OBJECT, STANDPOINT, AND PARTIAL TRUTH: SARTRE, HEIDEGGER,
AND HEGEL ON CONSCIOUSNESS, HUMAN BEING, AND THE ABSOLUTE

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation is an attempt to make sense of why (sometimes) philosophers reject past theories of x (reality, knowledge, morality, etc.) while they acknowledge at the same time that the theories being rejected contain philosophically interesting truth about x (philosophers will typically say things like: “Theory θ gets things wrong about x, but there’s a grain of truth (about x) in it,” “Philosopher Φ is mistaken about x, but he’s on to something,” and so on). The answer I want to explore is partial truth, construed not intensionally, i.e., as truth “in part,” but extensionally, i.e., as truth of a part (of an object). A description of the Statue of Liberty, for instance, that goes: “It’s a tabula ansata, that is, a tablet evoking the law; on it is inscribed the date of the American Declaration of Independence, July 4, 1776, (and so on)” can be both rejected and acknowledged to contain interesting truth; the former, because only a part of the Statue of Liberty is being described, not the Statue of Liberty simpliciter; and the latter because that is a part of the right object (i.e., the Statue of Liberty and not, say, the Eiffel Tower). I suggest that something analogous, in a more complex way, can be seen to (sometimes) happen in philosophy. If this view is correct, I argue, an interesting explanation can be given of why (sometimes) philosophers have rejected past theories of x while acknowledging at the same time that the theories being rejected contain philosophically interesting truth: because those philosophers have believed the theories being rejected were partially true in the sense just sketched. As examples, I propose J. P. Sartre on previous theories of consciousness, M. Heidegger on previous theories of human being, and G. W. F. Hegel on previous theories of the Absolute (God). I conclude by suggesting that my model can be extended to additional figures in the history of Western philosophy, and that my model of partial truth can tell us interesting things about the nature of philosophy as a theoretical enterprise.

In Chapter 1, I make three claims supporting the view that the notion of partial truth (in an extensional sense) can be especially helpful in philosophy when combined with the notion of standpoint (perspective, stance, point of view). First, I claim that the relation between part and
whole that in many cases applies to objects can be seen to apply also to *standpoints* toward objects (although, in this case case, “part” and “whole” must be understood in a metaphorical sense, not in a literal one). I say that a standpoint is “part” of another standpoint when the former is *grounded* on the latter, i.e., when the latter makes the former possible, but not the other way round (still in different words, and using current analytic terminology, when the former supervenes on the latter). If that’s the case, I say that the former standpoint is *secondary* with respect to the latter, which is *basic*. Second, I claim that adopting a secondary standpoint toward an object (as opposed to a basic one) might in some instances be the reason why we are able to observe only part of that object; adopting a basic standpoint toward that object, by contrast, might allow us to observe the object in its entirety. Third, I claim that philosophical objects differ from ordinary ones in so far as, for them, it is crucial to adopt the right standpoint in order to observe the *right* object in the first place. Taken together, I conclude, these three claims support the view that there can be partial truth of philosophical objects (again, extensionally understood) on account of the fact that a secondary standpoint toward them, as opposed to a basic one, is being adopted. I then suggest that this circumstance might be employed to give an interesting explanation of why three significant philosophers in the Continental tradition of philosophy (Sartre, Heidegger, and Hegel) have rejected previous theories of a philosophical object (consciousness, human being, and the Absolute, respectively) while acknowledging at the same time that the theories being rejected contain philosophically interesting truth.

In Chapter 2, I argue that Sartre both rejects the best previous philosophical theories of consciousness and acknowledges that they contain philosophically interesting truth. As instances of the best previous philosophical theories of consciousness according to Sartre I propose Descartes’ and Husserl’s. According to Sartre, I argue, Descartes and Husserl are committed to the view that consciousness is best studied via reflection, that is, from a reflective standpoint. Sartre agrees that by adopting a reflective standpoint toward consciousness we can discover philosophically interesting truth about it. However, I take Sartre to contend, the reflective standpoint is, unbeknownst to Descartes and Husserl, grounded on a more basic one, which takes precedence over it and makes it possible in the first place: the unreflective one. By observing consciousness from a secondary standpoint, Descartes and Husserl are able to observe only a “part” (i.e., an aspect) of consciousness. Because they describe only a part (aspect) of
consciousness, Descartes’ and Husserl’s theories must according to Sartre be rejected; but because they describe part of the right object, they contain philosophically interesting truth.

In Chapter 3, I argue that Heidegger both rejects the best previous philosophical theories of human being and acknowledges that they contain philosophically interesting truth. As an instance of the best previous philosophical theories of human being I propose the blanket term “the philosophical tradition.” According to Heidegger, I argue, the philosophical tradition is committed to the view that human being is best studied qua object-of-theory, that is, from a theoretical standpoint. Heidegger agrees that by adopting a theoretical standpoint toward human being we can discover philosophically interesting truth over it. However, I take Heidegger to contend, the theoretical standpoint is, unbeknownst to the philosophical tradition, grounded on a more basic one, which takes precedence over it and makes it possible in the first place: the pretheoretical one. By observing human being from a secondary standpoint, the philosophical tradition is able to observe only a “part” (i.e., an aspect) of it. Because it describes only a part (aspect) of human being, the theory of the philosophical tradition must according to Heidegger be rejected; but because they describe part of the right object, it contains philosophically interesting truth.

In Chapter 4, I argue that Hegel both rejects the best previous philosophical theories of the Absolute (Spirit) and acknowledges that they contain philosophically interesting truth. As instances of the best previous philosophical theories of the Absolute I focus on Kant’s and Fichte’s. According to Hegel, I argue, Kant and Fichte are committed to the view that the Absolute is best studied from (what Hegel calls) a reflective standpoint. Hegel agrees that by adopting a reflective standpoint toward the Absolute we can discover philosophically interesting truth about it. However, I take Hegel to contend, the reflective standpoint is, unbeknownst to Kant and Fichte, grounded on a more basic one, which takes precedence over it and makes it possible in the first place: the speculative one. By observing the Absolute from a secondary standpoint, Kant and Fichte are able to observe only a “part” (i.e., an aspect) of it. Because they describe only a “part” (aspect) of the Absolute, Kant’s and Fichte’s theories must according to Hegel be rejected; but because they describe part of the right object, they contain philosophically interesting truth.
In Chapter 5, I argue that, according to Sartre, Heidegger, and Hegel, partial truth about consciousness, human being, and the Absolute is philosophically negative, not merely incomplete or insufficient. That is why, according to these philosophers, the best past theories must be rejected, as opposed to completed or supplemented. I suggest that this happens because, according to Sartre, Heidegger, and Hegel, consciousness, human being, and the Absolute are themselves standpoints toward entities, in addition to entities; moreover, they are what can be called global standpoints toward entities (i.e., standpoints toward all entities, over the whole of that there is). What is negative about the best past theories about consciousness, human being, and the Absolute, is that, by being based on a secondary standpoint, as opposed to a basic one, the assertions contained in them are true of consciousness, human being, and the Absolute qua entities, not qua standpoints, which is what is fundamental. On this account, the theories don’t simply fail to capture the nature of consciousness, human being, and the Absolute; they positively misrepresent it.
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CHAPTER 1
OBJECT, STANDPOINT, AND PARTIAL TRUTH

This dissertation is a study on the notion of partial truth in philosophy. Philosophers are in the business of finding out the truth about reality, and the obvious thing they want to fight is, in the first instance, falsehood.¹ A look at the history of philosophy shows, however, that philosophers have in many instances been equally anxious to fight theories they take to be inadequate, but not exactly false. This circumstance raises interesting and challenging questions, which is the goal of this dissertation, at its most general, to put on the table. Let’s start with the most obvious one: if a philosophical theory is (deemed) not (to be) false, what can be inadequate about it? Now there surely are various things other than falsehood that can make a philosophical theory inadequate.² What I want to do in this dissertation is to focus on what I take to be a case of its own, deserving a closer look than it has received so far: partial truth.

Suppose I have never been to New York and I ask you to describe the Statue of Liberty, so I can figure out how it looks. Suppose you answer something like: “It’s a man wearing jeans and a T-shirt, holding a baseball bat in his right hand and a newspaper in his left one.”³ Given that the Statue of Liberty represents a woman wearing robes, holding a torch in her right hand and a tablet evoking the law in her left one, your description is false. Now suppose you answer something like: “It’s a tabula ansata, that is, a tablet evoking the law; on it is inscribed the date of the American Declaration of Independence, July 4, 1776,” and you proceed to describe this tablet with minute detail. In this case, your description is inadequate too, but not exactly false. As a matter of fact, your description is true, at least in the sense that the female figure that the statue

¹ At a deeper level, ignorance.
² For instance, obscurity, inconsistency, intuitive implausibility, lack of sound logic, and so on (I’ll come back to this; see in particular pg. 18).
³ I’ll claim this description of the Statue of Liberty is false (i.e., the sentences making up the description are false of the Statue of Liberty); but someone might object that a man wearing jeans and a T-shirt and holding a baseball bat, etc. has some structural (anatomic) similarity to a woman wearing robes holding a torch, etc. (which is what the Statue of Liberty represents); so perhaps this description isn’t false after all (at least, false simpliciter). To take care of worries along these lines, the reader is invited to consider alternative descriptions like: “It’s an elephant sitting on the tip of a wooden chair,” “It’s a piece of cheese on which two olives and glass of water stand,” “It’s an isosceles blue triangle,” and so on. I take all these descriptions to be false of the Statue of Liberty (i.e., false simpliciter, not false “in a sense”).
represents is holding the tablet as you describe it. What makes your description inadequate is that instead of describing the Statue of Liberty, you’re describing only a part of it.

Something similar, I hold, can be seen to happen sometimes in philosophy. Or, rather, I will suggest, this is what (some) philosophers in history have (sometimes) seen their predecessors as doing. Obviously philosophers are not in the business of describing statues, nor bigger physical entities, nor physical reality in its entirety; arguably, what philosophers aim at describing is reality simpliciter. Suppose now that reality (simpliciter) is composed of physical material, numbers, and God. Suppose further that a philosopher describes reality as being composed of physical material and numbers. In this case, it’s plausible to hold that this philosopher’s description of reality is inadequate but not exactly false: what the description says is true but, instead of describing reality, the description is describing only a part of it. In this way, something analogous to the example of the Statue of Liberty can be seen to happen in philosophy.

My primary goal in this study is to offer three instances of what I see as being partial truth in philosophy along similar lines (Chapters 2 to 4). My secondary goal is to draw on these three instances to argue that the notion of partial truth, in the way I construe it, can help to make sense of a sort of relation holding between philosophers and their predecessors that, I shall suggest, constitutes a significant pattern in the philosophical praxis and the history of philosophy, and to which more attention than it has received so far should be paid (Chapter 5).

1.1 OBJECT, STANDPOINT, AND PARTIAL TRUTH

1.1.1 Object and Standpoint

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4 Philosophers (metaphysicians at any rate) aren’t interested in physical reality but in reality simpliciter. Whether reality simpliciter coincides with physical reality is, philosophically speaking, an open question.
5 The two cases are somewhat different, as in the former only one part of the whole is being described, whereas in the latter all the parts except one, are being described (and, of course, “part” means different things in both examples: in the former, it is a proper, physical part; in the second, one element of a series). What is essential for my present point is that both descriptions fail to describe the whole.
6 Or rather, as we will see in a minute, three instances of what three philosophers in history (not me) have seen as being partial truth in philosophy along similar lines.
I have already suggested that the objects philosophers are typically interested in are of a more abstract nature than the Statue of Liberty.\(^7\) Furthermore, I want to add now, philosophers aren’t only interested in objects taken in isolation, but sometimes, and in the first place, in how we access objects.\(^8\) Accordingly, two things are going to happen in the three examples I will provide in this study as offering evidence of partial truth in philosophy. First, what philosophers are going to be describing in them isn’t a statue or a toy reality made of three elements, but something of a more abstract and complex nature. Second, philosophers in my examples are going to consider how we access these objects, in addition to thinking about these objects themselves. It will turn out that partial truth in the way I want to construe this notion goes hand in hand with the idea that some ways of accessing some objects are more basic than others. But before developing this idea, let me pause for a moment and comment on the distinction between objects and ways to access objects, as this distinction will play a major role in the defense of my thesis.

Let’s come back to the examples of the Statue of Liberty and of a toy reality made of three elements. These two examples have in common a description and something being described. We have already established that the description is not false in so far as the right object is being described (the Statue of Liberty and reality, respectively);\(^9\) but it’s still inadequate in so far as only a part of the object, as opposed to the object simpliciter,\(^10\) is being described. The two examples present, of course, important differences: in one case we have a physical object; in the other, a toy (i.e., a highly simplified) reality. Now it’s open to debate what reality is, but at least in so far as we oppose objects to access to objects, it’s plausible to consider it an object too. Of

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\(^7\) It won’t do to object that philosophers are interested in statues (for instance in ontology, mereology in particular). Statues work in this case as examples of objects about which a philosophical question is raised. To consider statues from a philosophical standpoint involves eo ipso to consider them qua objects of an abstract nature. (See section 1.2.2. below for further discussion)

\(^8\) In philosophical jargon, philosophers aren’t interested only in entities, that is, in ontology, but also in how we get to know entities, that is, in epistemology (broadly construed: some ways of accessing objects need not involve knowledge).

\(^9\) Of course, there’s going to be qualms about my contention that this description is not false. It can be argued that a description of the Statue of Liberty that goes: “It’s a tabula ansata, that is, a tablet evoking the law, etc.” is false. I will come back to this in Chapter 5. By now I stick to the point that in this description (part of) the right object is being described (i.e., the Statue of Liberty), as opposed to the wrong one (say, the Eiffel Tower). I take this to involve interesting truth; more precisely put, to involve the possibility of making assertions about the relevant object containing interesting truth about them (however “interesting truth” is subsequently spelled out).

\(^10\) I prefer the contrast pair part of an object/object simpliciter to part of an object/object in its entirety (or part of an object/the whole object), as truth talk about the latter suggests that there can be exhaustive truth about an object (i.e., truth about every single part (physical or otherwise) of an object), an idea that is problematic.
course, by this I’m not suggesting that reality is a big object out there, but that, whatever it is, it’s something we meaningfully talk about, philosophize about, observe, and so on. Accordingly, I’ll be using the umbrella term “object” from now onwards for *anything* we can meaningfully talk about, philosophize about, observe, and so on.\(^1\)

Suppose now that, when prompted to describe the Statue of Liberty, what you do is to think, first of all, about different *perspectives* you might adopt towards it, as you believe that some of them work better than others. For instance, to observe the Statue of Liberty from the front, at a medium distance, seems to work better than to observe it from the front, at a very short distance, in which case you wouldn’t have an overall view of the human figure; or from a helicopter flying on top of it, in which case you wouldn’t be able to see its face; or from its base, in which case you wouldn’t be able to read what is inscribed in the tablet being held by the human figure in her left hand; and so on. From all these different perspectives you’d be able to *see* the statue; but it seems as if some of them work better than others (or at any rate some of them don’t work as well), at least for some specific purposes (such as, for instance, describing the statue).

Drawing on this thought about adopting different perspectives toward a physical object, what I propose to do in this study is to consider partial truth with a significant shift of focus, from objects to *perspectives* over objects. Given, however, that the term “perspective” suggests a visual model of accessing to objects, I’d like to introduce a more abstract term allowing for the possibility of accessing objects in ways not necessarily tied to visual perception (or even perception simpliciter). This term is “standpoint.” Preliminarily, we can take a *standpoint* to be a perspective broadly construed. A standpoint is thus a perspective, but also a point of view, a stance, and so on; that is, “somewhere” (it doesn’t need to be a physical place) from where an object appears to us *in such and such way*, with the possibility of the object appearing in *different* ways, if we change the standpoint toward it. We have just seen that adopting different

\(^1\) Thus, I am using “object” in roughly the same sense in which, with quite different purposes, Bertrand Russell (*Principles of Mathematics*) uses “term”: “Whatever may be an object of thought, or may occur in any true or false proposition, or can be counted as one, I call a term. This, then, is the widest word in the philosophical vocabulary. I shall use as synonymous with it the words unit, individual, and entity. The first two emphasize the fact that every term is one, while the third is derived from the fact that every term has being, i.e., is in some sense. A man, a moment, a number, a class, a relation, a chimaera, or anything else that can be mentioned, is sure to be a term; and to deny that such and such a thing is a term must always be false.” (Russell [1903] 1938: 43) (This quote just illustrates my use of the expression “object”; nothing of what I say depends on any thesis defended by Russell).
perspectives (i.e., standpoints) over an object (in this case, the Statue of Liberty) can make a difference in how we observe it and thus describe it. I intend to apply this idea to philosophical objects.

Before thinking about how this idea can work, let’s consider first of all general differences between an object and a standpoint toward an object. What I take to be the biggest difference is that, whereas an object is, as said, something we observe, meaningfully talk about, philosophize about, and so on, a standpoint is something more elusive and difficult to grasp. By this I don’t mean to suggest that a standpoint can’t be observed, talked about, philosophized about, and so on; it obviously can. For instance, I can say that observing the Statue of Liberty from a helicopter flying on top of it allows me to see the top of the head, but not the woman’s face nor the tablet evoking the law the woman is holding. This is an assertion which is prima facie true, and is about a standpoint toward the Statue of Liberty. What happens in the case, however, is that a standpoint has become an object, something we can talk about, philosophize about, observe, and so on. But a standpoint qua object, I want to contend now, is something different from a standpoint qua standpoint. In this study I will take the notion of standpoint in what I take to be a pregnant sense, standpoint qua standpoint. Essentially, I will assume that a standpoint is something we adopt, not something we observe; as something we experience in the first person, not in the third one. A standpoint, still in different words, is a genuine standpoint when it does the observing, not when it’s observed itself.

1.1.2 Standpoint: Secondary and Basic

So far I have established two things. First, this is a study on the notion of partial truth in philosophy, with a shift of focus, from objects to standpoints (perspectives) toward objects. Second, this study focuses on the notion of standpoint as something we adopt, not as something we observe; as something we experience in the first person, not in the third one. I now proceed to discuss what I see as potentially novel in this shift of focus. The novelty is based on two insights. My first insight is that a standpoint toward an object can, as much as the object, be seen as having parts and wholes (not in a literal sense though, but in a metaphorical one; I’ll get back to this in a minute). My second insight is that this circumstance can be exploited to offer a
potentially interesting explanation of why, in some instances, philosophers can observe only a part of an object instead of the object simpliciter (here “part” will also turn out to have a metaphorical sense); the idea being that, by adopting a standpoint toward an object that is “part” of another standpoint, what philosophers can observe of that object is, correlatively, only a part of that object (more on this below). This circumstance can in turn explain why, according to some philosophers, their predecessors have been able to observe only a part of an object (again in a metaphorical sense); the idea being that, according to the former, the latter were adopting a standpoint toward the object which, unbeknownst to them, was a “part” of another standpoint (again, more on this below). This circumstance, finally, can in turn explain why (sometimes) philosophers in history have rejected past theories about x (reality, knowledge, morality, etc.) while acknowledging at the same time that the theories being rejected contain philosophically interesting truth, a fact which is the goal of this study to explain (or, more modestly, bring to the attention of my readers as something puzzling).

Let’s start discussing my first insight: standpoints, as much as objects, can be seen as having parts and wholes. The first point I want to make here is that “parts” and “wholes” shouldn’t be understood in this case in a literal sense, but in a figurative one. This follows from what I said at the end of the last section, namely that standpoints, considered as something we adopt in first person (not observe in third one), aren’t objects we observe, but something more elusive and difficult to grasp. But what does this figurative sense amount to? The idea is that a standpoint can be seen to be grounded on another standpoint if the latter takes precedence over the former and makes it phenomenologically possible in the first place. If this happens (assuming the possibility is accepted as philosophically meaningful and legitimate), the former can thus be seen to be phenomenologically “included” in, and thereby be a “part” of, the latter. Using alternative terminology, we can say the former standpoint phenomenologically supervenes on the latter.12

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12 My use of “to supervene” here could be disputed. First off, supervenience as a philosophical term of art is typically taken to apply to things (what I above call objects), rather than to standpoints toward things (McLaughlin and Bennett 2011). Secondly, what is typically stressed in the concept of supervenience is the idea of covariance: the properties supervening and the properties being supervened on must necessarily covary McLaughlin and Bennett 2011, Kim 1990: 7, 9); but this covariance leaves it undecided as yet whether the properties supervening are (i) dependent on, but (ii) not reducible to, the properties being supervened on (Kim 1990: 9).
Let’s think of a simple, preliminary example to illustrate this idea. Suppose you are looking at the Statue of Liberty from somewhere far off (for instance, a boat sailing away), and you use binoculars to observe the statue. It’s clear, first of all, that observed through binoculars the statue appears in a different way than if you observed it with the naked eye. The statue looks of course bigger (at the expense of other areas of your previous visual field, which will likely fail to appear in the new visual field), and you can observe parts of it in greater detail than you did before (for instance, you might be able to describe with minute detail the tablet evoking the law, something that, due to the distance, you weren’t able to do when you were observing it with the naked eye).

With the naked eye, conversely, the statue looks of course smaller, and you aren’t able to observe many of the details that you’re now able to see with the binoculars. Now if we construct “perspective” in terms of visual location, it doesn’t seem as if observing the statue with binoculars involves adopting a different perspective than observing it with the naked eye (for the perspective, strictly speaking, hasn’t changed; what changes is the size, sharpness, and accuracy of what you can see in the visual field). What I want to say instead is that observing the statue with binoculars involves adopting a different standpoint than observing it with the naked eye (here’s where a more abstract term than “perspective” helps). I will accordingly say that when we observe the Statue of Liberty with the naked eye and when we observe it with binoculars, we are observing it from two different standpoints.

My contention now (and this is the important point) is that the standpoint we adopt toward the statue when we observe it through binoculars is grounded on the standpoint we adopt toward the statue when we observe it with the naked eye. When you use binoculars, everything that appears in your visual field is “contained” in what appears in the visual field when you look with the naked eye. That is, something appears in the visual field you can observe through the binoculars because it appears in the visual field when you look with the naked eye.

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13 There’s an ambiguity here that needs to be taken care of: the term “standpoint” can concern the phenomenology, the “what it is like” of a perception, as well as its mechanics (physics, physiology, neurology, etc.). Given that, as I established, this study focuses on the idea of standpoint as something we adopt, in the first person, not as something we observe, in the third one, my claim here concerns the phenomenology.

14 Again, “contained” here should be taken in a figurative sense, not a literal one.
can’t appear in the visual field you can observe through the binoculars. Of course, what appears in the visual field you can observe through the binoculars does so with a bigger size and sharpness; but however bigger and sharper it appears, it does appear at all because it was already there (namely, in the visual field of the naked eye) to start with.

Perhaps a simpler example of how a standpoint can be seen to be phenomenologically grounded on (and, thereby, be a “part” of) another is vision through colored glasses. If I put on glasses whose lenses are, say, pink, I will see everything pink-colored. It’s plausible to hold then that how things look to me with these glasses on is grounded on how things look to me without them. Perception through pink glasses is thus phenomenologically grounded on perception through the naked eye. Using alternative terminology, perception through pink glasses phenomenologically supervenes on perception with the naked eye.

If these two examples are accepted as plausible, we get the following result: some standpoints (for instance, visual perception through binoculars or pink glasses) are (or can be seen to be) grounded on others (for instance, visual perception through the naked eye). If that’s the case, I’ll say that the former standpoint is secondary with respect to the latter, which is basic.

If, moreover, the circumstance that a standpoint is grounded on another holds unbeknownst to the person who is adopting that standpoint, the claim that the secondary standpoint is grounded on a more basic one can become a philosophically interesting thesis. This can be shown with the following fictional example.

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15 Someone might object that this isn’t true of things like telescopes or microscopes: given their power and sophistication, these instruments allow us to see things prima facie not included in the visual field of our naked eye (for instance, Jupiter’s satellites or a virus). Is it the case then that what we can observe through a telescope or a microscope is phenomenologically grounded on what we can observe through our naked eye? I am committed to the view that it is. What’s going on in this case, I respond, is that the phenomenological grounding doesn’t occur in one single step (like in the case of the binoculars), but in a more complex manner. The starting point is that there’s a phenomenology of what appears in the telescope or the microscope because there is a phenomenology of what appears in the visual field of our naked eye to begin with: our naked eye makes a phenomenology of the telescope or microscope possible, but not the other way round.

16 What “grounded” exactly means here merits further spelling out as, once again, we’re talking of a phenomenological, not ontological, grounding relation.
Imagine a race of human beings, call them the “binocularians,” who are born with binoculars incorporated to their eyes, whereby their visual perception always works through binoculars (a story should be told here about how binocularians are able to handle short-distance perception; suppose that they can get along with only long-distance perception). If there were philosophers among the binocularians, they might wonder whether visual perception through binoculars is the most basic way they have to visually perceive the world, or whether there is some way to do so which is still more basic (the analogous question for “normal” philosophers would probably be whether there is some way to access the world which is more basic than perception simpliciter). If the binocularian-philosophers were insightful enough to realize that the binoculars are “technologically”\textsuperscript{17}, not naturally, incorporated to their eyes, and that their naked eyes should be able to see on their own, they might come to the conclusion that perceiving the world with their naked eyes must be more basic than perceiving it with the binoculars (assuming acceptance of my claim before that perceiving the world through binoculars is grounded on perceiving it through the naked eye). This thesis would be defensible even if the binocularian-philosophers couldn’t get to actually see things with their naked eyes because the binoculars can’t be removed (it could be defended, so to say, on “a priori” grounds). On the other hand, acceptance of the thesis wouldn’t necessarily mean that binocularian-philosophers believe that the things they observe through the binoculars aren’t actually there (in other words, the binocularian-philosophers need not be skeptics about what they see through the binoculars). Rather, it’d mean that, according to binocularian-philosophers, perceiving the world through binoculars is secondary with respect to a more basic standpoint, which takes precedence over it and makes it possible in the first place: perception through the naked eye. This fictional example illustrates the idea that, sometimes, to claim that a given standpoint is secondary with respect to another one, which is more basic, can be a philosophically interesting thesis, if the circumstance in question takes place unbeknownst to the person adopting the secondary standpoint.\textsuperscript{18}

\textsuperscript{17} In some convoluted bio-technological way, for by hypothesis binocularians are (naturally) born with binoculars incorporated to their eyes.

\textsuperscript{18} In the examples of partial truth I will offer in my central chapters I will show that the claim that such and such standpoint towards \(x\) (a philosophical object) is secondary with respect to a more basic one is common to the three philosophers I will consider (and my suggestion is that it is furthermore common to a wide array of philosophers of different traditions in the history of philosophy).
At a more abstract level, it’s plausible to hold that a number of standpoints are grounded on others in significantly different but still analogous ways. For instance, if we agree that *imagining* or *remembering* something, for instance the Statue of Liberty, is possible only if we have *perceived* it beforehand, it’s plausible to hold that imagining or remembering something is *grounded* on having perceived it beforehand. The point here isn’t that we can imagine or remember things, for instance the Statue of Liberty, “on the grounds” that we perceive them first (that is, the point isn’t a *causal* story about how imagination and memory work). The point is that *how* a thing (for instance, the Statue of Liberty) *looks like* in imagination or memory is grounded on how that thing *looks like* in perception. Arguably, whatever you imagine or remember of the Statue of Liberty was “contained,” and thus grounded on, what you perceived of the statue in the first place, whereas the converse doesn’t hold: how things look like in perception isn’t “contained” in how things look like in imagination or memory. It is then plausible to hold that what phenomenologically appears in my imagining or remembering the Statue of Liberty is grounded on what it appears in my perception. Once again, we can alternatively say that imagination or memory phenomenologically supervene on perception.

Examples of how some standpoints can be seen to be grounded on others can go higher in level of abstraction. For instance, we can distinguish a *scientific* standpoint toward reality from a *common sense* one. It’s clear that “standpoint” here has a more abstract sense than in the case of the binoculars and of imagination and memory; but still *is* a standpoint, for how objects appear to us from either one can be seen to be different than the other. From a common sense standpoint, I see the world as containing tables, chairs, other people, and so on. From a scientific standpoint, I see the world as containing energy fields, atoms, electrons, quarks, and so on. It makes sense to defend both that a common sense standpoint toward reality is grounded on a scientific one (for it can be defended that we see tables, chairs, other people, and so on, on account of physical properties holding among the physical entities that scientific theories assume to exist), as well as to defend that a scientific standpoint toward reality is grounded on a common sense one (for it can be argued that we see energy fields, atoms, electrons, quarks, and so on only because we see

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19 Again, the claim here concerns the *phenomenology* of a standpoint, not its mechanics. My suggestion is that there is a *phenomenological* grounding relation, besides an ontological one (much more discussed in the literature, especially in the last 10 years or so).
ordinary objects in the first place, of which scientific theories provide more sophisticated descriptions).

If all these examples are accepted as plausible (more examples along similar lines could be provided), I take myself to have established a first important result: some standpoints can be seen to be grounded on other standpoints. This happens when the latter takes precedence over the former and makes it possible in the first place. If that’s the case, I’ll say that the former standpoint is secondary with respect to the latter one, which is basic. In some analogical sense, we can then say that the former standpoint, the secondary one, is a “part of,” because it is “contained in,” the latter (of course, again, this holds in an analogical sense). I take the idea that a grounding relation can hold for standpoints toward objects, as much as for objects, to be of potential interest for philosophy, especially if we are sympathetic to the view that what standpoint we adopt over an object can make a significant difference in how we think philosophically about that object, indeed in what (philosophically considered) the object really is in the first place.

1.1.3. Secondary Standpoint Gives Partial Truth

Let’s discuss now my second insight, which runs as follows: the circumstance that standpoints can, as much as objects, be seen to have parts and wholes can be exploited to give a potentially interesting explanation of why, in some instances, philosophers have been able to observe only a part of an object, instead of the object in its entirety. The idea here is that, in some cases, adopting a standpoint toward an object which is “part” of another standpoint might be the reason why what we can observe of that object is, correlative, only a part of that object, instead of the object in its entirety. But how is this idea going to work?

It’d be good to start with an example to illustrate this idea, but here we start coming up with difficulties, as visual perception doesn’t illustrate it very well (it’d be interesting to ask why, as

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20 In other words, once again, the idea that there is a phenomenological grounding relation (as opposed to an ontological one).
21 Where, per section 1.1.2., “part” and “whole” shouldn’t be understood literally but figuratively, i.e., some standpoints are grounded, or “supervene,” on other standpoints.
22 I.e., adopting a standpoint towards an object which is grounded on a more basic standpoint towards that object.
there must be a philosophically interesting reason\textsuperscript{23}). Here is, however, a first shot at an example. Observing the Statue of Liberty through binoculars, we established, is grounded on (i.e., is a “part” of) observing the Statue of Liberty through the naked eye (again, as far as its phenomenology is concerned). Well, it turns out that, although what we can see through the binoculars shows bigger and in greater detail, things that were in the visual field of the naked eye are likely to stay \textit{out} of the picture. To this extent, it can be held that the binoculars allow us to see \textit{less}, in fact a \textit{part} of a bigger whole. It therefore seems plausible to hold that adopting a \textit{secondary} standpoint toward an object (in this case, observing the Statue of Liberty through binoculars) allows us to see a \textit{part} of that object instead of the whole; whereas, conversely, adopting a \textit{basic} standpoint toward the same object (in this case, observing the Statue of Liberty through the naked eye) would allow us to see the whole.

Here’s where this preliminary example doesn’t work quite well: even though using binoculars to see (i.e., adopting a secondary standpoint toward) the Statue of Liberty allows us to see only a \textit{part} of it, it still allows us to see (part of) it in \textit{bigger} size and \textit{greater} detail. It isn’t clear therefore that what we can see through binoculars is \textit{partial} with respect to what we can see through the naked eye, rather than the other way round (since in degree of sharpness and size, what we can see through the naked eye can be said to be partial with respect to what we can see through the binoculars). The idea would be more effectively illustrated if, in degree of sharpness and size, what we can see through binoculars and through the naked eye stayed \textit{the same} (in other words, if we applied a sort of \textit{caeteris paribus} clause to the example making it the case that perceiving a part versus a whole were the \textit{only} way in which observing something through binoculars and through the naked eye differ).

Accordingly, I will change a little bit the example to illustrate better the idea behind my second insight (although this example will have the disadvantage of construing the notion of standpoint a bit clumsily, in terms of physical location and distance, plus other \textit{ad hoc} circumstances). Suppose you are inside a room with a very narrow window facing the Statue of Liberty and, because the window is so narrow, it only allows you to see a part of the statue, for instance the

\textsuperscript{23} My sense is that the reason has to do with the distinction, which I will introduce later, between ordinary and philosophical objects: visual perception allows us to access ordinary objects; I will be arguing, however, that the idea I am now introducing will hold only for philosophical objects.
tablet evoking the law that the woman is holding in her left arm (suppose, moreover, that you’re tied up in such a way that you can’t move closer to the window, which would allow you to peek closer and have a more ample perspective over the statue). In this case, it’s plausible to say that you can see only a part of the Statue of Liberty, instead of the whole, on account of the fact that you’re placed somewhere (i.e., you’re adopting a certain standpoint) which allows you to see only that part.

Suppose now there is another place that would allow you to see the Statue of Liberty in its entirety, for instance, the uncovered deck of a boat. If that’s the case, you can observe the Statue of Liberty in its entirety on account of the fact that you’re placed somewhere (i.e., you’re adopting a certain standpoint) allowing you to do so. What we have so far is a scenario illustrating how, from two different standpoints, a room with a very narrow window and the uncovered deck of a boat, you can see, respectively, only part a part of the Statue of Liberty and the Statue of Liberty in its entirety.

Just as a final twist, suppose that the first standpoint is a “part” of the second. (Given that in this example I am construing “standpoint” in terms of physical location, “part” here turns out to have a literal sense, and this is why the example doesn’t illustrate my idea very effectively; in the examples I will present in this study a “part” of a standpoint won’t be a literal part; as explained before (see section 1.1.2.), “to be a part of” will mean “to be phenomenologically grounded on”). Suppose, for instance, that the “room” with a very narrow window facing the Statue of Liberty is a little cabin built on top of the deck of the boat. In this case, we have two standpoints you can adopt over the Statue of Liberty, a cabin with a very narrow window and the uncovered deck of a boat. From the former you can only see a part of the statue, whereas from the latter you can see it in its entirety. Moreover (and this is now the important point), the first standpoint is part of the second; in other words, the first standpoint is grounded on, or is secondary with respect to, the second (again, we can alternatively say that the first one “supervenes” on the second).

If this scenario is accepted as plausible, my claim now is that by drawing on the notion of standpoint we can give an interesting explanation of why only a part of an object, instead of the object simpliciter, is being observed: because a secondary standpoint toward the object, instead
of a basic one, is being adopted. In the case of the present example, you can see only part of the Statue of Liberty because you are adopting a standpoint (a cabin with a very narrow window) which is “secondary” with respect to a more basic one (the uncovered deck of a boat). (Here’s where the example fails, among other things: there is no reason why we couldn’t see the statue simpliciter from the secondary standpoint too, if only some circumstances were different; for instance, if the window wasn’t so narrow. Moreover, the grounding relation between the standpoints is here physical, not phenomenological: the deck is physically grounded on the boat.\(^\text{24}\)) To say that you’re describing the tablet instead of the statue is to say that you’re offering a partial description of it, which isn’t very helpful. To say, by contrast, that you’re placed somewhere allowing you to see only the tablet, instead of somewhere else that would allow you to see the whole statue, is to say a) why you’re offering a partial description in the first place; b) what the solution is; what you would need to do to have a view of the whole.

If these examples are accepted as plausible, I take myself to have established a second important result: in some instances, the reason why we are able to observe only a part of an object instead of the whole is that we are adopting a standpoint toward that object that is secondary with respect to a more basic one (again, my examples so far don’t show this idea very effectively; I hope to demonstrate in Chapters 2, 3, and 4 that this idea works better for philosophical objects). This gives us a first, preliminary reason to believe that my shift of focus regarding partial truth, from objects to standpoints toward objects, promises to be philosophically interesting. The reason is this: different from statues and other ordinary objects, the objects philosophers are typically interested in aren’t usually around for us to observe, whereby it arguably requires big philosophical insight to get to “observe” the right philosophical object; but this means that the notion of standpoint acquires a big importance in philosophy, as coming to “observe” the right philosophical object crucially bears, in many instances, on adopting the right standpoint toward it.

Before moving on, let me make a final preliminary point about the notion of partial truth. It’s important to realize that there is an ambiguity in the expression “partial truth” and derivatives, as “partial” can be understood extensionally or intensionally. In the latter case, “partially true”

\(^{24}\) Additionally, “grounded” here just means “(physically) resting on, being supported by.”
means “not wholly true” or “not totally true,” that is, “approximately true,” but still true (if at all) of the object in its entirety (or, rather, the object simpliciter). In the former case, by contrast, “partially true” means “true of a part,” but still completely so (not “approximately”). For instance, the assertion “The Statue of Liberty represents freedom” can be said to be “partially true” in the sense of approximately true (or true “in a sense”): what the Statue of Liberty represents is not literally freedom, but a woman wearing robes and holding a torch, and so on, which is a symbol of freedom. Still, the predicate “… represents freedom,” if true of the Statue of Liberty at all (even if “approximately”), is true of the statue as a whole (or the statue simpliciter), not of a part of it. By contrast, the assertion “The Statue of Liberty represents a tablet evoking the law; on this tablet is inscribed the date of the American Declaration of Independence, July 4, 1776, (and so on)” can be said to be partially true in the sense that is true of only a part of the Statue of Liberty (but still completely so, not “approximately” or “in a sense”). This study, I hope it’s clear by now, focuses on the latter, not the former sense of “partially true,” that is, its extentional one: not as meaning “approximately true,” but as meaning “true of a part.”

1.2 PHILOSOPHERS AND THEIR PREDECESSORS

Let us turn now to the idea, which is going to be central in this essay, that there is an interesting connection between the notions of standpoint and of philosophical object. This idea prompts a number of preliminary questions: What exactly is a philosophical object?, How does it differ from an ordinary object?, How can the notions of object, standpoint, and partial truth be seen to apply to it?, Is the difference between the way these notions apply to philosophical objects and the way they do to ordinary ones a difference of degree or, rather, of essence?, and so on. These are all important questions that will require the rest of this essay to find adequate response (or, more realistically, a beginning of a response); but it’d be good to start discussing them now. Before doing that, however, let’s think for a minute about the notions of object, standpoint, and

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25 Incidentally, I think my focus on the extensional sense of partial truth, rather than on the intensional one, involves a shift of focus too with respect to the current philosophical literature. It has become a trend in the last decades to analyze (and vindicate the importance of) of the notion of partial truth in the sense of “approximately true” (or “pragmatically true”); but as far as I know little importance has been given to the notion of partial truth in the sense of “true of only a part,” which is what I propose to do here. For an analysis of partial truth (in the sense of “approximately” true) in philosophy of science, see da Da Costa and French. 2003. Further literature on the notion of partial truth: Mikenberg et al. 1986, Bueno and Da Costa 2007, and Elgin 2011.
partial truth and their importance in philosophy. Why should philosophers care about these notions at all?

1.2.1 Partial Truth More Explanatory than Falsehood

This study is motivated by the belief that there is a philosophically interesting puzzle concerning a relation often established between philosophers and their predecessors, and that the notions of object, standpoint, and partial truth can give us an interesting answer (or at least beginning of an answer) for a significant amount of cases. I hinted at the puzzle by pointing out at the very beginning of this chapter that philosophers have sometimes been anxious to fight philosophical theories they take to be inadequate, but not exactly false (pg. 1). The puzzle is straightforward: what exactly is inadequate with a philosophical theory that is not false? Why should philosophers worry about it? I take this to be a genuine puzzle because, whatever the deficiencies a philosophical theory can be seen to have, as long it’s not seen to include false claims (assertions, theses) in it, it arguably shouldn’t be seen as contributing anything philosophically negative (as opposed to insufficient or not positive enough). (I will take care in a minute of the objection that deficiencies other than falsehood can be seen as contributing something philosophically negative). One of the guiding idea of this study is going to be that at least for some philosophical objects, and at least according to some significant philosophers in history, partial truth, in the way I construe it, can be seen to contribute something philosophically negative, not simply insufficient or not positive enough.  

Before going any further, it’s important to be aware of a potential confusion that threatens looming in many of our discussions from now on. The confusion consists in running together claims about philosophical theories with claims about beliefs about philosophical theories; in other words, in confusing claims of the type “theory θ is true (or false)” with claims of the type: “according to philosopher Φ, theory θ is true (or false).” In the first case, we are making a claim about a theory; in the second case, we are making a claim about what a philosopher believes

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26 Of course, there is a sense in which partial truth, no matter how it is construed, contributes something negative, in so far as it’s incomplete (and, hence, for a number of reasons, potentially misleading). But I will argue in Chapter 5 that partial truth, in the way I want to construe this notion, can be seen to contribute something negative in a stronger sense.
about a theory (a claim which, in turn, may be true (or false) itself). This distinction is obvious enough but, as we will see, it has a strong tendency to get blurred for various reasons that would merit spelling out, whereby effort is needed to keep it in mind.\(^{27}\) The chief thesis of this study concerns philosophers’ beliefs about theories, not theories. That is, in this study I will defend the thesis that according to such and such philosopher, such and such philosophical theory is partially true rather than false. Whether the theory is in fact partially true rather than false is a different question (and whose answer, strictly speaking, doesn’t affect my chief thesis). This study is thus meant to be a contribution to the question how philosophers relate to (other philosophers’) theories, not to philosophical theories themselves; in particular, this study is meant to offer an explanation (so to say, itself a theory) of why at least in some instances philosophers (rationally) reject theories that, they acknowledge, contain philosophically interesting truth.

In order to motivate the idea that falsehood is the chief thing philosophers should worry about when evaluating philosophical theories, we should briefly discuss the different grounds on which philosophers typically reject philosophical theories (I take it for granted that, overwhelmingly, philosophers tend to reject, much more than to accept, at least wholesale, philosophical theories by other philosophers\(^{28}\)). The idea I want to preliminarily defend here (more on this in Chapter 5) is that, whereas philosophers can of course worry about many things with respect to philosophical theories, falsehood (broadly construed) plausibly takes the lead as the primary one, whereby to (rationally) reject theories acknowledged not to be false comes out as something puzzling.\(^{29}\)

Philosophers can worry about many things, but of course we are interested here in what they worry about as philosophers. The very nature of philosophy, however, makes it hard to pinpoint

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\(^{27}\) One of the reasons why the distinction between theories and beliefs about theories tends to get blurred is that, when discussing beliefs about theories, we need in many instances to discuss specifics about the theories that are the objects of belief, whereby we’re likely to switch from talk about beliefs about theories to talk about theories, even though we’re still concerned with the former (we will see this happening quite often in Chapters 2, 3, and 4).

\(^{28}\) This is an obvious fact that, however, hasn’t been taken seriously enough as a jump-start for a philosophical reflection on the nature of philosophy as a theoretical enterprise. The question metaphilosophers should be asking themselves here would be something along the lines of: what sort of theoretical enterprise is that one that doesn’t allow for acceptance (certainly not general, let alone universal) of their theories?

\(^{29}\) In Chapter 5 I will specify that “to reject” here is meant to be reject in a robust, as opposed to neutral, sense.
what characterizes it as a discipline and thereby establish legitimate grounds of worry. It’s plausible to hold, however, that philosophers are in the business of providing theories, and that a theory is a set of interrelated claims (assertions) which are supposed to be true of an object. Accordingly, it’s plausible to hold, or so I shall argue in Chapter 5, that theories are (rationally) evaluated, i.e., accepted or rejected, ultimately in terms of truth and falsehood (broadly construed). (And in particular, of course, when a theory is (rationally) accepted, it’s on the grounds of its truth, and when a theory is (rationally) rejected, it’s on the grounds of its falsehood).

Of course, the immediate objection will be that philosophical theories need not be accepted or rejected only in terms of truth and falsehood, or even in terms of truth and falsehood at all. Theoretical desiderata such as consistency, probability, information content, empirical content, empirical success, explanatory and predictive power, problem-solving capacity, simplicity, and accuracy, can (and do) play an important role in evaluating (and eventually accepting) theories. Conversely, theoretical inadequacies such as inconsistency, improbability, lack of information content, empirical content, empirical success, explanatory and predictive power, problem-solving capacity, simplicity, and accuracy can (and do) play a role in rejecting theories. What I want to contend, however, is that a theory being inadequate on all these grounds (in other words, anything other than falsehood) shouldn’t be put on the same level as being inadequate on the grounds of falsehood. In the latter case, I want to suggest, “to reject” a philosophical theory as being inadequate has a stronger sense than in the former.

This can be preliminarily shown with the help of an everyday example. If someone wants to know about e.g. Barack Obama’s political views, the claim that Barack Obama is an American politician may not do her a big service; for her purposes, then, this claim is inadequate. However, in so far as the claim is not false (it is, in fact, true), it’s implausible to hold that the claim is making a negative contribution to her knowledge of Barack Obama or his political views.

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30 I am aware that this is a very naïve view of what a philosophical theory is, at least as I formulate it here; but I think more sophisticated views can be accommodated without making a substantial difference to my present point.

31 Neither “theory” nor “truth” need to involve robust philosophical commitments; more on this in Chapter 5.

32 Philosophers need not use the word “false” to reject a theory on grounds of its falsehood. Sometimes philosophers use other words, most notably “mistaken” or “wrong.”

33 Niiniluoto 2007:182-195, in Kuipers (ed.) 2007. These desiderata apply to scientific theories, but preliminarily I am going to assume that they could apply to philosophical theories too.
Consider now the claim that Barack Obama is a Republican. This claim can be said to be inadequate too, but it’s plausible to hold that it is inadequate in a *stronger* sense than the previous one (strictly speaking, “inadequate” falls short of characterizing what’s wrong with this second claim). This claim doesn’t simply fail to do a service to someone who wants to know about Barack Obama’s political views; it does her a *disservice*, in so far as it leads her to entertain a *false* belief. This example, which I think can be extended to philosophical claims and theories (of course, with adjustments to account for the difference in abstraction and complexity), suggests that claims, i.e., assertions, can of course be seen as having a variety of inadequacies, but that *falsehood* probably takes the lead as the primary one.

In Chapter 5 I will have more to say about grounds other than falsehood to reject philosophical theories. I will essentially argue that, under a generous but plausible understanding of “truth” and “falsehood,” philosophical theories ultimately are (rationally) accepted or rejected *in terms of truth and falsehood*.\(^\text{34}\) Accordingly, I assume from now on that, when a philosopher rejects a theory about an object \(x\),\(^\text{35}\) it’s natural is to take this philosopher to believe that this theory is *false* of \(x\).\(^\text{36}\) The chief insight of this study is that, at least in some cases, it’s better to construe rejection of previous philosophical theories by subsequent philosophers in terms of *partial truth* rather than falsehood. I will talk extensively about the benefits, both interpretative and philosophical, of this insight; preliminarily, I want to give two quick reasons.

First, in many instances, to claim that philosopher \(\Phi\) rejects theory \(\theta\) on the grounds of falsehood (i.e., on the grounds that philosopher \(\Phi\) believes that theory \(\theta\) is false) doesn’t do justice to the fact that philosopher \(\Phi\) credits theory \(\theta\) with containing philosophically interesting truth. This circumstance suggests that philosopher \(\Phi\) doesn’t take theory \(\theta\) to be false simpliciter (in the way in which, for instance, someone might take a description of the Statue of Liberty that goes: “It’s a man wearing jeans and a T-shirt holding a baseball bat in his right hand,” and so on, to be false simpliciter). Rather, it suggests that philosopher \(\Phi\) takes theory \(\theta\) to combine significant falsehood with significant truth. But then, again, falsehood and truth arguably aren’t combined in

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\(^{34}\) However truth and falsehood are philosophically construed. I will argue in Chapter 5 that this is a subsequent, separate question.  
\(^{35}\) “Object” broadly construed.  
\(^{36}\) As I will argue in more detail in Chapter 5, “false” can be construed here in various ways, not necessarily as lack of correspondence with an independently existing object.
an accidental way, in the way in which a description of the Statue of Liberty might go: “It’s a woman (true) wearing a T-shirt (false),” and so on. The combination of truth and falsity is more complex and difficult to capture, and my notion of partial truth wants to make progress in this direction.37

Second, if it were the case that the philosophers proposing a theory as alternative to the one they reject saw themselves as swapping falsehood for truth (in the same way in which, for instance, I might replace a description of the Statue of Liberty that goes: “It’s a man wearing jeans and a T-shirt,” and so on, by one that goes: “It’s a woman wearing robes,” and so on), little justice would again be done to the fact that, in many instances, these philosophers see themselves as providing a more comprehensive theory. If, according to such and such philosophers, previous theories were false simpliciter, the new theories wouldn’t be more “comprehensive;” they’d simply be true as opposed to false.

Before going any further, it’s important to stress that philosophically interesting truth is far from trivial, whereby it’s plausible to hold that philosophical theories that contain it can’t be false simpliciter. In the case of the Statue of Liberty, it’s relatively trivial that, if a description goes: “It’s a tablet evoking the law, on which the American date of independence is inscribed …” instead of: “It’s a man wearing jeans and a T-shirt, holding a baseball bat in his right hand …” “interesting” truth about the Statue of Liberty is being discovered.38 In the case of philosophy, however, things are very different, or so I shall argue: in many instances it requires hard philosophical work to simply get to “observe” the right philosophical object. As I suggested before, given that philosophical objects aren’t around us for us to observe, to say things that are true of them entails in many instances that philosophically interesting truth is being discovered.39

37 In Chapter 5 I’ll have more to say about the idea of combination of truth and falsehood. I will essentially argue that, given that the expression “combination of truth and falsehood” is far from univocal, it doesn’t do straightforwardly explanatory work on why some philosophers reject philosophical accounts that, they acknowledge, contain philosophically interesting truth. In particular, the expression “combination of truth and falsehood” doesn’t exclude, without further elucidation, the possibility of partial truth with no falsehood.

38 The scare quotes suggest that in this case truth is interesting in a fairly mundane sense.

39 It won’t do to object that philosophical objects (at least many of them) are around for us to observe (for instance, material objects, knowledge claims, moral behavior, and so on): pure observation doesn’t disclose these objects in their philosophical outlook.
1.2.2 Objects: Philosophical Versus Ordinary

My last point brings us to the difference between philosophical and ordinary objects. Philosophically interesting truth, I have suggested, is far from trivial largely because of the fact that, different from ordinary objects, it is far from trivial to get to observe the right philosophical object in the first place. How ordinary objects differ from philosophical ones is going to be an important question in the framework of this essay; but, more specifically, in so far as much of the motivation behind my choice of examples in the central chapters will depend on some assumptions about philosophical objects that, being far from uncontroversial, require some justification. This is why it is worthwhile to briefly discuss them here. These assumptions are basically two. First, I will assume that philosophical objects differ from ordinary ones not so much in virtue of possessing special properties making them philosophical than in virtue of the special approach we adopt towards them. Second, I will assume that, nonetheless, at least some philosophical objects do possess some special properties that make them philosophically interesting.\(^{40}\) In virtue of these properties, I will argue, partial truth about philosophical objects (the ones possessing these properties) can be seen to contribute something philosophically negative as opposed to insufficient or incomplete (in Chapter 5 I will elaborate on why). In other words (and this is my chief insight here), making the case that there is partial truth in philosophy in the way I want to construe this notion requires choosing as examples philosophical theories about philosophical objects possessing these properties.

Let’s briefly discuss each of these two assumptions. The first one is that philosophical objects in general don’t differ from ordinary ones in virtue of possessing special properties making them philosophical, but in virtue of the special approach we adopt towards them. This can be seen straightforwardly when we consider that ordinary objects, like chairs, tables, trees, mountains, the Statue of Liberty, and so on, can easily become philosophical objects, as soon as we start asking special questions about them (Do chairs and tables exist? Are they physical entities? Are they made of matter? Do they have properties? Are they substances?, and so on).

\(^{40}\)“Properties,” here and henceforth, broadly construed.
However, while philosophical objects in general are not philosophical in virtue of possessing some special properties that make them philosophical but in virtue of the special approach we adopt towards them, at least some philosophical objects do possess special properties that make them philosophically interesting. There are three properties I want to specifically concentrate on, and the insight I want to pursue is that objects possessing these three properties have a philosophically interesting connection to partial truth (in a way that I will spell out in Chapter 5).

Reality, when looked at philosophically, can be seen as containing entities of a unique and elusive nature, to be distinguished from those far less mysterious entities about which we may lack a great deal of knowledge, but not a reasonably good idea of how to acquire, at least on final instance, this knowledge. Typically, but not always, these entities aren’t unique and elusive because we lack familiarity with them, but despite the fact that we are familiar (sometimes, very familiar) with them. These entities are unique and elusive in an essential, not in a factual sense.  

Consider numbers, for example. We are all too familiar with numbers, and have no difficulty dealing with them in ordinary life, at least in so far as we are able to count things and make simple calculations; at a more advanced level, arithmetic and algebra provides us with a wealth of interesting truths about them. From a philosophical point of view, however, numbers have a unique and elusive nature. What are numbers? Do they exist independently from us? Are they human inventions? Are truths about them objective or subjective? These are all prima facie meaningful and legitimate questions, but answering them is a very difficult task. Successive attempts in the history of philosophy to answer them have been rejected and replaced by newer accounts, rejected in turn. Today, as much as two millennia ago, we stand quite at a loss to say what numbers exactly are, even if contemporary advances in logic and the philosophy of mathematics have made the handling of these questions much more precise. Along with numbers, we can think of things such as the mind, time, values, language, meaning, intentionality, just to name a few, as further examples of entities seen from a philosophical point of view, possess a unique and elusive nature. The first special property that some

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41 Conversely, some entities are elusive in a factual, not essential sense. The Yeti or the Loch Ness Monster, for instance, are elusive creatures, because nobody has ever been able to offer incontestable evidence that they exist. However, neither the Yeti nor the Loch Ness Monster are elusive in an essential sense (that is, what sort of entities they are doesn’t raise particularly puzzling questions from a philosophical perspective).

42 “Entity” broadly construed.
philosophical objects can be seen to have is *uniqueness* and *elusiveness* (I’ll treat them as if they were a single property, even though they are two, and of a different sort\(^43\)).\(^44\)

In addition to (or independently from) being unique and elusive, some entities can be seen to be *central* in a philosophical understanding of reality. What I mean by this is that some entities are of such nature that there is a philosophically interesting route from a philosophical understanding of the nature of *this* entity to a philosophical understanding of the nature of the *rest of entities* (that is, ultimately, of *reality*) This doesn’t need to happen by virtue of the fact that the rest of entities are *ontologically* grounded on this entity; the idea is, rather, that they are *epistemologically* (or methodologically) grounded on it.\(^45\)

In Medieval philosophy, for instance, it was common to consider God to be an entity on which the rest of entities are grounded; this would be an example of *ontological* grounding, and it doesn’t need to involve the view that God is an entity which is central in a philosophical understanding of reality (although in Medieval philosophy that happened to be the case too). In Modern philosophy (roughly from Descartes to Hegel), on the other hand, it was common to consider the mind (understood in terms of consciousness)\(^46\) to be an entity understanding of which makes understanding of the rest of entities and of reality possible. I take this to be an example of an entity on which the rest of entities is *epistemologically* (or methodologically) grounded.\(^47\) This explains why in Modern philosophy, claims about the nature of reality are typically grounded on claims about the nature of the mind (specifically, of how the mind relates to reality).\(^48\) Crudely speaking, this is true of Descartes (the first Modern philosopher), Spinoza,

\(^{43}\) Uniqueness is an *ontological* category, whereas elusiveness is an *epistemic* one. On the other hand, an entity can be unique but not necessarily elusive, and the other way around.

\(^{44}\) Perhaps uniqueness and elusiveness can be analyzed in terms of resistance to integration into a physical picture of the world (this seems to be what numbers, the mind, time, values, language, meaning, and intentionality have in common).

\(^{45}\) “Epistemologically” broadly construed: understanding of the nature of this entity doesn’t need to involve *knowledge* of it.

\(^{46}\) See Chapter 2, section 2. 1.

\(^{47}\) This is the case if we assume a representationalist view in virtue of which our perception of things is mediated by our *mental* representations of things, whereby the mind is the entity *through* which we access the rest of entities. We will see, though, that the mind can also be seen to be an entity central for a philosophical understanding of reality even if we drop representationalist commitments (section Chapter 2, section 2.2 and 2.4.).

\(^{48}\) The fact that for Modern philosophers the question how the mind relates to “reality” (i.e., the external world) is philosophically legitimate (and in fact central) straightforwardly shows that for them the mind isn’t a part of reality
Leibniz, Locke, Berkeley, Hume, Kant, and Hegel, among others. For all these philosophers, I hold, the mind (understood in terms of consciousness) was an entity which, in addition to being of a unique and elusive nature (in the sense sketched above), was *central* in a philosophical understanding of reality.\(^49\)

It seems fair to say that most philosophers agree that some entity or another possesses a unique and elusive nature in the sense sketched above. Not all philosophers, however, agree that these entities are, in addition, central in a philosophical understanding of reality. Generally speaking, there are *few* entities fulfilling the requirement of centrality, whereas there are many that fulfill the requirement of uniqueness and elusiveness. For instance, many philosophers agree that numbers are entities of a unique and elusive nature, but few believe that numbers play a central role in a philosophical understanding of reality in the sense sketched in my previous paragraph.\(^50\)

Finally, a third property that some philosophical objects can be seen to have concerns *truth*: even if it’s the case that their unique and elusive nature makes it a challenge for philosophy to capture, it can be the case that truth about it can be achieved, if only the right standpoint toward them is found and adopted. This property involves two ideas. First, it involves the anti-skeptical idea that, for all its uniqueness and elusiveness, we can get to know true things about the entity in question. (Sometimes this idea acquires a stronger form, namely that skepticism about this entity is confused or meaningless.) For instance, at least some philosophers believe that, for all their uniqueness and elusiveness, it’s possible to eventually understand the nature of numbers. Second, it involves the point that adopting the right standpoint toward this entity is philosophically crucial to adequately understand its nature. This goes hand in hand with the idea itself; it’s the “entity” that lets reality appear in the first place. That’s what I mean to capture when I claim that in Modern philosophy the mind is central for a philosophical understanding of reality.

\(^49\) Of course, in significantly different ways and defending widely diverging philosophical doctrines.

\(^50\) Another example of an entity (or phenomenon) that can be seen to be central in a philosophical understanding of reality is *language* in the analytic tradition of philosophy (i.e., the one that starts with Frege, Russell, and Wittgenstein and continues with Carnap, Quine, Putnam, Davidson, and Kripke, to name a few of its foremost representatives). Of course, analytic philosophers don’t study language in order to find out what the nature of reality is. The philosophical route leading us from language to reality isn’t that simple. Rather (and, of course, crudely put), claims about reality (or of entities important for a philosophical picture of reality) are typically grounded on claims (or, rather, assumptions) about language and how it relates to reality.

\(^51\) Perhaps only Pythagoras held such position.
that philosophical objects differ from ordinary ones in so far as it’s crucial to adopt the right standpoint toward them.

Let’s recapitulate. Whereas philosophical objects don’t differ from ordinary ones by virtue of possessing special properties that make them philosophical, but rather by virtue of the special approach we adopt towards them, there are nonetheless some philosophical objects that can be seen as possessing special properties making them philosophically important: uniqueness and elusiveness, centrality in a philosophical understanding of reality, and cognizability, i.e., the potentiality to be known if only the right standpoint toward them is found and adopted. This sort of philosophical objects (assuming that there are such) are important in the context of this essay, because partial truth about them (in the way I construe this notion) can be seen to contribute something philosophically negative, not merely insufficient or not positive enough. They are thus ideal candidates to construct my case that there is such a thing as partial truth in philosophy, and that this notion can play an explanatory role in accounting for the fact that (sometimes) philosophers reject past theories about x (reality, knowledge, morality, etc.) while acknowledging at the same time that the theories being rejected contain philosophically interesting truth.

1.2.3 Sartre, Heidegger, and Hegel. Consciousness, Human Being, the Absolute

To conclude this first chapter, I proceed to introduce the three examples I will offer in this study as providing evidence that there can be partial truth in philosophy in the sense sketched so far (to be further elaborated on in my central chapters and in Chapter 5). I hasten to point out that, to some extent, the choice of examples is flexible, and different ones (that is, different philosophical objects, different philosophers, and different periods) might have been chosen. What is required for my examples to work is, I believe, three things: first, the objects to be discussed must be such that adopting or failing to adopt the right standpoint toward them must make a difference in whether we are observing the right object to start with (and that means that,

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52 We will see in short that at least according to three significant philosophers in the Continental tradition of philosophy, there are such philosophical objects (later on, my additional suggestion will be that the same is true of significant philosophers in the history of philosophy generally, indeed that philosophy as a theoretical discipline has a strong tendency to gravitate around those objects).
at its most general, the objects must be philosophical; more particularly, the objects must be special in the sense elicited in my last section: that is, they must be unique and elusive, central in a philosophical understanding of reality, and cognizable, in the sense that truth about them can be achieved, if the right standpoint toward them is found and adopted; second, it must be possible to adopt at least two different standpoints toward them, and one of these standpoints must be grounded on the other (that is, using the terminology I introduced before, one of these standpoints must be secondary with respect to the other, which is more basic); third, adopting a secondary standpoint toward the object in question can be seen to provide us with partial truth about that object, i.e., with beliefs (claims, theses) that are true of only a part of the object. The goal to be pursued is to argue that a philosopher can provide a theory which is true of only part of an object by dint of having adopted a secondary standpoint toward that object instead of a basic one. This circumstance can be used, in turn, to explain why subsequent philosophers have rejected past philosophical theories while acknowledging that they contain philosophically interesting truth: because they believe they are partially true in the way I construe this notion.

I think it would be possible to show that the thesis that philosopher Φ argues that their predecessors have provided us with only partial truth about an object (for instance, reality, knowledge, morality, etc.) on account of having adopted a standpoint toward that object which is not so much wrong as secondary with respect to a more basic one, works for a high number of philosophers and philosophical objects, within different periods in the history of philosophy. If in this study I focus on the European (Continental) tradition of philosophy and on the specific philosophers I choose it’s largely for the reason that familiarity with this tradition and these philosophers allows me to construct my case with much greater detail than I would in the case of different philosophers belonging to other philosophical periods and traditions. 53 This circumstance shouldn’t mislead the reader, however, into believing that I intend my construction of the notion of partial truth to apply only to these cases. I take these cases to be exemplary, but still examples of a pattern that I take to extend to the history of philosophy and the philosophical praxis in general. Let’s then proceed to introduce the three examples.

53 Given the amount of detail with which I will cover these three figures, I expect to do justice to their intrinsic philosophical interest. If the reader isn’t convinced by my overall thesis, she can read this dissertation as three separate studies on each of these figures.
According to three significant philosophers in the European tradition of philosophy, J. P. Sartre, M. Heidegger, and G. W. F. Hegel, three entities 1) possess a unique and elusive nature which is a challenge for philosophy to capture and 2) play a central role in a philosophical understanding of reality; but 3) truth about them can be achieved if the right standpoint toward them is found and adopted. These entities are consciousness for Sartre, human being for Heidegger, and the Absolute for Hegel. At its most general, the thesis I will defend is that, according to Sartre, Heidegger, and Hegel, the best past philosophical theories of, respectively, consciousness, human being, and the Absolute have been inadequate, but not exactly false; what is inadequate about them is that they provide us with only partial truth in the sense sketched above (to be further elaborated on in Chapter 5).

1.2.3.1 Sartre on Consciousness

According to Sartre, all previous philosophical theories about consciousness have been inadequate. At its most general, the thesis I will defend about Sartre (Chapter 2) is that, in the case of the best past philosophical theories, Sartre believes that they have been inadequate but not exactly false; what is inadequate about them is that they provide us only with partial truth about consciousness. The strategy I will use to defend this claim will be as follows. First, I will claim that the problem of the best past theories is best described by saying that, according to Sartre, they result from adopting an inadequate standpoint toward consciousness. Second, this standpoint is not inadequate in the sense that is wrong but in the sense that is secondary: a more basic standpoint takes precedence over it and makes it possible in the first place. Third, once we succeed to understand the nature of this more basic standpoint and adopt it, it turns out that what we are able to know about consciousness from the secondary standpoint isn’t so much false as, rather, partial. Thus, I will conclude (and this will be my chief thesis concerning Sartre), Sartre provides us with an example of what I see as being partial truth in philosophy in the sense I want to elicit in this study (in this case, about consciousness).

1.2.3.2 Heidegger on Human Being
According to Heidegger, human being has a unique and elusive nature which is a challenge for philosophy to capture. Now according to Heidegger, previous philosophical accounts of human being have been inadequate. (Similar to Sartre, Heidegger is worried about the best accounts so far; here the task of finding paradigmatic examples is more difficult, as they spread through the whole history of philosophy; as I will explain in Chapter 3, I will choose the “philosophical tradition” to be Heidegger’s target.) At its most general, the thesis I will defend about Heidegger is that, under analysis, these accounts are according to Heidegger inadequate but not exactly false; what is inadequate about them is that they provide us only with partial truth about human being. To show this I will proceed as follows. First, I will claim that the problem of previous accounts is best described by saying that, according to Heidegger, they result from adopting an inadequate standpoint toward human being. Second, this standpoint is not inadequate in the sense that is wrong but in the sense that is secondary: a more basic standpoint takes precedence over it and makes it possible in the first place. Third, once we succeed to understand the nature of this more basic standpoint and adopt it, it turns out that what we are able to know about human being from the secondary standpoint isn’t so much false as, rather, partial. Thus, I will conclude (and this will be my chief thesis concerning Heidegger), Heidegger provides us with an example of what he sees as being partial truth in philosophy (in this case, about human being).

1.2.3.3 Hegel on the Absolute

According to Hegel, the Absolute plays a central role in a philosophical understanding of reality, but the Absolute has a unique and elusive nature which is a challenge for philosophy to capture. Now according to Hegel, previous philosophical accounts of the Absolute have been inadequate. At its most general, the thesis I want to defend concerning Hegel on the Absolute is that, under analysis, these accounts are according to Hegel inadequate but not exactly false; what is inadequate about them is that they provide us only with partial truth about the Absolute. To show this I will proceed as follows. First, I will claim that the problem of previous accounts is best described by saying that, according to Hegel, they result from adopting an inadequate standpoint toward the Absolute. Second, this standpoint is not inadequate in the sense that is

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54 Hegel’s chief alternative term is “Spirit” (Geist in German); alternative terms used by Hegel include “Reason” (Vernunft), “God” (Gott), and “the True” (das Wahre).
wrong but in the sense that is secondary: a more basic standpoint takes precedence over it and makes it possible in the first place. third, once we succeed to understand the nature of this more basic standpoint and adopt it, it turns out that what we are able to know about the Absolute from the secondary standpoint isn’t so much false as, rather, partial. Thus, I will conclude (and this will be my chief thesis concerning Hegel), Hegel provides us with an example of what he sees as being partial truth in philosophy (in this case, about the Absolute).

1.2.4 Summary

To conclude this chapter, let me summarize my chief results so far. A look at the history of philosophy shows that philosophers have in many instances been anxious to fight accounts they take to be inadequate, but not exactly false. This circumstance raises philosophically interesting questions, among which the most obvious one is: what is inadequate with a philosophical account that is not false? The option to be explored in this study is partial truth, construed in as: truth of only part of an object.

A description can be seen not to be false in so far as the right object is being described; but still inadequate in so far as only a part is being described. In this case, the description is partially true (true of only part of its object). In this study, I want to defend the thesis that something like that can be seen to happen in philosophy; or rather, more accurately, that some philosophers have seen this their predecessors as doing this. My strategy for defending this thesis is to help myself with three examples along similar lines. On the basis of two plausible assumptions about the nature of philosophical objects, I suggest attacking the notion of partial truth with a shift of focus, from objects to standpoints toward objects. A standpoint is a perspective, point of view, stance, etc. we adopt over an object, rather than an object itself. A standpoint toward an object is something more elusive and difficult to characterize than an object. A standpoint can become an object (for instance, we can discuss whether observing the Statue of Liberty from the back, rather than from the front, works better to figure out its height), but it’s best to think of a standpoint as something we adopt, not as something we observe; that is, as something we experience in the first person, not in the third one.
A standpoint can, as much as an object, be seen to have parts and wholes, but “part” and “whole” must be taken in a figurative, not in a literal sense. A standpoint can be seen to be “part” of another standpoint if the former is *grounded* on the latter. A standpoint is grounded on another if the latter takes precedence over the former and makes it phenomenologically (or epistemologically) possible to begin with, but not the other way around. For instance, what we can observe of the Statue of Liberty through binoculars is grounded on what we can observe of it through the naked eye but not the other way round; phenomenologically, how things look like through the naked eye takes precedence over how things looks like through the binocular. If that’s the case, I say that the former standpoint is *secondary* with respect to the latter, which is *basic*. The possibility to be explored in this study is whether, in the case of some objects and some standpoints, adopting a *secondary* standpoint toward an object might allow us to see only *part* of that object, whereas adopting a basic standpoint might allow us to see it in its entirety. If this possibility proves successful, we can provide a philosophically interesting reason of why in some instances philosophers have been able to observe only a “part” (an aspect) of an object: because they were adopting a secondary standpoint toward that object. This reason can in turn provide a philosophically interesting explanation of why subsequent philosophers have believed that past philosophers, because of the fact that they were observing only part of an object, but still the *right* object, have taken their theories to be partially true rather than false.

Philosophical objects differ from ordinary objects less in virtue of possessing special properties that make them philosophical than in virtue of the special approach we adopt towards them. However, *some* philosophical objects *do* possess special properties that make them philosophically interesting. Three properties have an interesting connection to partial truth in philosophy. First, some philosophical objects have a unique and elusive nature which is a challenge for philosophy to capture (for instance, numbers or the mind); philosophical uniqueness and elusiveness doesn’t occur because we lack familiarity with an object, but despite the fact (sometimes because) we are *familiar* with that object. Second, some philosophical objects are central in a philosophical understanding of reality because *not* the rest of entities, but philosophical understanding of the rest of entities, are grounded on them. Philosophically speaking, these entities are our way of access to the rest of entities. An example of entities central in a philosophical understanding of reality is the mind in Modern philosophy and
language in Analytic philosophy. Finally, at least some entities which are unique, elusive, and central in a philosophical understanding of reality are (or can be seen to be) cognizable: truth about them can be achieved, as long as the right standpoint toward them is found and adopted. These three features have an interesting connection to partial truth because partial truth about philosophical objects possessing them can be philosophically negative as opposed to insufficient or not positive enough.

According to three significant philosophers in the European tradition of philosophy, Sartre, Heidegger, and Hegel, three entities (different in each case) 1) have a unique and elusive nature which is a challenge for philosophy to capture; 2) play a central role in a philosophical understanding of reality; but 3) truth about them can be achieved if the right standpoint toward them is found and adopted. These entities are consciousness for Sartre, human being for Heidegger, and the Absolute for Hegel. In this study I will show that, according to Sartre, Heidegger, and Hegel, past philosophical theories of, respectively, consciousness, human being, and the Absolute, have been inadequate but not exactly false; what is inadequate about them is that they provide us only with partial truth about these objects. Central to my defense will be the idea that, according to Sartre, Heidegger, and Hegel, previous philosophers have adopted a secondary standpoint toward consciousness, human being, and the Absolute, which has allowed them to see only a “part” (an aspect) of them. What results from this is partially true (not false) theories about consciousness, human being, and the Absolute. This truth is partial, not in the sense that is insufficient or incomplete, but in the sense that is misleading or negative. Drawing on these three examples I hope to show in Chapter 5 that the notion of partial truth, in the way I construct it, can be helpful to make sense of some instances of rejection of philosophical theories by philosophers who acknowledge those theories as containing philosophically interesting truth.
CHAPTER 2
SARTRE ON CONSCIOUSNESS

According to Sartre, all past philosophical theories of consciousness have been inadequate in some way or another. At its most general, the thesis I want to defend in this chapter is that at least the best past theories are according to Sartre inadequate but not exactly false; what is inadequate about them is that they provide us with partial truth about consciousness (in the sense sketched in Chapter 1, to be elaborated on in Chapter 5). Crucial to my defense will be the notion of standpoint and the idea that, according to Sartre, there is a secondary and a basic standpoint that we can adopt over consciousness. In essence, I will argue that the following holds according to Sartre. First, what is problematic about the best past theories is best described by saying that they result from adopting an inadequate standpoint toward consciousness. Second, this standpoint is not inadequate in the sense that is wrong but in the sense that is secondary: a more basic standpoint takes precedence over it and makes it possible in the first place. Third, what we are able to know about consciousness from the secondary standpoint isn’t so much false as partial. As I anticipated in Chapter 1, I will take this to be an example of partial truth in philosophy, and I will argue in Chapter 5 that the notion of partial truth, conveniently spelled out, can be a helpful notion to make sense of at least some instances of rejection of theories by philosophers who acknowledge those theories to contain philosophically interesting truth. These instances, I will suggest, constitute a significant pattern in the history of philosophy and philosophy praxis, and more attention should be paid to it.

In order to defend these claims, I need first of all to delimit Sartre’s target, the theories I’ll contend he takes to be partially true. Given that, to Sartre’s eyes, his theory is essentially the first to get the nature of consciousness quite right, he considers all past philosophical theories of consciousness inadequate in some way or another. However, it would be a mistake to run all of these theories together, as Sartre credits some with having contributed philosophically interesting truth, whereas he ignores others for being inept or uninteresting. Two figures deserve Sartre’s credit for having contributed most to our philosophical understanding of consciousness,
Descartes and Husserl.\textsuperscript{55} For all their philosophical merits, however, Sartre believes that Descartes’ and Husserl’s theories of consciousness must be rejected. What we have here, I contend, is the sort of relation between a philosopher and his predecessors that is the goal of this study to elucidate: rejection of a theory that, it’s acknowledged, contains philosophically interesting truth. How do we square these two facts, rejection and acknowledgement of interesting truth? My answer is partial truth. Essentially, I will take Sartre to believe that Descartes’ and Husserl’s theories are not false in so far as in them the right object is being described;\textsuperscript{56} but that are still inadequate in so far as only a part\textsuperscript{57} of that object is being described. I will suggest that what we have here is a scenario analogous to the one of my very first example (Chapter 1): a description of the Statue of Liberty that goes: “It’s a tabula ansata, that is, a tablet evoking the law; on it is inscribed the date of the American Declaration of Independence, July 4, 1776 …,” and so on, can be seen not to be false in so far as the right object is being described, but still inadequate in so far as only a part of that object is being described. (We still need to see why Sartre wants to reject these theories, instead of complete or supplement them; I’ll discuss this in Chapter 5).

To make my case, I will focus on Sartre’s early work, in particular on The Transcendence of the Ego (\textit{TE}).\textsuperscript{58} The reason why I draw on Sartre’s early work is simple: its overarching theme is consciousness, and its overarching goal is to come up with an adequate philosophical understanding of it, which includes as a task engaging critically with past philosophical theories of consciousness and showing their inadequacies. The reason why I draw on \textit{TE} is that this work is Sartre’s first significant philosophical publication, which involves two things. First, being Sartre’s first publication, \textit{TE} is the work by Sartre most obviously indebted to his predecessors (in this case, Descartes and Husserl), whereby what according to Sartre is philosophically valuable in them stands out more conspicuously than in later work. Second, being Sartre’s first

\textsuperscript{55} This simplifies things a bit, as there are more figures that might be candidates to deserving this credit (Bergson, Kant, Hegel, and Heidegger, among others). However, they are a plausible choice, and my case for partial truth can be construed for both of them along roughly similar lines, which makes them methodologically more interesting than other choices.

\textsuperscript{56} Which, per Chapter 1, section 1.2.1. (final paragraph), involves philosophically interesting truth.

\textsuperscript{57} Or, in this case, an aspect or mode of it.

\textsuperscript{58} Although I’ll be drawing on other works, especially from Sartre’s early period; these include: The Emotions: Outline of a Theory (\textit{E}) (Sartre [1939] 1948), The Imaginary (\textit{I}) (Sartre [1940] 2004b), and Being and Nothingness (\textit{BT}) (Sartre [1943] 1992a).
articulation of his own theory, TE engages critically with Descartes’ and Husserl’s theories and shows their inadequacies quite conspicuously too.\(^{59}\) TE, in a nutshell, exemplarily showcases Sartre’s double stance towards Descartes and Husserl that is my goal in this chapter (and this study) to elucidate (i.e., rejection of a theory that, it’s acknowledged, contains philosophically interesting truth).

Before proceeding to make my case, let me make two quick disclaimers.

First, in view of its title (Transcendence of the Ego), TE seems to be an essay about the ego, i.e., about the self, not about consciousness. It’s plausible to assume that the self has a philosophically interesting connection to consciousness,\(^{60}\) whereby it’s plausible to expect of an interesting philosophical work on the self (as TE undoubtedly is) to say philosophically interesting things about consciousness. But it’s not clear that a philosophical work on the self should thereby be a work on consciousness. Given that I think this is the case of TE, I need to provide some justification for this view. Most of this justification will be given in the course of this chapter, in which I intend to show that Sartre’s views about the self derive from his views about consciousness, rather than the other way round.\(^{61}\) By now let me preliminarily point out that the self and consciousness, for Sartre as much as for Descartes and for Husserl, are tightly connected, whereby any philosophically interesting thesis by Sartre about one amounts to a philosophically interesting thesis about the other. (To be faithful to the letter of TE, I’ll be sometimes speaking of Sartre’s views about the self, although, as we will see, what I really mean with that on final analysis will be Sartre’s views about consciousness).

\(^{59}\) A more elaborate treatment of Descartes and Husserl can be found at different places of BN.

\(^{60}\) Although this assumption can be challenged: philosophers like Nietzsche and Heidegger, for instance, might arguably reject it.

\(^{61}\) I need this claim to make my overall case in this chapter, for, remember, in this chapter I claim that, according to Sartre, Descartes’ and Husserl’s theories of consciousness are partially true rather than false. More specifically, I need this claim to argue, in Chapter 5, that what Sartre criticizes in TE isn’t so much Descartes’ and Husserl’s views about the self as their views about consciousness. This claim, in turn, will allow me to argue that we can construe Descartes’ and Husserl’s thesis that there is a self in consciousness as being true for Sartre (even though in fact Sartre believes this thesis is false), while it still holds that, for Sartre, Descartes’ and Husserl’s theories of consciousness should be rejected (Chapter 5, section 5.1.2.). The point I’ll be making is that Sartre would find Descartes’ and Husserl’s theories of consciousness inadequate even if (counterfactually) Sartre believed all the theses contained in them (for instance, those about the self) were true.
Second, even though *TE*’s chief targets are Descartes and Husserl, Sartre targets more figures, although more peripherally. One is the philosopher Immanuel Kant, a figure I’ll say some things about, but whom I will largely leave aside in this chapter. Another is the French moralist François de La Rochefoucauld (1613-1680), who according to Sartre is the foremost representative of what he calls the “French moralists.” It isn’t clear that Sartre’s allusions to Kant might suffice to defend a thesis analogous to the one I defend with regard to Descartes and Husserl. But we will see that this can be done with regard to La Rochefoucauld and the moralists, whereby I will devote a section to discuss Sartre’s views about their theory of consciousness too (section 2.3. below), and profit from this discussion to supplement my case about Descartes and Husserl with a third, additional, figure.

2. 1 DESCARTES ON CONSCIOUSNESS

Given that this chapter concerns consciousness from a philosophical perspective it’d be good to start with a preliminary discussion of what is going to be meant by consciousness here. This task, however, wouldn’t be without some dangers, as per Chapter 1, philosophical objects aren’t around for us to observe, whereby it’s not clear what exactly a specific philosophical object is unless we somehow know that we’re adopting the right standpoint toward it. To start with a general definition of consciousness, in other words, wouldn’t guarantee that we have captured the right object to begin with. It seems therefore better to let the characterization of consciousness emerge from Sartre himself or, rather, from the past philosophers he takes to have contributed most to their philosophical understanding.

The first philosopher Sartre credits with having contributed philosophically interesting truth about consciousness is Descartes. In this section I briefly spell out Descartes’ views on

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62 Essentially, Sartre argues that Kant’s famous claim that “the I think must be able to accompany all my representations” (*Critique of Pure Reason* B131-132; Kant [1781/1787] 1998: 246) may well be true from a critical (epistemological) standpoint, but not necessarily from a factual (phenomenological) one. Kant is right, says Sartre in other words, that all consciousness of *x* may become the object of an “I think” (Sartre takes this to mean that I can always *reflect* on my consciousness of *x* and make a statement of the form “I am conscious of *x*”); but this doesn’t mean that all consciousness of *x* is the object of an “I think” (i.e., *not* all consciousness of *x* is of the form “I am conscious of *x*”). Here the notion of standpoint and issues of priority can be seen to engage a philosophically important debate: whereas Sartre and Husserl would hold that Kant’s epistemological (critical) standpoint is *secondary* with respect to a phenomenological (factual) one, Kant would hold that the opposite is true.
consciousness in a way that highlights the chief points on which later I will construct my case.\textsuperscript{63} There are three points in Descartes’ theory of consciousness that must be emphasized in connection to Sartre: according to Descartes, (a) the mind must be understood in terms of consciousness; (b) consciousness is completely revealed in the cogito; and (c) the cogito occurs in reflection. Let’s briefly consider each of these points in turn.

2. 1. 1 The Mind

Descartes is the first philosopher to have taken the mind to be an entity that is philosophically special in the way I sketched in Chapter 1. This take by Descartes on the mind, which is shared by Sartre too, is going to help me in my overall case on partial truth, for I will be able to suggest that partial truth about what Descartes calls the mind (that turns out to be largely equivalent to what we today call consciousness\textsuperscript{64}) can be seen to contribute something philosophically negative, as opposed to insufficient or incomplete. For Descartes, the mind is a unique and elusive sort of entity, not perhaps factually, but certainly philosophically.\textsuperscript{65} More importantly, for Descartes the mind is central in a philosophical understanding of reality: a philosophical understanding of reality is grounded on a philosophical understanding of the mind. What Descartes means here concerns a question of epistemological priority: we can be certain that we know reality only because we can be certain that we know our mind in the first place (and then there is a philosophically interesting route from knowledge about our own mind to knowledge about reality, via the idea and existence of God). Even more importantly, and here’s the first point that needs emphasizing in connection to Sartre, the mind must be understood in terms of consciousness.\textsuperscript{66} Contra the Aristotelian tradition, for which the mind is a principle of life and something to be studied as an object, that is, from a third person standpoint, Descartes takes the mind to be completely disclosed in our being conscious of it, and accordingly something to be studied from the standpoint of the subject, that is, from a first person standpoint.

\textsuperscript{63} My goal in what follows isn’t historical or exegetical. I content myself with presenting a fairly standard picture of Descartes that does justice to, or at least doesn’t contradict, Sartre’s reading.

\textsuperscript{64} Although, as we will see, with important differences.

\textsuperscript{65} Descartes famously claims that factually the mind is better known (i.e., it is less elusive) than our body (cf. Second Meditation, subtitle: Descartes [1641] 1984: 16).

\textsuperscript{66} There may be qualms about whether Descartes was really the first philosophers to have understood the mind in terms of consciousness. St. Augustine is a good candidate of (early) Medieval philosophy for having done so.
To get a first glimpse of what, according to Sartre, isn’t as adequate in Descartes’ theory of consciousness, it may help to remember that Descartes’ overall philosophical project is epistemological. As is well known, Descartes is interested in establishing absolute certainty in our knowledge.\(^67\) His preliminary strategy is to show that all of our beliefs are on principle always dubitable.\(^68\) As is also well known, Descartes believes that knowledge coming from experience (ultimately from the senses) can be on principle always deceptive (locally, since senses sometimes deceive us,\(^69\) and globally, since we might be dreaming\(^70\)). and knowledge *not* coming from experience, that is, rational or a priori knowledge (for instance, arithmetic truths), isn’t better off: for all we know, an all-powerful evil demon might trick us into taking to be true a belief that is not (for instance, that two plus two equals four), each time that we come to have the belief in question.\(^71\) What results from this all-around skepticism isn’t that *none* of our beliefs is indubitable and that, therefore, there is no certainty whatsoever,\(^72\) but, again as is well-known, that at least *one* of our beliefs *is* indubitable: that I exist.\(^73\) This doesn’t mean that I exist as a body or a physical being (indeed, this is what we typically take ourselves to be), because, as Descartes has already established, an evil demon might trick me into thinking that I have (or am)

\(^{67}\) “I realized that it was necessary, once in the course of my life, to demolish everything completely and start again right from the foundations if I wanted to establish anything at all in the sciences that was stable and likely to last.” (Descartes [1641] 1984: 12)

\(^{68}\) “[I] am finally compelled to admit that there is not one of my former beliefs about which a doubt may not properly be raised; and this is not a flippant or ill-considered conclusion, but is based on powerful and well thought-out reasons. So in future I must withhold my assent from these former beliefs just as carefully as I would from obvious falsehoods, if I want to discover any certainty.” (Loc. cit. 14-15)

\(^{69}\) “Whatever I have up till now accepted as most true I have acquired either from the senses or through the senses. But from time to time I have found that the senses deceive, and it is prudent never to trust completely those who have deceived us even once.” (Loc. cit. 12)

\(^{70}\) “As I think about this more carefully, I see plainly that there are never any sure signs by means of which being awake can be distinguished from being asleep. … Suppose then that I am dreaming, and that these particulars –that my eyes are open, that I am moving my head and stretching out my hand- are not true. Perhaps, indeed, I do not even have such hands or such a body at all.” (Loc. cit. 13)

\(^{71}\) “I will suppose therefore that … some malicious demon of the utmost power and cunning has employed all his energies in order to deceive me.” (Loc. cit. 15) “[S]ince I sometimes believe that others go astray in cases where they think they have the most perfect knowledge, may I not similarly go wrong every time I add two and three or count the sides of a square, or in some even simpler matter, if that is imaginable?” (Loc. cit. 14)

\(^{72}\) “I will suppose then, that everything I see is spurious. I will believe that my memory tells me lies, and that none of the things that it reports ever happened. I have no senses. Body, shape, extension, movement and place are chimeras. So what remains true? Perhaps just the one fact that nothing is certain.” (Loc. cit. 16)

\(^{73}\) “[L]et him [i.e., a deceiver of supreme power and cunning] deceive me as much as he can, he will never bring it about that I am nothing so long as I think that I am something. So after considering everything very thoroughly, I must finally conclude that this proposition, *I am, I exist*, is necessarily true whenever it is put forward by me or conceived in my mind.” (Loc. cit. 17).
a body, whereas in fact I have (or am) not.74 Rather, what is indubitable is that I exist only in so far as I think.75 But then, again, “thinking” shouldn’t be understood here as a cognitive capacity that, say, computers can possess too. Rather, and this is the first crucial point that I take Sartre to give Descartes credit for, “thinking” means something like to be conscious of something. Otherwise, it wouldn’t make sense for Descartes to hold that thinking is the only phenomenon absolutely immune to skeptical doubt: if we understood “thinking” in its ordinary meaning, it is perfectly dubitable whether I think or not (an evil demon might delude me into making me believe my thought processes are rational and coherent, whereas they really are a chaotic mess with no thinking whatsoever). By contrast, understood as “being conscious,” it can easily be seen that not even the most powerful evil demon can make me doubt that, while I am conscious, I am conscious of whatever I am conscious of.

A conscious state in virtue of which consciousness directs towards itself, allowing for the fact that consciousness can’t be mistaken that the conscious state of which it is conscious of is actually there, is called by Descartes cogito (in Latin, “I think”).

2. 1. 2 The Cogito

As is well known, Descartes took the cogito to be the only legitimate starting point in philosophy, the only absolutely indubitable certainty from which we can reconstruct our knowledge. Whether Descartes was right in considering the cogito the only legitimate starting point in philosophy or in understanding self-consciousness the terms he did, Descartes’ most important and well-known insight set the agenda for virtually the whole of Modern philosophy. Spinoza, Leibniz, Locke, Berkeley, Hume, Kant, and Hegel,76 no matter how staunchly opposed to Descartes, somehow share his assumption that access to our consciousness77 constitutes a starting point in philosophy, or at least a central fact that needs to be incorporated into a philosophical picture of reality.

74 “I am not that structure of limbs which is called a human body. I am not even some thin vapour which permeates the limbs –a wind, fire, air, breath, or whatever I depict in my imagination; for these are things which I have supposed to be nothing. Let this supposition stand.” (Loc. cit. 18)
75 “Thinking? At least I have discovered it –thought; this alone is inseparable from me. I am, I exist –that is certain. But for how long? For as long as I am thinking. For it could be that were I totally to cease from thinking, I should totally cease to exist.” (Ibid.)
76 These are the most important names in mainstream Modern Philosophy. Many others could be included.
77 Of course, there are divergences over the ultimate nature of this “privilege.”
While this assumption was challenged in various ways by post-Hegelian (and anti-Cartesian) philosophers including, among others, Schopenhauer, Kierkegaard, Marx and Nietzsche,\(^{78}\) Descartes’ chief insight was taken up anew and radicalized in Husserl’s phenomenology (this circumstance will become relevant when we proceed to consider Husserl in section 2.2.).

2. 1. 3 Reflection

There is room for interpretative controversy, but it’s plausible to hold that, according to Descartes, consciousness is best studied in reflection. The reason is simple: Descartes believes it’s in reflection that consciousness completely reveals to itself, because consciousness completely reveals to itself when it is conscious of itself, and consciousness is conscious of itself, precisely, in reflection. We will see later on that the crux of my thesis that, according to Sartre, Descartes’ theory of consciousness isn’t false but partially true is that Sartre believes that consciousness can be conscious of itself (and more fundamentally so) prior to reflection too. I will take this to mean that, according to Sartre, there is a standpoint toward consciousness that is more basic than reflection. Now it is open to scholarly debate whether Descartes fails to realize this circumstance or whether he realizes, but believes that absolute certainty wouldn’t be guaranteed in this case. What I think is less open to debate is, as we will see, that according to Sartre the following holds: (a) Descartes takes the cogito to be the basis of any philosophically interesting truth about consciousness; (b) Descartes’ cogito is secondary with respect to a more basic mode of self-consciousness.

2. 2. HUSSERL ON CONSCIOUSNESS

The second philosopher Sartre credits with having contributed philosophically interesting truth about consciousness is Husserl. There are three claims by Husserl about consciousness that are going to be relevant in my case for partial truth in Sartre with respect to Husserl: (a) phenomenology, not psychology, provides us with philosophically interesting truth about consciousness; (b) consciousness must be understood in terms of intentionality; and (c) consciousness must be studied via reflection. Let’s discuss each of these three points in turn.

\(^{78}\) And non-philosophers like, crucially, Freud. Again, many other philosophers could be included here.
2. 2. 1 Phenomenology

Late Husserl called phenomenology a “neo-Cartesianism.”⁷⁹ (We will see in a minute what phenomenology exactly is). This testifies to Husserl’s debt to Descartes. Husserl claimed to be following a Cartesian program, indeed to follow Descartes’ agenda in a way that was more sensitive to Descartes’ discovery of the *cogito* than he himself had been. For Husserl, as much as for Descartes, consciousness is completely revealed in its being conscious of itself, and consciousness of itself provides us with the only domain in which absolute evidence can be found. Philosophers, who, according to Husserl, are supposed to pursue knowledge in its highest degree of evidence, should devote themselves to exploring this domain.

Probably the best way to understand what is so important for Sartre in Husserl’s views of consciousness is to contrast them with the view that Husserl attacked: that consciousness is best studied from a third-person standpoint, as something we can be conscious of, instead of what is conscious. This is the standpoint adopted by psychology, understood not as a branch of philosophy (rational psychology), but as a positive science on the model of physics and the rest of natural sciences.

Husserl claimed that, for philosophical purposes, consciousness must be taken to be something quite different from what psychology took it to be. In the second half of the 19th century, psychology became a positive science by taking consciousness to be a part of nature, something to be described and explained in the same way in which a physicist describes and explains physical phenomena. While Husserl never denied that consciousness *can* be naturalized nor that psychology can become a science,⁸⁰ he denied the value of psychology when it comes to elucidating a particular aspect of consciousness of crucial relevance for philosophy, namely, the difference between the *objective* correlates of our conscious states as opposed to the *subjective* acts in which we are conscious of these correlates. For the purposes of this chapter at least, Husserl is then best seen as updating Descartes’ move against the Aristotelian tradition, with its

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⁷⁹ Husserl *CM*: 1.

⁸⁰ In the sense of “positive science.” Husserl took phenomenology to be the *real* scientific psychology. But in the latter case “scientific” has for Husserl a more pregnant, grander sense than as applied to the empirical sciences.
emphasis on the third person standpoint toward consciousness, bringing about a shift of standpoint to the first person.

Consider *logical laws*, for instance. If one is after a philosophical elucidation of the validity of logical laws, as Husserl was, one can be tempted to focus on the psychological processes in which logical laws are thought in order to explain that validity. This can be done via a “genetic” explication of how we psychologically get to acquire those laws or through a “static” description of how we psychologically represent them. In either case, the elucidation proceeds in psychological terms, and the goal is a derivation or, more strongly, a deduction of logical laws from psychological ones. Generally speaking, the attempt to account for, or, more strongly, derive, a phenomenon from psychological phenomena is called psychologism. Psychologism flourished in the second half of the 19th century, and Husserl’s phenomenology can be seen, at least in its origins, as a reaction against it.

Husserl’s point against psychologism was that accounting for the objective validity of logical laws in psychological terms involves a category mistake fallacy. A Kantian way to put Husserl’s point would be to say that logical laws lay claim to a universal, necessary validity that no conscious state, taken to occur in space and time, as psychology does, can explain. Now this Kantian way to put the point is a bit misleading, because it suggests that it’s unversality and

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81 This is what set Husserl’s phenomenology going (*Logical Investigations* [LI]: Husserl [1900/01] 1970). Later on, Husserl generalized the objects to be studied to *everything* consciousness can be conscious of (*Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy* [Ideas]: Husserl [1913] 1982) and *Cartesian Meditations* [CM]: Husserl [1931] 1995).

82 “Our great task is now to bring the Ideas of logic, the logical concepts and laws, to epistemological clarity and definiteness.” (*LI*: 251)

83 “The essential theoretical foundations of logic lie in psychology, in whose field those propositions belong—as far as their theoretical content is concerned—which give logic its characteristic pattern. Logic is related to psychology just as any branch of chemical technology is related to chemistry, as land-surveying is to geometry, etc.” (*LI*: 90)

84 We could say “successful reaction.” There is wide agreement that Husserl’s *LI* crucially helped to discredit the psychologist program, at least in the terms in which it was originally put.

85 *LI*: 179. Sartre himself puts Husserl’s point thus: “If I seek the psychic *facts* which are at the basis of the arithmetic attitude of the man who counts and calculates, I shall never arrive at the reconstitution of the arithmetic *essences* of unity, number and operation.” (*E*: 10; my emphasis)

86 “We are […] interested in what makes science science, which is certainly not its psychology, nor any real context into which acts of thought are fitted, but a certain objective or ideal interconnection which these acts a unitary objective relevance, and, in such unitary relevance, an ideal validity.” (*LI*: 225)
necessary validity what is irreducible to the conscious acts in which logical laws are thought, whereas Husserl’s point concerns the *objective sense* of logical laws, whether or not universally and necessarily valid. What Husserl suggested to avoid the category mistake fallacy was to develop a more refined understanding of the conscious acts in which logical laws are thought. This understanding is Cartesian in spirit, that is, conscious acts are to be studied in so far as we immediately observe them, but Husserl wants to avoid the pitfalls into which Descartes fell when trying to make a deductive use of his original discovery that the *cogito* is immune to skeptical doubts. According to Husserl, a rigorous distinction must be drawn between the conscious acts in which we grasp (for instance) logical laws and what these acts are conscious of. According to Husserl, grasping this distinction with the required radicalism is heavily impaired if one takes conscious acts to be spatio-temporal events occurring in the natural world, as psychologism did. If the latter is accepted, Husserl believes, there is no way to escape relativism and skepticism. According to Husserl, grasping this distinction with the required radicalism is heavily impaired if one takes conscious acts to be spatio-temporal events occurring in the natural world, as psychologism did. If the latter is accepted, Husserl believes, there is no way to escape relativism and skepticism.  

Husserl’s reason is simple: starting from *facts* you can only explain *facts*. Thus, a radical change of standpoint is needed to account for the heterogeneity of objective correlates and subjective conscious acts.

2.2.2 Intentionality

We have just seen that, according to Husserl, psychologism fails to provide us with an adequate philosophical understanding of consciousness, because it fails to draw a distinction between conscious acts and what conscious acts are conscious of. This is just to say that, according to Husserl, what psychologism targets isn’t *consciousness* itself, but a psychological state (entity, event, etc.), something we are conscious of.

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88 “Psychologism in all its subvarieties and individual elaborations is in fact the same as relativism, though not always recognized and expressly allowed to be such. […] Every doctrine is *ipso facto* relativistic, a case of specific relativism, if, with the empiricists, it treats the pure laws of logic as empirical, psychological laws.” (*LI*: 145).

89 “[M]ost serious consequences arise for the psychologistic logicians. “The first is that only vague rules could be based on vague theoretical foundations. If psychological laws lack exactness, the same must be true of the prescriptions of logic.[…] In the second place […] no natural laws can be known a priori, nor established by sheer insight. … Nothing, however, seems plainer than that the laws of ‘pure logic’ all have a priori validity.” (*LI*: 98-99)

90 “Psychologism can only be radically overcome by a pure phenomenology, a science infinitely removed from psychology as the empirical science of the mental attributes and states of animal realities.” (*LI*: 253)
What we need, Husserl believed, is not just refining our psychological theories or developing better ones, but, rather, attempting a less theory-laden, at the limit theory-free description of consciousness as we observe it. Such description reveals one fundamental fact: conscious states are always about something.\(^9^1\) This is what Husserl, following his teacher Franz Brentano, expressed by saying that consciousness is intentional.\(^9^2\) The intentionality of consciousness isn’t supposed to be a contingent property that might be present in some cases, e.g., in veracious perception, but missing in others, e.g. in misperception. Rather, Husserl holds, consciousness is intentional through and through, in its very nature: even a misperception, for instance, is misperception of something. According to Husserl, the intentionality of consciousness is a principle without ontological commitments. By refusing to assimilate, for instance, an arithmetic truth to the conscious act in which this truth is known to be true, not only does Husserl refuse to assign an ontological status to arithmetic objects, but, moreover, he leaves this ontological status systematically undecided. The whole question about the ontological status of the correlates (contents) of consciousness is, quite simply, excluded from phenomenology. For Husserl, this ontological non-commitment isn’t an optional move that a phenomenologist might or might not choose to follow, but the only possible way to do phenomenology. This is why Husserl demands a “suspension” or “bracketing” of what he calls our “natural attitude,” in which ontological assumptions are always tacitly present.\(^9^3\) Husserl called this suspension “phenomenological reduction,”\(^9^4\) and the importance he placed on it cannot be overestimated: as long as the phenomenological reduction is not adequately understood, he thought, phenomenology will remain a descriptive psychology, and thus a positive science.

2.2.3 Reflection

\(^9^1\) “Without exception, every conscious process is, in itself, consciousness of such and such.” (CM: 33).

\(^9^2\) “Conscious process are also called intentional; but then the word intentionality signifies nothing else than this universal fundamental property of consciousness: to be consciousness of something.” (CM: 33) Of course, the principle of intentionality of consciousness does not exclude the fact that there are “elements” in consciousness that are not themselves intentional: “One easily sees […] that not every really inherent moment in the concrete unity of an intuitive mental process [i.e., a conscious act] itself has the fundamental characteristic, intentionality, thus the property of being “consciousness of something.” That concerns, for example, all data of sensation which play so great a role in perceptual intuitions of physical things.” (Ideas: 75, Husserl’s emphasis)

\(^9^3\) For example, in the natural attitude we take objects of perception to be “out there,” in the physical world, whereas we take objects of, e.g., imagination not to be “out there,” but, rather, say, in “our mind.”

\(^9^4\) More technically, epokhē (from Greek εποχή, a suspension of judgment).
According to Husserl, the phenomenological reduction is a philosophical advance over Descartes (and at least the Sartre of the first pages of *TE* seems to agree). One of Descartes’ mistakes, Husserl suggests, is to have assumed that consciousness is a part of the “furniture of the world” (even if immaterial); that is, in Descartes’ terminology, that consciousness is a *substance*. Husserl avoids this mistake by realizing that, after the reduction, consciousness isn’t anything existing, not a substance, but a pure domain of sense. However, the same as Descartes, Husserl is committed to the view that *reflection* is the adequate standpoint to be adopted over consciousness. This point is important, and the basis on which I want to construct my case that, according to Sartre, there is a standpoint toward consciousness that is more basic than the one adopted by both Descartes and Husserl.

Husserl’s distinction between a subjective conscious state and the objective correlate of that state was encapsulated in the Cartesian schema *cogitatio-cogitatum*. Whereas “*cogito*” translates the Latin “I think” (i.e., “I am conscious”), a *cogitatio*, from the Latin “thought,” refers to the *act* in which one’s thinking (i.e., being conscious) takes place. *Cogitatum*, finally, is the past participle of the verb “*cogito*,” thus “what-is-thought;” this is the term Husserl uses to refer to the objective correlate of the conscious state we happen to be observing, for instance a logical law (*qua*-being-thought), a desk (*qua* being-perceived), a unicorn (*qua*-being-imagined), and so on.

When Husserl generalized phenomenology to a systematic study of *all* conscious states and shifted his attention to the schema *cogitatio-cogitatum*, however, he thought it necessary to admit an *additional* subjective component of conscious states: the *Ego* or *self*. This doesn’t need to make of the self a “material” component of our conscious states. After the phenomenological reduction, the Ego doesn’t seem to be “materially” in consciousness.

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95 This is the move against which Sartre’s *TE* reacts. Significantly, Husserl himself had rejected in *Logical Investigations* the idea that the Ego belongs to consciousness: “The phenomenologically reduced ego is therefore nothing peculiar, floating above many experiences: it is simply identical with their own interconnected unity. […]” (*LI*: 542)

96 “In contradistinction [to any cogito], the pure Ego would, however, seem to be something essentially necessary; and, as something absolutely identical throughout every actual or possible change in mental processes, it cannot in any sense be a really inherent part or moment of the mental processes themselves.” (*Ideas*: 132).

97 “This much is clear from the very beginning: After carrying out this reduction we shall not encounter the pure Ego anywhere in the flux of manifold mental process among others, nor as strictly a part of a mental process, arising and then disappearing with the mental process of which it is a part.” (*Ideas*:132)
What is Husserl’s rationale for admitting the existence of a self in consciousness? This question is important, as Husserl’s answer is crucial in Sartre’s rejection of Husserl’s theory of consciousness. A quick answer by Husserl is that we must do justice to the fact that we can observe the correlate of a conscious state in many different ways, while the conscious state remains “invariant.” For example, when perceiving a chair in my office I can shift my look from, say, the wall at the back to the chair by my desk, back and forth, at my will. This shift of look shouldn’t be taken in an empirical sense, but in a phenomenological (or, more controversially, in Kantian terms, a transcendental one). The point isn’t simply that, say, by a convenient adjustment of my optic nerves I am able to change the perspective over what I see, thus passing from perceiving the chair by my desk to the wall at the back, back and forth. The point is rather that the possibility of thus changing my look is internal to the perception itself, even if my optic nerves (or neurons firing, or what have you) stay “invariant.” Thus, Husserl seems to believe, a subjective pole “behind” this look must be admitted into phenomenology’s “ontology.” The possibility of consciousness to change the look at any point, not just in the same sort of conscious state, but from one sort to another, suggests in effect the existence of a subjective pole behind each conscious state. Seen from the opposite side, in addition, every correlate of a conscious state appearing in the background (for instance, the wall of my office behind my desk, when I perceive my desk in my office) can always become the explicit object of our look, thus passing from appearing in the background to appearing in the “foreground.” In this sense, our conscious life forms a unity, and the famous Kantian claim “‘I think’ must be capable of accompanying all my representations” holds good also for Husserl.

98 “If an intentive mental process is actional, that is, effected in the manner of the cogito, then in that process the subject is “directing” himself to the intentional Object. To the cogito itself there belongs, as immanent in it, a “regard-to” the Object which, on the other side, wells forth from the “Ego” which therefore can never be lacking.” (Ideas: 76)

99 “[T]he Ego belongs to each coming and going mental process; its “regard” is directed “through” each actional cogito to the objective something. This ray of regard changes from one cogito to the next, shooting forth anew with each new cogito and vanishing with it. The Ego, however, is something identical.” (Ideas:132)

100 For instance, I can perceive my friend Sergio, but I can also imagine, remember, and so on, my friend Sergio, at my will.

101 Although arguably in a different sense. “In every actional cogito the ego lives out its life in a special sense. But all mental processes in the background likewise belong to it; and it belongs to them. All of them, as belonging to the one stream of mental processes which is mine, must admit of becoming converted into actional cogitationes or incorporated into actional cogitationes as immanental constituents. In Kant’s words, “The ‘I think’ must be capable of accompanying all my presentations.” (Ideas: 132-3). An intriguing Insertion in Copy A: “…whether also Kant’s sense I leave undecided…”
“transcendence within immanence.” The self, Husserl believes, cannot be “bracketed” or “suspended,” as the physical world can.

Husserl understood this self to be “transcendental.” If taken in a Kantian sense, this makes of the self-propelled look a constraint for conscious states to be conscious of something. Thus, Husserl’s transcendental move seems to endorse a new, up-to-date version of Descartes’ (and, with differences, Kant’s) insight that in every cogito there is a self as the subject of every cogitatio. This must commit Husserl to the view that in every act of perception there is a self perceiving, in every act of imagination there is a self imagining, in every hating there is a self hating, and so on.

2. 3 THE PSYCHOLOGISTS

We have just seen how, on the basis of their respective theories of consciousness, both Descartes and Husserl hold the thesis that there is a self in consciousness. We will see in short that Sartre

102 “If we retain a pure Ego as a residuum after our phenomenological exclusion of the world and of the empirical subjectivity included in it (and an essentially different pure Ego for each stream of mental processes), then there is presented in the case of that Ego a transcendency of a peculiar type –one which is not constituted- a transcedency within immanency.” (Ideas:133)

103 “[I]f I effect the phenomenological epokhe, then, as in the case of the whole world in the natural positing, there “I, the human being” undergoes exclusion; what remains behind is the pure act-process with its own essence. However, I also see that the apprehension of that process as human mental process, apart from the positing of existence, brings in a variety of things which need not of necessity be there and that, on the other hand, no excluding can annul the form of cogito and cancel out the “pure” subject of the act: the “being directed to,” the “being busied with,” the “taking a position toward,” the “undergoing,” the “suffering from” necessarily includes in its essence this: that it is precisely a ray “emanating from the Ego” or, in a reverse direction of the ray, “toward the Ego” –and this Ego is the pure Ego; no reduction can do anything to it.” (Ideas:190-1).

104 “Concerning our terminology we may add the following. Important motives, grounded in the epistemological problematic, justify our designating “pure” consciousness […] as transcendental consciousness […] (Ideas: 66). The customary view that Husserl’s phenomenology became with Ideas an updated Kantian idealism can find support in claims like these: “[…] [T]here is […] such a thing as the field of a pure consciousness, indeed, […] there is such a thing which is not a component part of Nature, and is so far from being that, that Nature is possible only as intentional unity motivated in transcendentally pure consciousness by immanental connections.” (Ideas:115); “The existence of Nature cannot be the condition for the existence of consciousness, since Nature itself turns out to be a correlate of consciousness: Nature is only as being constituted in regular concatenations of consciousness.” (Ideas: 116).

105 “Among the universal essential peculiarities pertaining to the transcendentally purified realm of mental processes [Erlebnisse] the first place is due to the relationship of each mental process to the “pure” Ego. Each “cogito,” each act in a distinctive sense, is characterized as an act of the Ego, it “proceeds from out of the Ego,” it “lives” “actionally” in the act.” (Ideas:190)

106 This Cartesian affinity, on the other hand, is strengthened by Husserl’s self-proclaimed “foundational” character of phenomenology. “In addition […] phenomenology, by virtue of its essence, must claim to be “first” philosophy and to offer the means for carrying out every possible critique of reason.” (Ideas:148)
wants to reject this thesis. However, Sartre believes that the presence of the self must be rejected against the claims of some psychologists too. Let’s see exactly why, as, similar to the case of Descartes and Husserl, what Sartre objects to the psychologists is having an inadequate theory of consciousness, based on having adopted an inadequate standpoint toward it.

Generally speaking, Sartre divides the theories of consciousness he rejects in TE into two groups: the ones that defend a formal, and the ones that defend a material, presence of the self in consciousness. Examples of the former are Descartes and Husserl (and Kant). Examples of the latter are what Sartre calls “the French moralists” or “theorists of amour-propre,” like La Rochefoucauld, or “psychologists,” like presumably the Freudians. Similar to the case of Descartes and Husserl, my guiding insight is going to be that, according to Sartre, the French moralists and psychologists have an inadequate theory of the self because they have an inadequate theory of consciousness in the first place.

Let’s start considering the opposition between formal and material presence of the self. What this opposition amounts to is not articulated by Sartre very precisely, but intuitively the distinction seems clear: whereas Kant and Husserl believe there is a self in consciousness as a unifying subject of our experiences, these psychologists and moralists take the self to belong to consciousness as the ultimate, self-satisfying motor of our conscious life. For the former, the self is in consciousness as an empty presence: we can never intuit it, but without it there wouldn’t be a unified consciousness in the first place. For the latter, the self is in consciousness, and its presence can be experienced, although only through cunning or insight. Sartre renders this distinction terminologically explicit by using “I” for the formal notion of the self, and “me” for the material one. (This distinction is not as important as it might seem, since Sartre’s “I” and “me” are two aspects of one single self).

Significantly, these psychologists-moralists warn us, we do not need to be aware of our self at all. Most of the time, our self is “behind” our feelings, volitions, thoughts, etc, without being noticed. But being noticed or not, they claim, the self is always present in consciousness. Furthermore, the self is not “neutrally” present. Rather, the self “uses” consciousness as a means for an end,
which is the self’s satisfaction of its desires. Thus, and this seems to be what the theory in question amounts to, consciousness is \textit{selfish} by nature.\footnote{Both in a purely psychological sense and in a moral, pejorative one. That is why, somewhat oddly at first sight, Sartre lumps together “psychologists” and “moralists” here.}

This position has some plausibility to it: sometimes we can become aware of this selfishness ourselves. For example, while “altruistically” helping Paul and aiming, for all I know, at \textit{his} good, I can suddenly realize that I am helping him so that \textit{I} feel proud of myself, \textit{I} stop suffering at his sight, \textit{I} can take advantage of my help later on, etc.\footnote{No doubt, this is a favorite and recurrent motive in many of La Rochefoucauld’s maxims, encapsulated in the exemplary one “Our virtues are, most often, only vices in disguise” (La Rochefoucauld [1678] 2007: 3).} This may well tempt us to consider self-satisfaction to be always present in consciousness, either if we are conscious of this circumstance or not. On the other hand, and as these psychologists say, only rarely are we conscious of our search for self-satisfaction: most frequently, our own self does not appear to us, at least as an ever-desiring source of action. Moreover, Sartre suggests, these psychologists claim that this lack of consciousness is not due to our lack of attention or insight. Rather, our own self \textit{actively} disguises itself in various and sophisticated forms. One has to grasp it in a cunning way. At the limit, and this seems to be Freud’s postulate, a direct access to it is impossible. Only through a long and patient interpretative work of what our consciousness \textit{does} offer us can we gain some insight of it, and even so in a very tentative and hypothetical manner.

\section*{2. 4. SARTRE ON CONSCIOUSNESS}

So far I have presented the views about consciousness by the two philosophers Sartre gives most philosophical credit, Descartes and Husserl (supplemented by the psychologist La Rochefoucauld). Remember however that the chief textual source I am drawing on to make my case is an essay about the self. Accordingly, a good way to thus discuss what, according to Sartre, is inadequate with Descartes’ and Husserl’s theories of consciousness is to discuss what, according to Sartre, is inadequate with Descartes’ and Husserl’s theories of the self. My chief claim in my next paragraphs will be that what Sartre finds inadequate about Descartes’ and Husserl’s theories of the self is not so much their theses about the self (in particular, that there is a self in consciousness) as their theories of consciousness underlying them. I will use this thesis
as a basis to claim that, according to Sartre, Descartes’ and Husserl’s theories of consciousness aren’t so much false as partially true.

2. 4.1 Existence of The Self

2.4.1.1 Philosophical Self

According to Sartre, Kant’s famous claim that “it must be possible for the “I think” to accompany all my representations”\(^{109}\) basically means that a self is a necessary condition for a unified consciousness. Without a self, we wouldn’t have a unified consciousness, but a succession of consciousnesses unrelated to one another. A self, something permanent that is conscious of the successive conscious states and that connects them with one another, must be in consciousness (even if, in fact, we don’t observe it). Kant’s claim that there is a self in consciousness thus holds according to Sartre \textit{de jure}. Sartre asks whether Kant’s \textit{de jure} claim, with which he agrees, applies \textit{de facto} too.\(^{110}\)

According to Sartre, both Descartes and Husserl take the cogito as a proof that there is a self in consciousness: whenever consciousness directs towards itself, i.e., reflects, a self appears in consciousness. It thus might seem as if the self is present in consciousness generally, not just in the cogito: in the cogito a self is observed because there is a self in consciousness generally, whether being observed in reflection or not. This is the view that, according to Sartre, both Descartes and Husserl endorse. Now as far as the cogito (reflection) is concerned, Sartre agrees with Descartes and Husserl: every time I pass from, let’s say, perceiving my desk, to observing my perceiving my desk, a self appears in consciousness.\(^{111}\) However, Sartre contends, that there


\(^{110}\) “We have to agree with Kant when he says that ‘it must be possible for the “I think” to accompany all my representations’. But should be thereby conclude that an I inhabits de facto all our states of consciousness and really performs the supreme synthesis of our experience?” (\textit{TE}:2). “[I]t must be possible for the ‘I think’ to accompany all our representations, but does it accompany them in actual fact?” (\textit{TE}:3). “[W]e wish to resolve the problem of the de facto existence of the I in consciousness […]” (\textit{TE}:4).

\(^{111}\) “[I]t is undeniable that the Cogito is personal. In the ‘I think’ there is an I which thinks. […] Each time that we grasp our thought, either by an immediate intuition, or by an intuition based on memory, we grasp an I which is the I of the thought that is being grasped and which, furthermore, gives itself as transcending this thought and all other possible thoughts[…]This is the de facto guarantee of the de jure affirmation in Kant. It thus appears that there is not a single one of my consciousnesses that I do not grasp as endowed with an I.” (\textit{TE}: 9-10)
is a self in consciousness is not true of all sorts of consciousness. Sartre gives two reasons to defend this view.

First, Sartre points out that, although the cogito consists in the fact that, in it, consciousness directs towards itself (hence the privileged certainty of what is being observed\textsuperscript{112}), the cogito, structurally considered, includes two consciousnesses, a reflecting and a reflected one.\textsuperscript{113} What goes on in the cogito, Sartre urges, is not that consciousness is observing itself; but, rather, that the reflecting consciousness is observing the reflected one. We need to be careful here with this seemingly dissolution of one consciousness into two. First, Sartre suggests, in the cogito there aren’t two different consciousness, one of them observing the other in the way in which, say, I observe my friend Sergio: consciousness is still one, as the distinction between a reflecting and a reflected consciousness is phenomenological or conceptual, not material or numerical. Second, the fact that reflection transforms an unreflective consciousness into a duplex of a reflected-on and a reflecting one doesn’t mean that the reflecting consciousness is unconscious: if this were so, the consciousness being reflected-on would itself lapse into the unconscious, not being an object for any consciousness anymore; the whole conscious structure would lapse into the unconscious. Rather, the reflecting consciousness is positionally conscious of the reflected consciousness, and non-positionally conscious of itself.\textsuperscript{114} But since it is non-positionally conscious of itself, this reflecting consciousness is in turn unreflected. In short, Sartre concludes, although Descartes and Husserl are right in claiming that the self appears in the cogito, it appears only in the reflected consciousness, not in the reflecting one. In the latter, taken in isolation, there really is no self at all.\textsuperscript{115}

\textsuperscript{112} In this he takes both Descartes and Husserl to be right “[T]he certainty of the Cogito is absolute since, as Husserl says, there is an indissoluble unity between the reflecting consciousness and the reflected consciousness (so much so that the reflecting consciousness cannot exist without reflected consciousness).” (\textsc{TE}:10)

\textsuperscript{113} “The fact remains that [in the Cogito] we are in the presence of a synthesis of two consciousnesses, one of which is conscious of another.” (\textsc{TE}:10)

\textsuperscript{114} “Insofar as my reflecting consciousness is conscious of itself, it is a non-positional consciousness. It becomes positional only if directed at the reflected consciousness which, in itself, was not a positional consciousness of itself.” (\textsc{TE}:10) “In fact, all reflecting consciousness is in itself unreflected, and a new, third-order act is needed to posit it.” (\textsc{TE}:10-11)

\textsuperscript{115} “[T]he reason why Descartes moved from the Cogito to the idea of thinking substance is that he believed that I and ‘think’ are on the same level. We saw just now that Husserl, albeit more subtly, can basically be charged with the same error.” (\textsc{TE}:14)
Second, Sartre appeals to what we experience in unreflective consciousness to argue that in it there is no self.\footnote{116}{“I will call such a consciousness ‘first order’ or ‘unreflective’ \textit{[irréfléchie]} consciousness” \textit{(TE:8)}.} This claim seems to rest on a dubious basis: how can we observe what we experience in unreflective consciousness? Being unreflective, our consciousness is conscious of something \textit{other} than itself (for instance, my desk, Peter, a landscape, a mathematical theorem, and so on). In so far as I am conscious of my consciousness, I am \textit{non-positionally} conscious. Now this non-positional character of self-consciousness prevents it, precisely, from being observed. If, on the other hand, I turn my look to my consciousness, I can well observe a self, but this is because a \textit{leap to reflection} has occurred. In this case, unreflective consciousness has vanished and can’t be “observed” any more. This doesn’t necessarily mean that the object I was originally perceiving, for instance, my desk, has vanished too. I can well continue perceiving my desk, but my perceiving my desk has passed from being unreflected to being reflected-on. Although there is still perception, it is now \textit{reflected}. Again, unreflected perception has vanished. So the question is: how can we observe our unreflective consciousness?

Sartre’s solution is to observe unreflective consciousness in an \textit{indirect} way: not through reflection, since once we do this unreflective consciousness disappears, but through \textit{memory}.\footnote{117}{“[T]his operation, this non-reflective grasp of a consciousness by another consciousness, can obviously be performed only in and by memory […]” \textit{(TE:12)}} According to Sartre, we can reconstitute the whole of a past, non-reflective consciousness through memory. Moreover, Sartre suggests, this doesn’t happen to be a contingent fact or a special skill we possess, but a fact dictated by systematic features of consciousness. As said before, every unreflective consciousness is, although non-positionally, conscious \textit{of itself}. This seems phenomenologically correct: no matter how absorbed I was in some object e.g., one hour ago, and how little conscious I was “of myself,” the memory of my “contents” of consciousness remains, and can be intuited and described. Once we do so Sartre’s conclusion is clear: “[T]here is no I on the unreflected level.”\footnote{118}{\textit{TE:13}.}

(Another possibility open to Sartre to grasp unreflective consciousness would be what he calls \textit{purified reflection}. What exactly Sartre means by purified reflection is a very difficult interpretative problem, and unfortunately this is a topic I must leave aside here. According to
Sartre, purified reflection is a special sort of reflection, theoretically possible but extraordinarily
unusual in human life, and what is distinctive about it is that, in it, consciousness both directs
towards itself and limits itself to observing unreflective consciousness, without positing any self
nor any psychical entity.)

Sartre’s conclusion of these two phenomenological descriptions is that neither in unreflective
consciousness nor at the unreflected level of reflective one (i.e., in reflecting consciousness) is
there a self. The self only appears in reflected consciousness.119 This essentially says that,
according to Sartre, the thesis that there is a self in consciousness isn’t false simpliciter, but
rather partially true: it is true of a “part’ of consciousness, i.e., reflected consciousness. (Of
course, “part” here, as suggested in Chapter 1, must be taken in a figurative sense; perhaps we
should say true of an aspect or of a mode of consciousness. Different to a part, reflected
consciousness happens once in a while, whereas a part would be continuously present). What we
have here, I contend, is a picture that is quite analogous to my very first example in this study. A
description of the Statue of Liberty that goes: “It’s a tabula ansata, that is, a tablet evoking the
law; on it is inscribed the date of the American Declaration of Independence, July 4, 1776,” and
so on, is not false in so far as the right object is being described (the Statue of Liberty); but it’s
still inadequate in so far as it describes only a part of the object, not the object in its entirety.
Analogously, I hold, Sartre believes that a description of consciousness that goes: “It’s a self
appearing in an inadequate fashion, as the unity of our psychical states and actions,” and so on
(see below) is not false in so far as the right object is being described (consciousness); but it’s
still inadequate in so far as it describes only a part of the object (reflected consciousness), not the
object in its entirety (consciousness simpliciter). This basically summarizes what is my chief
thesis for the whole chapter.120

The fact that there is a self in reflective consciousness but not in unreflective one, however,
raises a problem for Sartre: where does the self come from? How do we account for the presence
of the self in reflection, a point on which Sartre has agreed? Sartre’s suggestion is that the self

119 Indeed, reflecting consciousness is unreflected, unless a third-order conscious act makes of this reflecting
consciousness in its turn an object of reflection. See above.
120 Much of the rest of the chapter is elaboration for purposes of giving a complete analysis of TE and do justice to
its intrinsic philosophical interest.
does not simply happen to appear in reflection; rather, it is reflection itself that makes the self appear, that brings about the self.\footnote{“But might it not be precisely the reflective act that brings the me [the self] into being in reflected consciousness? … Husserl is the first to recognize that an unreflected thought undergoes a radical modification when it becomes reflected. But does this modification have to be limited to a loss of ‘naivete’? Might not the essential aspect of the change be the fact that the I appears?” \textit{(TE:11)}} We should not think of the self as a permanent entity, of which we are not conscious in unreflective consciousness and of which we become conscious when we reflect. If that were the case, where would this self happen to be in unreflective consciousness? Rather, Sartre seems to be suggesting, the self is a “volatile” pseudo-entity that reflection produces as much as intuits (I am aware that the term “pseudo-entity” is awkward: all I mean is an entity whose existence is parasitic on a special mode of consciousness, whose occurrence is furthermore always optional). If so, we can’t say unqualifiedly that, for Sartre, there is or that there is not a self. Against the latter, Sartre states that the self appears and is intuitive.\footnote{“We should note, further, that the I does not appear to reflection as the reflected consciousness: it gives itself \textit{through} reflected consciousness. To be sure, it is grasped by intuition and is the object of evidential certainty” \textit{(TE:15)}. Sartre’s additional claim is that this certainty is neither “apodictic” nor “adequate;” but that does not make our intuition of the self less evident and certain.} Moreover, neither \textit{TE} as a whole nor its chief thesis would make sense if there were no self, if only because a wide array of claims about it are made.\footnote{That is why it is not accurate to read Sartre as arguing that the self is “an imaginary construct” (Howells 1988:2). Sartre’s self is \textit{not} a construct, if that means something made up. The self is real and intuitable, although its mode of appearance is in effect of a very peculiar, “evanescent” nature. It is equally inaccurate to say that according to Sartre ‘states’ such as love of hatred are “illusory unities imposed on the perpetual flux of consciousness in our desire to give ‘depth’ and ‘durability’ to our feelings.” \textit{(loc. cit)}. Again, states have nothing of “illusory” for Sartre, if that means “possessing deceptive appearance” or “non-existing;” states are perfectly real and intuitable, even when they appear inadequately and only in reflective consciousness. I bring out this criticism of Howells because it is representative of much in the secondary literature that, in my opinion, misreads Sartre on this score. If for Sartre the self were something illusory, he couldn’t conclude things like these: “[T]he I is an existent. It has a type of concrete existence, doubtless different from that of mathematical truths, meanings, or spatio-temporal beings, but just as real.” \textit{(TE: 15-16)}} To this extent, Sartre is a realist about the self: there \textit{is} such a thing as the self, as well as (true or false) facts of the matter about it. (It would be worth a separate discussion about what Sartre, \textit{later on},\footnote{\textit{BT} specifically.} calls being-for-others, the social self). Against the former, the claim that there is a self is not unqualifiedly true for Sartre. \textit{Only} in reflective consciousness is there a self, and the self is as much \textit{constituted} as contemplated by reflection.\footnote{“[T]he Ego is an object apprehended but also \textit{constituted} by reflective knowledge.” \textit{(TE:34, Sartre’s italics.)}} In unreflective consciousness the self does not only \textit{fail} to appear: there simply is \textit{no} self at all.

\footnotesize
\begin{itemize}
\item \footnote{But might it not be precisely the reflective act that brings the me [the self] into being in reflected consciousness? … Husserl is the first to recognize that an unreflected thought undergoes a radical modification when it becomes reflected. But does this modification have to be limited to a loss of ‘naivete’? Might not the essential aspect of the change be the fact that the I appears?” \textit{(TE:11)}}
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\item \footnote{That is why it is not accurate to read Sartre as arguing that the self is “an imaginary construct” (Howells 1988:2). Sartre’s self is \textit{not} a construct, if that means something made up. The self is real and intuitable, although its mode of appearance is in effect of a very peculiar, “evanescent” nature. It is equally inaccurate to say that according to Sartre ‘states’ such as love of hatred are “illusory unities imposed on the perpetual flux of consciousness in our desire to give ‘depth’ and ‘durability’ to our feelings.” \textit{(loc. cit)}. Again, states have nothing of “illusory” for Sartre, if that means “possessing deceptive appearance” or “non-existing;” states are perfectly real and intuitable, even when they appear inadequately and only in reflective consciousness. I bring out this criticism of Howells because it is representative of much in the secondary literature that, in my opinion, misreads Sartre on this score. If for Sartre the self were something illusory, he couldn’t conclude things like these: “[T]he I is an existent. It has a type of concrete existence, doubtless different from that of mathematical truths, meanings, or spatio-temporal beings, but just as real.” \textit{(TE: 15-16)}}
\item \footnote{\textit{BT} specifically.}
\item \footnote{“[T]he Ego is an object apprehended but also \textit{constituted} by reflective knowledge.” \textit{(TE:34, Sartre’s italics.)}}
\end{itemize}
Given that, as I established at the beginning of this chapter, Sartre sees a very tight connection between the self and consciousness, any thesis by him about the self involves or goes hand in hand with a thesis about consciousness (although, as we have just seen, not necessarily vice versa). There are in particular four theses that Sartre defends about the self and that are important to understand Sartre’s theory of consciousness, against Descartes’ and Husserl’s. They are the following:

1. The self is an object-like entity, not a consciousness-like one. It is just as objective and real as mathematical truths or spatio-temporal things, although it has a different kind of existence. Using philosophical jargon, the self is *transcendent* to consciousness, not immanent. It is an object *for* consciousness, not a subject *in* it. This basically says that the self is not consciousness itself or something consciousness-like, but something we are conscious *of*. (If we want to be sensitive to the social self and fundamental project, elements of selfhood that Sartre will introduce later on in his work, we could call the self in this more restricted sense *psychic self*).

2. The self can be observed, just as much as mathematical truths and spatio-temporal entities. Similar to spatio-temporal entities, the intuition of the self is not adequate, in one stroke and from a single point of view, but *inadequate*, by profiles and from different, potentially infinite points of view. (Different profiles of a spatio-temporal entity, for instance, a chair, are the different aspects of the chair I can observe from different angles; by contrast, different profiles of the self are the different reflected consciousnesses I can observe in reflection: for example, I can observe that I am perceiving a chair, that I am sad, that I remember my friend Peter, and so on.)

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126 TE: 15-16.
127 “The I is an *existent*. It has a type of concrete existence, doubtless different from that of mathematical truths, meanings, or spatio-temporal beings, but just as real. It gives itself as transcendent.” *(TE:15-6)*
128 Specifically in *BN*.
129 “The I yields itself to a special kind of intuition which grasps it behind reflected consciousness, in a way that is always inadequate.” *(TE:15-6)*
130 Like, for example, an image (an object of imagination). See *I*.
131 Like, paradigmatically, an object of perception. Well understood, the self is *not* an object of perception. It is an object, or, rather, pseudo-object, of reflection. It belongs to the psychical, as opposed to the physical world. But the same as an object of perception, its mode of presence is always partial, incomplete.
3. The claim that there is a self is true only for reflective consciousness. The self does not appear in unreflected consciousness, but in, or rather, behind, reflected consciousness. (“Behind” here is of course somewhat metaphoric; the point is that we observe the self “through” a reflected consciousness, indirectly, not directly.) In unreflective consciousness there is no self at all.

4. The existence of the self must be, using Husserl’s terminology, bracketed or suspended. The cogito, “I think,” affirms more than what is undoubtedly given in intuition. Its truth, therefore, and contra Descartes, is not apodictic. The only absolutely certain given of the pseudo-cogito and therefore only genuinely apodictic truth is not “I am conscious of x” but “there is consciousness of x.”

The most important claim for my purposes is number 3. Sartre does agree with Descartes and Husserl that there is a self. However, Sartre suggests, there is a self only in reflective consciousness, not in unreflective consciousness (nor in purified reflective consciousness). It is true that Descartes and Husserl claim there is a self in consciousness, i.e., a subject of our conscious acts, whereas Sartre claims that there is a self for consciousness, i.e., an object of our conscious acts. This is a fundamental disagreement between Sartre, on the one hand, and Descartes and Husserl, on the other. If so, the claim that there is a self in consciousness must be false for Sartre (not partially true). Does this invalidate my thesis that, according to Sartre, Descartes’ and Husserl’s theories are partially true, rather than false? I believe not. There are two ways to accommodate this problem.

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132 “‘The I only ever appears on the occasion of a reflective act.’ (TE:16)
133 We shall see later that this qualification is important.
134 “When I run after a tram, when I look at the time, when I become absorbed in the contemplation of a portrait, there is no I.” (TE:13)
135 According to Husserl “That ego sum or sum cogitans must be pronounced apodictic … was already seen by Descartes.” (CM: 22). (Yet, according to Husserl, contrary to Descartes –according to Husserl!- “I exist, ego cogito, … no longer signifies “I, this man, exist.” (CM: 25). According to Sartre, by contrast, “The transcendent I must fall under the phenomenological reduction. The Cogito affirms too much. The sure and certain content of the pseudo-cogito’ is not “I am conscious of this chair,” but “there is consciousness of this chair.” This content is sufficient to constitute and absolute field for the investigations of phenomenology.” (TE:16) The “pseudo-cogito” is the self-consciousness of unreflective consciousness. The ‘pseudo’ part of the formula accounts for the fact that, being unreflective consciousness, this is not a Cartesian, reflective cogito. The ‘cogito’ accounts for the fact that unreflective consciousness, despite being non-positionally conscious of itself, is still conscious of itself.
First, it can be responded (as I do in Chapter 5) that even though Sartre does believe Descartes’ and Husserl’s thesis that there is a self in consciousness is false, it could counterfactually be construed to be true for Sartre without this circumstance altering the fact that Sartre sees Descartes’ and Husserl’s theories of consciousness to be partially true rather than false (on account of the fact that they adopt a standpoint toward consciousness that is based on a more basic one). In other words, while there are at least some theses about consciousness that Descartes and Husserl defend that Sartre takes to be false (not partially true), these theses could counterfactually be construed to be true for Sartre while it still holds that Sartre takes Descartes’ and Husserl’s theories of consciousness to be partially true.

Second, it can be responded that my model of partial truth, although correct, doesn’t totally work in practice, as one can always find theses in the theories rejected that are false according to the philosopher rejecting them, while it still holds that, for the most part, the philosophers take the theories to be partially true rather than false. This is just another way to say that my model of partial truth (sketched in Chapter 1, especially section 1.1) works, so to speak, only “in ideal conditions,” but ideal conditions are never found in the history of philosophy and the philosophical praxis, as relations between philosophers and theories get “messy” for various reasons and factors that would merit further spelling out; if we were able to “abstract away” from this “messiness” we’d verify that my model works. (These two responses merit further development.)

2.4.1.2 Psychological Self

Let’s consider now Sartre’s strategy for rejecting the material presence of the self in consciousness, defended by La Rochefoucauld. I want to quickly cover this because I will argue at the end of this chapter that Sartre takes La Rochefoucauld’s theory of consciousness to be partially true in quite an analogous way than Descartes’ and Husserl’s, something that I believe will make my case even more solid. If Sartre has appealed to a description of consciousness to argue, against Descartes and Husserl, that there is no self in unreflected consciousness, this time the same strategy would be ineffective. La Rochefoucauld, like the Freudians, admits that the self does not appear in what Sartre calls unreflective consciousness. But Sartre takes La
Rouchefoucauld to claim that the self is *there* none the less. According to Sartre, La Rouchefoucauld’s insight, like that of the Freudians three centuries later, is that we are not conscious of our self because, precisely, the self “conceals” itself to more effectively fulfill its desires (our consciousness is in charge of repressing our desires most of the time).

Sartre’s strategy this time is to charge these psychologists with failing to distinguish between unreflective and reflective consciousness, a charge that I will take to amount to failing to realize that consciousness can be unreflectively conscious of itself, and that this unreflective consciousness is, moreover, more basic than reflective consciousness. According to Sartre, this produces the following double error. First, they unnecessarily supplement unreflective consciousness with a reflective layer to account for the fact that unreflective consciousness is conscious of itself. Second, they claim that this reflective level is unconscious, to account for the fact that most of the times the self remains unknown to us. According to Sartre, the first mistake results from failing to see that unreflective consciousness does not need a reflective layer to be conscious of itself. As explained before, in being positionally conscious of an object, unreflective consciousness is by the same stroke non-positionally conscious of itself. In short, unreflected consciousness is *autonomous* and does not require reflection to be completed at all. Furthermore, at the unreflective level, desire is “centrifugal” and impersonal, i.e., not endowed with a self. The second mistake, Sartre suggests, results from the confused view that consciousness can be unconscious at the same time, which Sartre simply dismisses as a contradictory or confused notion.

Sartre’s conclusion of this brief psychological study parallels the previous one: there is no self in unreflective consciousness or “behind” it. The self only appears with a reflective act. According to Sartre, the *me* and the *I* are simply two sides of the self (the “passive” and the “active”...
Both of them are transcendent to consciousness. Below I will contend that underlying this conclusion by Sartre is his criticism of La Rochefoucauld’s theory of consciousness and I will provide textual evidence showing that Sartre rejects this theory as being inadequate but not exactly false.

2. 4. 2 Appearance of the Self

So far, Sartre has established that there is no self in unreflective consciousness, but that it appears only in reflected consciousness, and furthermore as an object for reflective consciousness, not as a subject in it. Now how does the self exactly appear? Do we intuit it adequately and apodictically, the same way we intuit reflected consciousness? Sartre has already claimed that the self does not appear in reflected consciousness and all at once, adequately, but through it and by “profiles,” inadequately. Besides appearing inadequately, the self does not appear apodictically. The difference between “adequate” and “apodictic” is important in this context. According to Husserl (and Sartre following him), an object is given adequately when our consciousness can encompass it in its entirety, without leaving out any aspect of it. For instance, to perceive a physical object (for instance, a chair) involves, by necessity, to leave aspects of it left unperceived (for instance, observing the front of the chair leaves the back part out). Thus, a physical object is given always inadequately to consciousness. By contrast, to be conscious of a mathematical truth or of a mental state (for instance, \(\frac{1}{4}+\frac{1}{2}=\frac{5}{4}\) and a pain, respectively) can be grasped in its entirety in one single consciousness, and hence is given adequately. An object is given apodictically when, furthermore, its very existence is given adequately too; in other words, when it is phenomenologically (although perhaps not logically) self-refuting to doubt its existence. According to Husserl (following Descartes), only my being conscious of whatever I’m conscious of is apodictically given. Some adequately given objects aren’t necessarily apodictic; for instance, even if a single grasp of \(\frac{1}{4}\) doesn’t leave anything out of it, it might still be the case that there’s no such a thing as \(\frac{1}{4}\), or that a Cartesian evil demon tricks me into taking to be true things about \(\frac{1}{4}\) that aren’t really true. Apodictic evidence is of a

140 “[The Ego [the self], of which I and me are merely two faces, constitutes the ideal (noematic) and indirect unity of the infinite series of our reflected consciousnesses.” (TE:21)

141 “[T]he I must not be sought in unreflected states of consciousness nor behind them. The me appears only with the reflective act, as the noematic correlative of a reflective intention.” (TE:20)
higher type than adequate one, indeed the highest possible type of evidence; after it, it comes adequate evidence, and lower than that inadequate evidence.

Sartre’s insight about the self, then, against Husserl, is that the self is given neither apodictically nor adequately. According to Sartre, the self is neither reflected consciousness itself, nor one particular reflected consciousness, nor a real set of specific reflected consciousnesses. Instead, the self is the ideal unity of all our (potentially infinite; past, present and future) reflected consciousnesses. An infinite number of reflected consciousnesses would be necessary to have a total grasp of our self, but this total grasp is impossible. The reason is simple: the self is given through each of our reflected consciousnesses, much the same as a physical object is given through each of the different aspects different angles allow us to see of it. The same way we can’t observe the metaphysical totality of a physical object, but only the physical object from one angle, one aspect at a time, we can’t observe the metaphysical totality of psychical objects either (including the self).

Sartre’s further claim is that the self does not directly unify our reflected consciousness, but rather the states, actions and qualities of reflected consciousness. It is states and actions which, in their turn, directly unify our reflected consciousnesses. Thus, the self unifies reflected consciousnesses only mediatelly, through states and actions. The self is the ideal unity of all my potentially infinite reflected consciousness in which Peter appears to me as being hateful. More accurately, Sartre suggests, hatred does directly appear to me in reflection, but only through what Husserl calls a “profile” (Abschattung). Hatred towards Peter, for instance, oversteps an individual consciousness of Peter appearing as hateful, in an analogous way in which my desk being wooden oversteps an individual consciousness of my desk appearing to me as being wooden.

Different from states, actions are “chosen.” As opposed to the inert nature of states, actions are spontaneous. Whereas examples of states were hatred and love, Sartre’s examples of actions are doubting, reasoning, meditating and making a hypothesis. Again, the important issue here

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142 The same way a physical object can never be given in its entirety (adequately), but only through a profile (inadequately).
regards less the accuracy of this psychological taxonomy than Sartre’s claim that all these conscious actions must be taken to be transcendences. The same as in the case of states, this means that, e.g., my doubting or reasoning are not directly present to my reflective consciousness. Rather, its mode of presence is indirect, and mediated by all my reflected doubting, reasoning, etc.-consciousnesses. Thus, doubting, reasoning or perceiving are not themselves given at one stroke in reflected consciousness. They are ideal units of all my potentially infinite reflected consciousnesses of doubt, reasoning or meditation. Furthermore, and equally important, the mode of presence of actions is, again, inadequate. I do not intuit my doubting or reasoning all at once and in one stroke, but through time and by profiles.

This last point by Sartre allows me to show how, once again, a thesis by Descartes about consciousness happens to be true for Sartre, but only of a part of consciousness. Remember that for Descartes at least one piece of knowledge is absolutely indubitable: the fact that I am conscious of having my beliefs, or of doubting. According to Sartre, this is true of unreflective doubt, the same as of what is apodictically given in unreflected consciousness. However, Sartre suggests, it is not true of reflective consciousness. A distinction must be drawn between Descartes’ methodical doubt, which is an action (that is, a psychical entity), and his spontaneous one, which is a consciousness. Whereas the latter can be held to be apodictically certain, the former is transcendent to consciousness, given inadequately and therefore of a doubtful nature. If so, “I doubt” is not, as Descartes thought, an apodictic truth, i.e., a truth it is meaningless to doubt (or the opposite of which is self-refuting). On the contrary, if Sartre is right that doubting is a transcendent object given always inadequately, the same as “I,” it is clear that the assertion “I doubt” is and will always remain doubtful, even when grounded on evident intuition. Still in other words, Descartes’ only apodictic beginning ought to have been “there is consciousness of doubting” instead of “I doubt” (or “there is consciousness of thinking” instead of “I think”).

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143 “[P]urely psychical actions, such as doubting, reasoning, meditating, making a hypothesis, must also be conceived of as transcendences [like “playing the piano,” “driving a car,” or “writing,” that is, actions “‘taken’ from the world of things’].” (TE: 26)

144 “[W]hen Descartes says, ‘I doubt therefore I am’, is he talking about the spontaneous doubt [i.e., unreflective doubt] that reflective consciousness grasps in its instantaneous character, or is he talking of nothing other than the enterprise of doubting [i.e., reflective doubt]? This ambiguity, as we have seen, can be the source of serious errors.” (TE, 27)
So far Sartre has stressed and elaborated on the radical difference of nature between states, actions qualities and the self, on the one hand, and consciousness, on the other. Sartre encapsulates this difference in the opposition between consciousness and the psychical. The psychical is the unity of states, actions and qualities; the self is its most all-encompassing synthetic unity. Consciousness is impersonal, intentional spontaneity, directed outwards by necessity, and conscious of itself, either non-positionally or positionally. The psychical, on the contrary, is a non-intentional pseudo-spontaneity, an object for consciousness, and never conscious of itself. In a nutshell, what according to Sartre is inadequate about Descartes’ and Husserl’s theories of consciousness is to have failed to capture consciousness at its most basic, and have captured instead consciousness as it appears from the reflective standpoint, which is secondary with respect to the unreflective one.

Let’s see one example of a thesis by Husserl that Sartre takes to be false (or at least “highly debatable”), but which might counterfactually be construed to be true without altering the fact that Sartre rejects Husserl’s theory of consciousness. It’s true that what Sartre is going to argue in what follows concerns Husserl’s views of the self but, as established in the introduction to this chapter, theses about the self, for Sartre as much as for Husserl, go hand in hand with theses about consciousness.

Sartre warns us to be careful with the expression “synthetic totality of the psychical” as applying to the self. The danger here is to understand it in an analogous way to other “synthetic totalities” of a very different nature. One can think, for example, of a desk as being the “synthetic totality” of all the potentially infinite perceptions I can have of it. If so, the desk can be taken to be an object-pole, an X unifying all these possible perceptions. Sartre takes Husserl to defend this position. Against it, Sartre stresses the fact that what is logically prior here is the objective X.

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145 Remember though that for Sartre the self is a different kind of transcendent unity than states and actions.
146 “We have just learnt to distinguish between the ‘psychical’ and consciousness. The psychical is the transcendent object of the reflective consciousness; it is also the object of the science called psychology. The Ego appears to reflection as a transcendent object realizing the permanent synthesis of the psychical. The Ego is on the same side as the psychical.” (TE: 28, Sartre’s emphasis) “In an article in Recherches Philosophiques I attempted to show that the Ego does not belong to the domain of the for itself [i.e., consciousness]. I shall not repeat here. Let us note only the reason for the transcendence of the Ego: as a unifying pole of Erlebnisse the Ego is in-itself [TE’s “transcendences”], not for-itself.” (BN: 155-6)
147 TE: 33
This means that although a desk can be taken to be a synthetic totality, this totality is in turn analyzable. Its “components” can be taken to be self-standing. I can consider my desk’s color apart from the desk itself, and the same goes for its shape, size, etc. The desk can be taken to be “behind” all its qualities as a unifying pole that might subsist even abstracting its qualities away, ideally speaking at least. On the contrary, e.g., a melody is an un-analyzable totality, as its parts cannot be isolated from the whole, even abstractedly: if I consider a particular note apart from the melody, this particular note becomes meaningless by itself. Sartre does not think it makes sense, in other words, to take the melody to stand “behind” its notes as a supporting, objective pole (in the same way a desk might be seen as standing “behind” its qualities). The unity of the melody exhausts itself in the fact that the notes cannot be considered in isolation without vanishing. They are non-self-standing components of the whole. Sartre invites us to think of the self in terms of (but not in exactly the same way as) the latter sort of “synthetic totality” rather than the former. The self, Sartre argues, does not neutrally “receive” successive states and actions without being affected, as an objective pole does. Each new state and action “alters” the self in a more substantial way than, e.g., a new color or shape alters my desk. The self is, Sartre says, “compromised” by its states and actions. This already says that there exists a relation between the self and its states and actions that goes beyond being a purely “neutral” link between these two dimensions. I will try now to focus on what Sartre thinks the specific nature of this relation is.

148 “It is useless, for instance, if we consider a melody, to suppose there is some X which acts as a support for the different notes. The unity stems in this case from the absolute indissolubility of elements which cannot be conceived of as separate, except by abstraction. The subject of the predicate will here be the concrete totality, and the predicate will be a quality abstractly separated from the totality and gaining its full meaning when it is linked back to the totality.” (TE:29-30)

149 More accurately put, a note in isolation is meaningful (i.e., it has a determinate pitch and sound), but not qua ‘part’ of a melody.

150 A melody, then, at least compared to a desk, is a peculiar and elusive entity. Of course, not in the same sense as the mind, since, inter alia, a melody doesn’t play a central role in our philosophical understanding of reality. Sartre says, “I refuse to see in the Ego a sort of X pole acting as the support for psychical phenomena. […] The Ego is nothing other than the concrete totality of states and actions that it supports [like the melody is regarding the concrete totality of its notes, I.G.]. Doubtless it is transcendent to all states that it unifies, but not as an abstract X whose mission is merely to unify.” (TE: 30)

152 The word “alters” is not totally accurate, since one of the conditions of something being altered is its subsistence (logical, physical or metaphysical, little matters here) “behind” or “beneath” the alteration, which is not the case with the Sartrean self.

153 TE: 30.
Part of an answer was already given when I considered states, actions and qualities. We saw that these correlates of a reflective act are not given all at once, *adequately, in* reflected consciousness, but, rather, *inadequately, through* it. This does not only mean that states and actions are ideal, transcendent unities of such and such reflected consciousness (roughly the way a desk is the ideal unit of all my perceptive consciousnesses of it). Moreover, we just saw, states and actions are given in reflective intuition as somehow “bringing about” reflected consciousnesses, and qualities are given as “bringing about” states and actions in its turn. Something similar is true of the self in relation to states and actions: the self somehow “*produces*” or “*causes*” them, either indirectly, trough qualities, or directly. But is the relation between the self and its states and actions exactly the same one as that one between the states and actions and reflected consciousnesses?

Before anything else, there is a fundamental difference, Sartre believes, between these two types of relations. Whereas states and actions give a *meaning* to reflected consciousnesses, this is not the case with the self in relation to states and actions. To transcend my spontaneous, unreflective revulsion at the presence of hateful Peter towards reflective hatred of Peter is to positively *qualify* this particular reflected consciousness with a “new” outlook.\(^{154}\) We might say in Kantian terms (doing some violence to terminological accuracy), that the link between my unreflective revulsion at the presence of hateful Peter\(^{155}\) and my reflective hatred is a “synthetic” one, since we enrich the appearance of reflected revulsion with a meaning not contained in the appearance itself; the meaning-intention, e.g., “hatred” is, so to say, “informative.” That is why it makes sense to ask oneself whether, e.g., one really *hates* Peter after all, instead of, e.g., despising, detesting, disliking or disapproving of him. Differently so when we link the self to states and actions. In this case, Sartre argues, we add nothing to the latter: the transit from hating-Peter to *my*-hating-Peter (“I hate Peter”) is thus an “analytic” link (of course, not in the Kantian sense that the “I” is part of the concept of “hatred,” much less of “hating-Peter,” but in the very loose sense that with this link we are not giving any further positive content to the hatred itself). Does this mean that the self (or rather, its unification of states and actions) is “dispensable”? What

\(^{154}\) *“When I unify my consciousness under the rubric ‘hatred’, I add to them a certain meaning, I qualify them.”* (TE: 32).

\(^{155}\) Although my formulation begs the question. I should simply say “unreflective revulsion of Peter.” Whether Peter appears in fact as being *hateful* will depend on whether it is *hatred* rather than, e.g., anger, contempt, antipathy, envy, jealousy, etc. what I feel towards him.
does the self *contribute* when it unifies states and actions? “Materially” speaking, we should gather from Sartre’s account, precisely nothing.\(^{156}\) However, the self appears as effectively realizing the total synthesis of the psychical.\(^{157}\) And this makes sense: it is precisely as a *total* synthesis of the psychical (as opposed to the synthesis of such and such *particular* reflected consciousness) that the contribution of the self is simply “formal,”\(^{158}\) without specific contents. That is why the self is both always present and yet “meaning” nothing in material, positive terms.\(^{159}\) One might in fact compare, as Sartre does, this total unification of the self to the total, ideal, synthetic unification that the *world* plays in unreflective life.\(^{160}\) The comparison works as follows: just as the world stays at the background of worldly objects broadly conceived (i.e., correlates of unreflective consciousness, which include, but don’t need to be restricted to, physical objects), the self stays at the background of psychical objects (i.e., correlates of reflective consciousness).

Sartre’s twofold negation is a bit surprising. If the relation between the self and its states and actions is neither that of production nor that of causation, what sort of relation is it? Sartre suggests that it is a *mixture* of both, and being a mixture of *(free)* production and *(deterministic)* causation, the self is an *irrational* notion. With this, we should not conclude that Sartre’s efforts to characterize in positive terms the self and its relation to states and actions have failed; Sartre suggests that it belongs to the inner nature of the self to appear to us as something profoundly irrational. Sartre uses terms like “poetic production,” “(ex nihilo) creation” and even “magical procession,” among others, to describe the relation between the self and its states and actions or, more simply put, between the *self* and *consciousness*. Sartre’s idea here is that the self appears to us as combining two mutually irreconcilable features: on the one hand, it appears to be

\(^{156}\) “[W]hen I incorporate my states into the concrete totality *me*, I add nothing to them.” *(TE: 32)*.

\(^{157}\) “The Ego appears to reflection as a transcendent object realizing the permanent synthesis of the psychical.” *(TE: 28)*.

\(^{158}\) Of course, this “formal” character has little to do with the “formal” presence of the self in, not (“outside”) consciousness advocated, according to Sartre, by Kant and Husserl. Furthermore, it is not “formal” in the sense of “empty,” since the self is effectively intuitable.

\(^{159}\) “I do not say to myself, ‘Perhaps I have an Ego’, in the way I can say to myself, ‘Perhaps I hate Peter’. I am not here seeking for a unifying *meaning* to my acts.” *(TE: 32).*

\(^{160}\) With the difference, Sartre intriguingly points out, that, whereas the appearance of the self in reflective life is *permanent*, the appearance of the world in unreflective life is *exceptional*: “The Ego is to psychical objects what the World is to things. However, the appearance of the World in the background of things is quite rare; special circumstances are required (well described by Heidegger in *Sein und Zeit*) for the world to ‘unveil’ itself. The Ego, on the contrary, always appears on the horizon of states.” *(TE:30-31).*
spontaneous freedom, the absolute origin of all of our conscious states; on the other hand, it appears to be inert passivity, an object like a table or a mathematical truth, but of a psychical character. These two features account for the fact that the self appears to us as possessing a quite irrational nature.

2. 5 STANDPOINT: UNREFLECTIVE VERSUS REFLECTIVE

So far I have presented Descartes’ and Husserl’s (supplemented by La Rochefoucauld’s) theories of consciousness and the self, as well as Sartre’s chief criticisms as they stand in TE, the chief source I’m drawing on. What I want to show now is two things. First, I want to show that, whereas Sartre’s explicit discussion in TE concerns the self, what is really at stake for Sartre is consciousness; Sartre’s views about the self derive from his views about consciousness, rather than the other way round. Second, I want to show that, according to Sartre, what is problematic about Descartes’ and Husserl’s theories about consciousness is best described by saying that they result from adopting an inadequate standpoint toward consciousness. This standpoint is not inadequate in the sense that is wrong but in the sense that is secondary: a more basic standpoint takes precedence over it and makes it possible in the first place. What we are able to know about consciousness from the secondary standpoint isn’t false but, rather, partial.

2. 5. 1 The Reflective Standpoint

Let’s start with Husserl, as he is the chief target of TE. Given that Sartre puts Husserl and Descartes in the same bag, what holds of Husserl is going to hold, mutatis mutandis, for Descartes too.

I have explained above (section 2.2.3), but it’s important to stress once again, that Husserl is committed to the view that consciousness is best studied in reflection. In the Cartesian Meditations, his most mature exposition of phenomenology, he says:

Perceiving straightforwardly, we grasp, for example, the house and not the perceiving. Only in reflection do we “direct” ourselves to the perceiving itself and to its perceptual directedness to the house. (CM: 33)
It is true that Husserl distinguishes *natural* reflection (the one that psychology uses) and *phenomenological* reflection, but this distinction draws on the concept of phenomenological reduction (in which existential commitment are suspended), without affecting the fact that, in reflection, consciousness is *positionally* directed towards *itself*:

The proper task of reflection … is not to repeat the original process [the subjective process present in consciousness in the natural attitude] but to consider it and explicate what can be found in it. (*CM*: 33)

According to Husserl, reflection is the standpoint that must be adopted over consciousness for philosophical purposes:

Precisely thereby an experiential knowing (which is at first descriptive) becomes possible, that experiential knowing to which we owe all conceivable cognizance and cognition of our intentional living [i.e., consciousness]. This continues to hold, then, for transcendental-phenomenological reflection. (*CM*: 34)

I conclude, then, that for Husserl consciousness is best studied in reflection, a conclusion that I rephrase, in the terms I introduced in Chapter 1 by saying that Husserl is committed to the idea that consciousness, as a philosophical object, is best observed from the *reflective standpoint*.

2.5.2 The Unreflective Standpoint

Sartre’s basic criticism against Husserl, I contend now, is that, unbeknownst to him, there is a standpoint toward consciousness that is more basic than the reflective one. As a result of failing to adopt this more basic standpoint, I take Sartre to believe that what Husserl can observe of consciousness is a “part” of it. Thus, I will conclude, Husserl’s theory of consciousness is according to Sartre partially true rather than false (in the sense sketched in Chapter 1, to be further developed in Chapter 5).

Sartre’s point against Husserl, let me clarify in the first place, can’t be the bare fact that consciousness can be conscious of itself prior to reflection, because it’s highly unlikely that Husserl wasn’t aware of this fact. What is at stake is, rather, whether consciousness of itself (in or prior to reflection) amounts to a standpoint toward consciousness taken as a philosophical object. This can be best seen through Sartre’s criticism of the idea of a self in consciousness,
drawing on Husserl’s notion of intentionality. In essence, I take Sartre to rely on the notion of intentionality to debunk Husserl’s idea that consciousness is best studied from a reflective standpoint.\textsuperscript{161} Since the defining feature of consciousness is to be conscious of something, Sartre argues, the correlate of our conscious states, not our conscious states themselves, or a self behind them, plays the unifying role.\textsuperscript{162} What is more, Sartre adds, consciousness’s intentionality renders a unified self possible, rather than the other way round.\textsuperscript{163} According to Sartre, by being conscious of an object, not of ourselves, we are, at the same time and by the same stroke, (nonpositionally) conscious of ourselves, through being conscious of the object.\textsuperscript{164}

This claim needs a little bit of unpacking. Suppose you’re watching a movie at a theatre and a friend sitting next to you asks you to make a complete inventory of what you are conscious of when you are watching that movie (not when you reflect on your watching it). You might start with fairly conspicuous things, such as, say, the blue eyes of the female lead role, her partner, the landscape at the background, and then proceed to more peripheral things, like the soundtrack of the movie, the smell of the theater, some whispers among the spectators, memories brought about by the movie, emotions felt, judgments entertained, and so on. Suppose that the inventory is eventually complete. Sartre would protest that, strictly speaking, you still need to add one more thing, which is consciousness being conscious of itself while all of this happens, on pain of everything you have just enumerated collapsing into the unconscious and disappearing. Thus,

\textsuperscript{161} “[T]he phenomenological conception of consciousness renders the unifying and individualizing role of the I completely useless. […] The transcendental I thus has no raison d’être.” (TE:7) These two simple claims encapsulate almost the whole of TE. For Sartre’s criticisms of Husserl on the intentionality of consciousness, see BN later on: “All consciousness is consciousness of something. This definition of consciousness […] means that consciousness in its inmost nature is a relation to a transcendent being. […] Husserl defines consciousness precisely as a transcendence. […] This is his essential discovery. But from the moment that he makes of the noema an unreal, a correlate of the noesis, a noema whose esse is percipi, he is totally unfaithful to his principle. “Consciousness is consciousness of something. This means that transcendence is the constitutive structure of consciousness; that is that consciousness is born supported by a being which is not itself.” (BN: 23) “…what Husserl calls intentionality… [H]e misunderstood its essential character.” (BN: 23) “[C]onsciousness implies in its being a non-conscious and transphenomenal being” (BN: 23-4) “To say that consciousness is consciousness of something is to say that it must produce itself as a revealed-revelation of a being which is not it and which gives itself as already existing when consciousness reveals it.” (BN: 24)

\textsuperscript{162} “It is usually believed that the existence of a transcendental I [like Kant’s] is justified by the need for consciousness to have unity and individuality. […] But it is certainly the case that phenomenology does not need to resort to this unifying and individualizing I. Rather, consciousness is defined by intentionality. Through intentionality it transcends itself, it unifies itself by going outside itself.” (TE:6)

\textsuperscript{163} “[T]he type of existence that consciousness has is that it is conscious of itself. And it becomes conscious of itself insofar as it is consciousness of a transcendent object.” (TE:7, Sartre’s emphasis).
Sartre is saying that whenever consciousness is conscious of something, it is simultaneously conscious of itself (while being conscious of something else).

Taken at face value, Sartre’s claim that consciousness is conscious of itself whenever it’s conscious of an object may sound somewhat unintuitive at first sight: when I am conscious of an object, for instance of my desk, my consciousness is apparently conscious only of my desk, not of its own being conscious of the desk. But this prima facie implausibility results from assuming that only in reflection consciousness can be conscious of itself. Sartre sees here a fundamental mistake; and he believes that it is philosophy, rather than common sense, that is responsible for this “reflective illusion.” There is no question, of course, that in reflection consciousness is conscious of itself. The mistake is, according to Sartre, to see in reflection the only or the basic way in which this can happen.

Against the view that reflection is the only way in which consciousness can be conscious of itself, Sartre replies that unreflective consciousness is conscious of itself too: by being conscious of an object, say, my desk, consciousness is simultaneously conscious of itself as being conscious of the object, my desk. It is true that, in this case, consciousness does not explicitly observe itself, but does so implicitly, in other words, consciousness is what Sartre calls non-positionally conscious of itself: it does not take itself as the object of consciousness. But it is not less conscious of itself for that.

Against the view that reflection is the basic way in which consciousness is conscious of itself, Sartre responds that the unreflective consciousness that takes precedence over the reflective one on account of its autonomy: whereas an unreflective consciousness does not need a reflective one to be conscious of itself, a reflective consciousness does need a reflected consciousness to be

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165 Of course I can be observing my desk and still have a dim consciousness of my own consciousness. To see the point Sartre is going to make, let the reader imagine a situation in which I am fully absorbed in the observation of something (a painting, a home-run, a face, etc.), absolutely “oblivious” of myself.

166 “[A] consciousness has no need of a reflecting consciousness in order to be conscious of itself. It merely does not posit itself to itself as its own object.” (TE:11)
reflective. This holds phenomenologically and ontologically. Phenomenologically, Sartre argues that

[R]eflective life [i.e., consciousness] generally presupposes spontaneous [i.e., unreflective] life. (TE: 20)

Ontologically, Sartre’s claim is that

The unreflected has an ontological priority over the reflected, since it does not need to be reflected in order to exist, and reflection presupposes the intervention of a second-order consciousness. (TE: 19)

This insight by Sartre that there unreflective consciousness of itself is more basic than reflective consciousness of itself is a fundamental tenet of his whole philosophy. In BT, Sartre claims

[R]eflection has no kind of primacy over the consciousness reflected-on. It is not reflection which reveals the consciousness reflected-on to itself. Quite the contrary, it is the non-reflective consciousness which renders the reflection possible; there is a pre-reflective cogito which is the condition of the Cartesian cogito. (BN: 13)

We need to stop at this point, as Sartre has established the central idea on which I am constructing my case. What I take Sartre to have established is two things. First, Sartre has established that there are two fundamental standpoints we can adopt over consciousness, the reflective and the unreflective one. Second, Sartre has established that one of them is grounded on the other; in particular, the reflective standpoint is grounded on the unreflective one. Using the terminology I introduced in Chapter 1 (section 1.1.2.), the reflective standpoint is according to Sartre secondary with respect to the unreflective one, which is more basic. Recall from Chapter 1 (section 1.1.2.) that a standpoint toward an object can be seen to be grounded on another standpoint if the latter takes precedence over the former and makes it phenomenologically (or epistemologically) possible in the first place. If that’s the case, we said, the former can be seen to be phenomenologically (or epistemologically) “included” in, and thereby be a “part” of, the latter. (Using alternative terminological choices, we can say that the former standpoint phenomenologically (or epistemologically) “supervenes” on the latter.)

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167 “[H]ow can we accept that the reflected comes first with relation to the unreflected? We can doubtless conceive a consciousness appearing immediately as reflected, in certain cases. But even then, the unreflected has an ontological priority over the reflected in order to exist, and reflection presupposes the intervention of a second-order consciousness.” (TE: 19)

168 Of course, these two standpoints don’t exhaust all the possible standpoints we can adopt over consciousness. They are the two fundamental ones concerning Sartre’s rejection of Descartes’ and Husserl’s theories.
This is precisely, I contend, what Sartre is suggesting about the two standpoints we can take over consciousness. According to Sartre, unreflective consciousness is a *standpoint* we can adopt over consciousness. 169 Unreflective consciousness is (non-positionally) conscious of itself and, therefore, somehow it “observes” itself (this is a bit misleading since to “observe” involves *positional* consciousness of whatever we are observing); consciousness *reveals* to itself unreflectively, and completely so. According to Sartre, on the other hand, reflective consciousness is of course a standpoint we can adopt over consciousness (this time “to adopt” is more properly used). More importantly, Sartre takes reflective consciousness to be *grounded* on, i.e., to be *secondary* with respect to, unreflective consciousness: without unreflective consciousness there wouldn’t be reflective consciousness to start with; the converse, however, doesn’t hold. 170

2. 6. PARTIAL TRUTH

We can conclude now showing that Sartre believes both that Descartes’ and Husserl’s theories of consciousness contain philosophically interesting truth. This shows that, whatever their theoretical inadequacies, they can’t be spelled out in terms of falsehood simpliciter. Rather, as I’ve just shown, it’s more accurate to spell them out in terms of adopting a secondary standpoint toward consciousness.

2.6.1 Descartes

It’s easy to show that Sartre credits Descartes with having contributed philosophically interesting truth about consciousness. This gives us reasons to believe that, whatever the philosophical inadequacies Sartre sees in Descartes’ theory of consciousness, they can’t be spelled out in terms of falsehood simpliciter. In other words, it can’t be the case that, for Sartre, Descartes’ *theory of*

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169 This is a bit misleading, since “to adopt” suggests *positional* consciousness of whatever object we adopt a standpoint towards.

170 In *BN* Sartre says: “I believe that I have demonstrated that the first condition of all reflection is a pre-reflective *cogito.*” (*BN*: 121)
consciousness is false, even if for Sartre there are theses by Descartes about consciousness that are false (for instance, that there is a self in consciousness).

First off, Sartre credits Descartes with having discovered that reflection provides us with a domain of absolute certainty:

It is necessary to repeat here what has been known since Descartes: a reflective consciousness delivers us absolutely certain data. (I: 4)

Second, Sartre credits Descartes with having discovered that, whatever consciousness may be, it can’t be itself part of the world. This doesn’t necessarily mean that Sartre agrees with Descartes that consciousness is “immaterial;” but Sartre acknowledges that Descartes’ theory of consciousness contains philosophically interesting truth:

What first appears evident is that human reality can detach itself from the world … only if by nature it has the possibility of self-detachment. This was seen by Descartes … . (BN: 60)

2. 6. 2 Husserl

The same as Descartes, it’s easy to show that Sartre credits Husserl with having contributed philosophically interesting truth about consciousness. This gives us reasons to believe that, whatever the philosophical inadequacies Sartre sees in Husserl’s theory of consciousness, they can’t be spelled out in terms of falsehood simpliciter. In other words, it can’t be the case that, for Sartre, Husserl’s theory of consciousness is false, even if for Sartre there are theses by Husserl about consciousness that are false (for instance, that there is a self in consciousness).

The most obvious way to show that Sartre’s credits Husserl with having contributed philosophically interesting truth about consciousness is Sartre’s endorsement of phenomenology as a philosophical method. According to Sartre, phenomenology’s chief object of description is, of course, consciousness, and this object is grasped by intuition. “Intuition” doesn’t refer to

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171 “Phenomenology is a [scientific, and not a ‘critical’] study of consciousness.” (TE:4)
172 “Its [phenomenology’s] essential way of proceeding is via intuition.” (TE:4)
an “ineffable” and mysterious way of apprehending things, as opposed to a language-embedded, conceptual, or argumentative one, but to the way in which things are immediately present to us in self-observation, without intermediaries.

As said before, once we use the phenomenological intuition we don’t identify the correlates of our conscious states with truly existing entities. When I perceive my desk, for instance, or even when I misperceive a desk, I take the desk to be “right there,” existing in the world. Sartre knows that a phenomenological reduction is necessary to suspend the ontological commitments of our natural attitude, in which this taking for granted is always present. The phenomenological reduction allows us to observe consciousness as something that Sartre, quite idiosyncratically, identifies with Kant’s transcendental consciousness. However, even after the reduction, Husserl’s consciousness is, for Sartre, unlike Kant’s, consciousness as we do observe it, not as it ought to be if what we observe is to count as experience (in Kant’s sense). What is important is that Sartre acknowledges Husserl’s theory of consciousness contains philosophically interesting truth:

I can go along with Husserl in each of the admirable descriptions in which he shows transcendental consciousness constituting the world by imprisoning itself in empirical consciousness. (TE: 4)

I take this to mean that as far as description is concerned, Sartre credits Husserl with describing the right object, even if from a standpoint that I take Sartre to believe is secondary with respect to a more basic one. This description of consciousness by Husserl includes distinguishing different types of evidence:

Husserl has rendered philosophy a signal service by distinguishing between different kinds of certainty. (TE: 15)

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174 “Intuition, according to Husserl, puts us in the presence of the thing.” (TE:4)
175 “Husserl takes up Kant’s transcendental consciousness and grasps it by means of the epoché.” (TE:4). Of course, it’s questionable that what Husserl grasps by means of the epoché is, as Sartre wants, Kant’s transcendental consciousness. “For Kant and for Husserl, the I is a formal structure of consciousness” (TE:16).
176 “It [Husserl’s] is a real consciousness, accessible to each and every one of us, once we have performed the ‘reduction.’” (TE:4)
The second way to show that Sartre’s credits Husserl with having contributed philosophically interesting truth about consciousness is Sartre’s endorsement of Husserl’s notion of intentionality. In *TE*, Sartre says

[C]onsciousness is defined by intentionality. (*TE*: 6)

And in *BN*, Sartre repeats that

All consciousness, as Husserl has shown, is consciousness of something. This means that there is no consciousness that is not a positing of a transcendent object, or if you prefer, that consciousness has no “content” (*BN*: 11)

Husserl defines consciousness … as a transcendence. In truth he does. This is what he posits. This is his essential discovery. (*BN*: 23)

2.6.3 La Rochefoucauld

Finally, Sartre credits La Rochefoucauld with having contributed philosophically interesting truth about consciousness, which gives us reasons to believe that, whatever the philosophical inadequacies he sees in La Rochefoucauld’s theory of consciousness, they can’t be spelled out in terms of falsehood simpliciter. This case is interesting, as, although Sartre’s interest in La Rochefoucauld is more peripheral than his interest in Descartes and Husserl, the textual evidence he offers for the thesis I want to make in this chapter is more explicit.

Sartre is quite clear that the theory of consciousness proposed by the French moralists is inadequate and must be rejected:

[W]e must, before we go any further, rid ourselves of a purely psychological theory that affirms, for psychological reasons, the material presence of the me in all our consciousnesses. This is the theory of amour-propre put forward by the French moralists. (*TE*: 17)

As we have seen, the central thesis of the French moralists, of which Sartre takes La Rochefoucauld to be their foremost representative, is that he self is materially present in all of our conscious acts (a self of which we may or may not be conscious). Given that Sartre wants to
deny this thesis, it’s tempting to hold that, according to Sartre, La Rochefoucauld’s thesis is false simpliciter. Textual support is easy to find. Sartre does say that

The interest of this [La Rochefoucauld’s] thesis seems to me to reside in the way it brings out an error very frequently committed by psychologists — an error consisting in confusing the essential structure of reflective acts with that of unreflected acts. (TE: 17, my emphasis)

And, more explicitly, that

La Rochefoucauld’s psychology … is not true. (TE: 20, Sartre’s emphasis)

However, to leave things at that wouldn’t do justice to the fact that Sartre acknowledges La Rochefoucauld’s theory to contain philosophically interesting truth. First, Sartre admits that La Rochefoucauld’s theory captures an important fact of our conscious life, namely that conscious states are “mine” and at least sometimes willed as mine, not for their own sake:

I feel pity for Peter and I come to his aid. For my consciousness, one thing alone exists at that moment: Peter-having-to-be-aided. … But if my state is suddenly transformed into a reflected state, then I am watching myself acting. … [As La Rochefoucauld (rightly) says, I.G.] It is no longer Peter who attracts me, it is my helpful consciousness that appears to me as having to be perpetuated. Even if I merely think that I must pursue my action because ‘it is good’, the good qualifies my behavior, my pity, etc. (TE: 20)

La Rochefoucauld’s point that conscious states can be lived and willed as “mine” is for Sartre insightful and, more importantly, true.

Second, Sartre believes that, in addition to being true, the fact observed by La Rochefoucauld is philosophically interesting, i.e. non-obviously true. This holds for Sartre both factually and philosophically. Factually, sometimes our conscious acts don’t appear to be “mine.” As Sartre suggests in the quote, in a situation in which all I’m conscious of is Peter-having-to-be-aided, my conscious acts are Peter-centered. There appearing no self in consciousness, my conscious acts don’t appear to be “mine” in any way. Philosophically, the existence of a self might be denied, in which case no conscious act would be “mine:” all of them would be selfless. In either case, the

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177 In an analogous way in which someone might claim that the Statue of Liberty represents a man wearing jeans and a T-shirt, holding a baseball bat in his right hand and a newspaper in his left one (pg. 1).
178 Or, in this case, psychologically interesting truth.
claim that at least some conscious acts are “mine” is, if true, philosophically (or psychologically) interesting.

On the one hand, then, Sartre believes that “we must rid ourselves” of La Rochefoucauld’s theory; the theory involves “an error” and, on the whole, “is not true.” On the other hand, Sartre acknowledges that La Rochefoucauld’s theory contains interesting truth. How do we square these two facts? My answer is partial truth: according to Sartre, La Rochefoucauld’s theory is true of only a “part” of our conscious life, i.e., reflective consciousness (not of consciousness simpliciter). It can be easily shown that Sartre doesn’t take La Rochefoucauld’s theory to be false, as, once its limits are acknowledged, the theory has (limited) legitimacy. Sartre does say that La Rochefoucauld’s psychology has found its rightful place. (TE: 20)

And, more explicitly, Sartre argues that

La Rochefoucauld’s psychology is true only for the particular feelings that take their origin from reflective life.” (TE: 20, my emphasis)

I take this quote by Sartre to showcase the overall thesis I have defended in this chapter, not only concerning La Rochefoucauld, but concerning Descartes and Husserl, even if textual support for the last two figures isn’t as telling.

2. 7 SUMMARY

To conclude, let me summarize the chief results of this chapter. According to Sartre, the best past theories of consciousness are inadequate but not exactly false; rather, they are partially true (in the sense sketched in Chapter 1, to be elaborated on in Chapter 5). According to Sartre,

179 Following the analogy of my first example in this study (pg. 1), we don’t have to say that a description that goes “It’s a tabula ansata, that is, a tablet evoking the law; on it is inscribed the date of the American Declaration of Independence, July 4, 1776,” is false about the Statue of Liberty (which, to some extent, is a correct claim to make); it’s more accurate to say that the description is true of a part of it.
Furthermore, the chief inadequacy of past philosophers has been to adopt a standpoint toward consciousness that is grounded on a more basic one, which takes precedence over it and makes it possible in the first place. The two philosophers I’ve taken Sartre to believe have contributed most to a philosophical understanding of consciousness are Descartes and Husserl; additionally, I’ve considered Kant and the French Moralists (in particular La Rochefoucauld).

Sartre credits Descartes with having discovered philosophically interesting truth about consciousness, on three accounts. First, Descartes is the first philosopher to understand the mind in terms of consciousness. Second, Descartes holds that consciousness is completely revealed in the cogito. Finally, Descartes holds that the cogito occurs in reflection, when consciousness is directed towards itself. Sartre credits Husserl’s theory of consciousness with containing philosophically interesting truth on three accounts too. First, Husserl holds that phenomenology, not psychology, is the proper way to study consciousness. Second, Husserl holds that consciousness must be understood in terms of intentionality. Third, Husserl is committed to the idea that consciousness must be studied via reflection.

Both Descartes and Husserl defend the thesis that there is a self in consciousness. Sartre believes this thesis is false in one sense, partially true in another. The thesis that there is a self in consciousness is for Sartre partially true in the sense that it doesn’t hold of consciousness simpliciter, but only of reflective consciousness: Sartre agrees that in reflection there is a self, but he argues that in unreflective consciousness there is no self at all. The thesis that there is a self in consciousness is for Sartre false in the sense that the self is not in consciousness as a subject of our conscious acts, as Descartes and Husserl argue, but for consciousness, as an object of our consciousness acts; the self, in other words, isn’t what is conscious, but something we are conscious of.

Underlying Sartre’s criticisms of Descartes and Husserl about the self there is a critique to Descartes’ and Husserl’s theories of consciousness. Essentially, Sartre believes that Descartes’ and Husserl’s theories of consciousness target the right object. What according to Sartre is inadequate with Descartes’ and Husserl’s theories isn’t so much that they include claims that are
false of consciousness (although this happens to be the case for Sartre too) but, rather, that their claims are true of only a part (i.e., mode) of consciousness, i.e., reflective consciousness.

According to Sartre, reflective consciousness is what we are able to observe of consciousness when we adopt a reflective standpoint toward it. According to Sartre, Descartes and Husserl are right that, when we observe our own consciousness from a reflective standpoint, (a) we are given a domain of absolute certainty and (b) a self appears. What Sartre objects to Descartes and Husserl is that there is a standpoint toward our own consciousness that is more basic than the reflective one, and moreover makes the reflective standpoint possible in the first place. This standpoint is the unreflective one. According to Sartre, consciousness does not need to reflect, i.e., direct towards itself, to be conscious of itself. By being conscious of an object (and an object alone) consciousness is at the same time and by the same token conscious of itself as being conscious of that object. It is true that, in this case, consciousness is non-positionally conscious of itself, i.e., it doesn’t take itself as an object; but it’s none the less conscious of itself for that. According to Sartre, reflective consciousness of itself is grounded on, and therefore it’s secondary with respect to, unreflective consciousness of itself, both phenomenologically and ontologically. Phenomenologically, unreflective consciousness is more basic because unreflective consciousness is conscious of itself too. Ontologically, unreflective consciousness is more basic because it doesn’t need reflective consciousness to exist. Both phenomenologically and ontologically, reflective consciousness “supervenes” on unreflective consciousness.

Descartes and Husserl are committed to the view that consciousness is best approached to from a reflective standpoint, and Sartre argues that a reflective standpoint toward consciousness is grounded on, and thus secondary with respect to, an unreflective standpoint. Given that Sartre acknowledges that Descartes’ and Husserl’s theories of consciousness contain philosophically interesting truth, the idea that what Sartre finds inadequate in Descartes’ and Husserl’s theories of consciousness is to have been based on a standpoint that is secondary with respect to a more basic one explains better Sartre’s acknowledgement of interesting truth than the idea that what Sartre finds inadequate in those theories is that they are false simpliciter of consciousness.
CHAPTER 3
HEIDEGGER ON HUMAN BEING

According to Heidegger, human being plays a central role in a philosophical understanding of reality, but human being has a unique and elusive nature that is a challenge for philosophy to capture. Now Heidegger believes that the best past accounts of human being have been inadequate. At its most general, the thesis I want to defend in this chapter is that, under analysis, these accounts are, according to Heidegger, inadequate but not exactly false; what is inadequate about them is that they provide us with only partial truth about human being (in the sense sketched in Chapter 1, to be elaborated on in Chapter 5).

To defend my thesis I will proceed as follows. First, I will claim that the problem of the best past accounts of human being is best described by saying that, according to Heidegger, they result from adopting an inadequate standpoint toward human being. Second, I will claim that, according to Heidegger, this standpoint is not inadequate in the sense that is wrong, but in the sense that is secondary: a more basic standpoint takes precedence over it and makes it possible in the first place. Third, according Heidegger, once we succeed to understand the nature of this more basic standpoint and place ourselves in it, it turns out that what we are able to know about human being from the secondary standpoint isn’t so much false as, rather, partial. Thus, I will conclude, Heidegger provides us with an example of what I see as partial truth in philosophy (in what, again, I take to be a philosophically interesting sense to be further discussed in my last chapter).

To explain Heidegger’s conception of human being and its centrality in a philosophical understanding of reality, a significant amount of expository work is needed. This is not an easy task, on account of the intrinsic difficulty of Heidegger’s thinking, the level of abstraction at

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180 The noun “human being,” which I prefer to Heidegger’s Dasein (more on this below), will involve some odd grammatical consequences. First, I handle it as non-countable (because, as we will see, Heidegger’s focus is more on being human than on human beings). Second, I handle it as neutral to avoid sex biases, wherefore I will use “its” as its possessive, instead of “his” or “her.”
which he works, and the unusually ambitious task he sets himself. The *locus classicus* of Heidegger on human being is his treatise *Being and Time* (BT from now on), the chief text I will draw on. Similar to the case of Sartre, this early work is characterized by its indebtedness to Husserl’s phenomenology, as well as by a radical departure from it. However, Heidegger engages, to a much larger extent than Sartre, with a variety of figures central in the Western tradition of philosophy, including Parmenides, Plato, Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas, Descartes, Kant, Hegel, Kierkegaard, Dilthey, Scheler, and Husserl. To some extent, any of these figures might be used to make my case, in so far as all of them have, according to Heidegger, something to contribute to our understanding of human being; but all of them, in some way or another, provide us according to Heidegger with inadequate accounts (that, under analysis, I shall claim, prove to be partially true rather than false).

It’s easy to see that, given the many targets Heidegger has in mind, the territory to be covered is much larger than in the case of Sartre. This means that, in order to make my task manageable, I need to make more drastic methodological decisions. The two most important are, first, what aspect(s) of human being and, second, what past accounts to choose to make my case. As we will see in a minute, these two questions go hand in hand: the best past accounts of human being so far derive their philosophical significance from illuminating specific aspects of human being, not its nature in general, so to focus on one of those aspects involves to focus on a specific best past account, and vice versa.

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181 This might lead us to consider Heidegger’s whole philosophical trajectory to better situate the position of Heidegger that I study in this chapter. How to divide this trajectory is a matter of scholarly debate, which I will skip here for being largely tangential for my purposes.

182 I will supplement *BT* with related texts from Heidegger’s published lessons of the same period (around 1927), especially *Die Grundprobleme der Phänomenologie (Grundprobleme)* (Heidegger [1927] 1975) and *Logik: Die Frage nach der Wahrheit (Logik)* (Heidegger [1925/26] 1976). Despite being Heidegger’s undisputed magnum opus, on the other hand, *BT* doesn’t adequately represent, even partially, Heidegger’s whole philosophy. *BT* is an early work against which Heidegger reacted quite soon. But *BT* is the recurrent starting point for an understanding of Heidegger’s later philosophy. Also, it must be taken into account that *BT* remains an *incomplete* work. Out of three Divisions that Heidegger had originally planned, only the first one and two thirds of the second were published. In *BT*’s seventh edition (1953), Heidegger announced that the remainder of the plan could not be written without radically reworking what was already published, thus renouncing to complete the original plan, indeed the plan itself and the entire philosophical program behind it.

183 As we will see, the idea of a special philosophical discipline trying to grasp the nature of human being (man) in general, i.e., a *philosophical anthropology*, is, contrary to appearances, relatively recent.
What I’ll do in this chapter is therefore focus on one aspect of human being that Heidegger takes to be of central importance, not on human being in general. Or rather, I will focus on human being in general by drawing on this particular aspect. For a number of reasons I’ll go over in section 4.3. below, I will focus on human being’s relation to the world. It’s Heidegger on past philosophical accounts of how human being relates to the world that I will examine in this chapter (or rather, as I will explain, the accounts of human being and world implicit in those accounts). But which past philosophical accounts should I specifically focus on? Given the impossibility of examining all the targets Heidegger has in mind in the framework of this chapter, what I’ll do is use the blanket term “philosophical tradition” to characterize Heidegger’s overall target. This decision has, of course, some costs, but also some advantages. The costs are its obvious lack of specificity and, even worse, the danger of falsifying the views of individual philosophers by bringing them down to a common denominator that perhaps doesn’t represent the views of any of them. The advantage is its convenience and its generality, which allows us to target at the same time various important past philosophical accounts at the same time. What I find decisive about this methodological choice is its textual support: Heidegger himself uses the expression “philosophical tradition” and is quite clear, at various points in BT, that this is the target of his criticisms (whether he is in fact right or wrong in so doing doesn’t really affect my thesis in this chapter, which concerns Heidegger on past philosophical theories\(^{184}\)).

After this brief methodological discussion, let me rehearse the thesis I want to defend in this chapter. According to Heidegger, the philosophical tradition has offered an inadequate account of human being’s relation to the world. Underlying this account is a view of both human being and world that is inadequate. Under analysis, this view is according to Heidegger not false but partially true (in a philosophically interesting sense to be further discussed in my last chapter).

3.1 BEING

\(^{184}\) Remember the distinction drawn in Chapter 1, section 1.2.1., between theories and philosophers’ beliefs about theories.
In a philosophical discussion about human being one would expect to start right away with the question: what is human being? and then examine the most important answers the philosophical tradition has provided, as well as the most relevant shortcomings that those answers can be seen as having. However, following Heidegger, this is precisely what I won’t be doing here. It is indeed one of Heidegger’s chief insights in *BT* that the question: What is human being? is philosophically important only to the extent that we turn the question around and, whatever human being may ultimately be, what we really ask ourselves is: what does it mean to be for human being in the first place? (Using Heidegger’s jargon: what is human being’s type of Being?). Now this question, in turn, is according to Heidegger important only to the extent that its answer provides us with a philosophically interesting route to an answer to the further question: what does it mean to be for entities in general? According to Heidegger, therefore, the question: what is human being? is, taken by itself, of limited philosophical interest: only taking for granted what it means to be for human being can mislead philosophers into thinking that a self-standing interesting answer can be given to it. This circumstance gives us a simple clue of how, according to Heidegger, there can be a philosophically inadequate account of human being whose inadequacy, however, doesn’t exactly consist in its being false and that, furthermore, can be construed in terms of partial truth (I’ll come back repeatedly to this idea.)

I will explain in short why Heidegger believes the question what it means to be for entities in general is philosophically important. By now, I want to stress that Heidegger believes this question is so important that he coins a special name for it: the question about Being. It is because the question about Being is so tightly connected with the question: What is human being (i.e., what is means for human being to be?) that we need to get clear about a few basic things about it, so we can later understand how this connection exactly works.

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185 That is, what is man? Following Heidegger, I take “human being” and “man” to pick out the same entity, but I don’t use the term “man” to avoid sexist language.
186 From now onward, “type of Being” of an entity (or sort of entities) is short for: “what it means to be” for that entity (or sort of entities).
187 Or, rather, what it means for entities to be in general. That is, Heidegger’s stress is on what to be means in general (at the highest level of abstraction), not what it means to be for entities in general.
188 In German, Seinsfrage.
189 From now onwards, unless otherwise specified, “what is human being?” is short for “what does it mean ‘to be’ for human being?”
3.1.1 The Question About Being

According to Heidegger, the philosophical tradition once raised the question about Being and gave some first tentative answers (especially, Heidegger contends, Parmenides, Plato and Aristotle). I will suggest later that Heidegger therefore believes the tradition had the right object of philosophy in view (i.e., entities qua entities), which gives us reasons to reject falsehood simpliciter as what according to Heidegger is philosophically inadequate about the tradition (see section 4.1.3.). However, Heidegger complains, the question about Being has since been forgotten or ignored; but it needs to be asked, for reasons I’ll go over in a minute.

I have already established that the question about Being is short for the question: what does it mean for entities in general to be? But this question is problematic as it stands, as it’s unclear what it’s being asked in the first place and, therefore, what a good answer should look like. Perhaps we can help ourselves with alternative formulations of the same question. These include: what makes entities be entities?, on the basis of what are entities entities?, in virtue of what are entities entities?, and so on.\footnote{Prima facie, what is problematic about these questions is their generality. It makes sense to ask what makes, e.g., a chair be a chair, a mountain be a mountain, a number be a number, a person be a person, and so on; but it doesn’t make as much sense to ask what makes entities be entities. Let’s get things backwards and try to make progress by considering Heidegger’s preliminary answer and elaborating on it. According to Heidegger, what makes entities be entities is (what he calls) Being. But what is Being?}

Negatively put, Heidegger contends, Being is not itself an entity.\footnote{If we were to look for a one-sentence summary of Heidegger’s entire philosophy, this statement would be a good candidate. But what is an entity? An entity, Heidegger tells us, is whatever is something or other.\footnote{Evidently, Heidegger is shooting for the highest level of generality here: anything we can meaningfully talk about is something or other, as even e.g. “nothing” is something or other, i.e.}} (If we were to look for a one-sentence summary of Heidegger’s entire philosophy, this statement would be a good candidate). But what is an entity? An entity, Heidegger tells us, is whatever is something or other.\footnote{“The Being of entities ‘is’ not itself an entity … [O]ur first philosophical step consists in not … ‘telling a story’ – that is to say, in not defining entities by tracing them back in their origin to some other entities, as if Being had the character of some possible entity.” (BT: 26)}

\footnote{According to Heidegger, the question about Being asks about what “determines entities as entities, that on the basis of which entities are already understood.” (BT: 25-6)}

\footnote{“Everything we talk about, everything we have in view, everything towards which we comport ourselves in any way, is being [“seiendes,” that is, “entity”]; what we are is being, and so is how we are.” (BT: 26)}
“nothing” as opposed to “something.” More prosaically, examples of entities include a tree, a city, a mountain, a country, a person, a pain, a number, a centaur, God, and so on; but also a fact (e.g., *that* hammers are useful), a property (e.g., red, big, round, etc.), an event (e.g., a hammer falling), and so on. As can be supposed from this list, Heidegger does not equate “is” with “exists:” some of these entities, like numbers and God, might not exist, and some, like unicorns, do *not* exist. And yet, Heidegger holds, *all* of these things are *entities*, i.e., they are, in some way or another. What is crucial for something to qualify as entity in Heidegger’s sense is that it be *something* as opposed to something else —whatever it may be at all.

Heidegger’s rationale for refusing to equate “to be” and “to exist” is the level of generality of his inquiry: *existing* entities are a species of the more comprehensive genus entity simpliciter. Given that Heidegger’s question is what it means for an entity in general to be, Heidegger isn’t particularly interested in the question *what* entities *exist*. Thus, Heidegger isn’t doing *ontology* (as as usually understood). Also, Heidegger is not interested in what the ultimate nature of reality is; thus, Heidegger is not doing *metaphysics* either. So what does Heidegger take himself as doing? In a nutshell, it’s *phenomenology*. But to understand what Heidegger means by “phenomenology,” and why he believes phenomenology is the right approach to the question about Being, we need to pause for a while and contrast phenomenology to ontology and metaphysics.

A description of sorts of entities discriminates entities according to what they are. Prima facie, there are different sorts of entities and, for a variety of reasons, it matters to philosophy to get clear about these differences. For example, mental entities, (such as pains, perceptions, beliefs, and so on) are prima facie quite different from physical entities (such as chairs, mountains, brain states, and so on); timeless entities (such as numbers or Platonic ideas) are quite different from temporal entities (such as living beings or historical events); and so on. A descriptive

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193 “[In describing the world] the first step is to enumerate the things that are ‘in’ the world: houses, trees, people, mountains, stars … This, however, is obviously a pre-phenomenological ‘business’ which cannot be at all relevant phenomenologically. Such a description is always confined to entities. It is ontical. But what we are seeking is Being.” (*BT*: 91)
194 In the way this term is used in the analytic tradition. This is ironic because Heidegger characterizes what he’s doing as “ontology” (more precisely, “fundamental ontology”).
195 According to Heidegger, the question about Being “must be treated phenomenologically.” (*BT*: 50) Still stronger: “*Only as phenomenology is ontology possible.*” (*BT*: 60)
metaphysics tries to establish an accurate “catalogue” of the different sorts of entities in general. Ontology tries to establish the sorts of entities that exist.\textsuperscript{196} For example, what prima facie are mental entities (such as pains and beliefs) might turn out to be physical entities (such as neurons and brain states) and, conversely, what prima facie are physical entities (such as chairs and trees) might turn out to be mental entities (such as perceptions of chairs and trees), and so on. Metaphysics, finally, tries to establish the sorts of entities that ultimately exist: for instance, even though mental entities might turn out to be physical entities, physical entities, in turn, might turn out to be, on final analysis, some other sort of thing.

Remember that Heidegger wants to find out what it means for entities to be in general. But Heidegger suggests that neither ontology nor metaphysics (in the way I just characterized them) can offer an adequate answer. The reason is quite simple: both of them, according to Heidegger, presuppose a chief meaning of “to be” in the very first place: to exist, to be real. Of course, different ontologies and metaphysics disagree, not only about what entities do in fact exist, but perhaps also about what “to exist” means in the first place. Precisely this disagreement, however, makes it plain that they agree on the supremacy of “to exist” as to what it means for entities “to be.” It won’t do to argue that ontologists and metaphysicians are of course aware that, for many entities, “to be” must mean something different than “to exist,” for instance possible and fictional entities; Heidegger’s response is simple: entities for which to be must mean something different than to exist (for instance possible and fictional entities) are understood negatively (privatively) in relation to existing ones, whereby the presupposition that to be means “to exist” is still operative. Heidegger’s question about Being is presumably more radical, as this presupposition is skirted. But this radicality prevents Heidegger from making use of this presupposition to look for the meaning of Being. What Heidegger urges philosophers to do is to describe how entities appear (to us).\textsuperscript{197} Describing how entities appear (to us) is the only rigorous way of doing philosophy, Heidegger suggests, because entities appearing (to us) is a more basic layer of study than existing entities: even non-existing entities, for instance Santa Claus, appear (to us) in some way or another.

\textsuperscript{196} Of course, it might be objected to ontology characterized in this way. W. v. O. Quine, for example, one of the driving forces behind the revival of ontology in the analytic tradition, does not ask what sort of objects do in fact exist?, but what sort of objects do given beliefs or theories take to exist?

\textsuperscript{197} In the remainder of the chapter, I shall be bracketing “to us” after to appear, suggesting, as Heidegger wants, that entities can’t appear other than to “us.”
There are two objections one might raise to Heidegger at this point. First, some entities (for instance, a unicorn) don’t exist; therefore they can’t appear (to us). Such entities, therefore, will fall outside the scope of the philosopher, and so he will be prevented from answering the question about the Being of entities in general. Heidegger’s likely response would be the following. The question: How do entities appear (to us)? is precisely the point at issue, so the answer is as yet unsettled. If so, the objection is question-begging; for it presupposes that only existing entities e.g. Obama, Chicago, or a horse, as opposed to e.g. Santa Claus, Wonderland, and a unicorn, can appear (to us). But this is not true: as just indicated, non-existing entities do appear (to us) (even if they have a peculiar mode of appearance).

The second objection is the following: how entities appear (to us) can’t be the proper subject of philosophy, because how entities appear (to us) is something subjective, but philosophy studies (or ought to study) how entities objectively are. Heidegger’s likely response would be the following. The claim that how entities appear (to us) is something subjective presupposes a contrast between subjective and objective. Thus, this objection is a variation of the first one. Accordingly, an analogous response applies: the question: what is the type of Being of entities in the way they appear (to us)? is precisely the point at issue; it is as yet philosophically unsettled. The difference is that now it is the type of Being of the entity to which things appear (namely, “us”) that is philosophically unsettled.

Heidegger’s most important claim until now has been that Being is itself not an entity.198 What, then, is Being? This question can’t be answered at this point yet; it takes the whole of BT to offer an answer.199 Given that I have established that Heidegger discriminates entities according to how they appear (to us), we can tentatively characterize Being, in an alternative way, as what makes entities qua entities appear (to us). In the next section I will draw on this characterization...

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198 Least of all is “Being of entities something behind entities, which does not appear (to us) in any way.” (BT: 60)
199 Or rather, it takes the whole of BT to adequately raise the question! The closest Heidegger comes to give a preliminary characterization “Being” is this: “Being, as the basic theme of philosophy, is no class or genus of entities; yet it pertains to every entity. Its ‘universality’ is to be sought higher up. Being and the structure of Being lie beyond every entity and every possible character which an entity may possess. Being is the transcendens pure and simple.” (BT: 62)
to argue that, according to Heidegger, there are two different *standpoints* we can adopt over entities in general (this claim will be instrumental for the case I want to make in this chapter).

Finally, why should philosophers be bothering about Being at all? I have already responded that Heidegger believes we have a *received* understanding of Being, namely “to exist,” “to be real.” But this understanding, at any rate as far as Heidegger is concerned, isn’t philosophically clear; it seems therefore a worth philosophical effort to get clear about it. What Heidegger wants to add now to this insight is the further idea that this received understanding of Being isn’t the exclusive possession of philosophers; rather, it belongs to human being in general, and moreover by necessity, due to the very nature of human being (I will come back to this in section 4. 2. 1). In short, the requirement of asking the question about Being isn’t dictated by *theoretical* concerns that some human beings might have (philosophers, in this case) but others not; it is dictated by *pretheoretical* concerns inherent to the nature of human being itself.

3.1.2 Standpoint: Pre-Theoretical versus Theoretical

So far I’ve talked much about Being and entities, but I still haven’t discussed the notion of standpoint. Remember, my overall goal in this study is to show that the relation between part and whole accounting for the fact that we can have partial truth can hold, in philosophy, not for objects, but for *standpoints* toward objects; in which case this relation becomes one between a secondary and a basic standpoint: the secondary standpoint provides us then with partial truth (*not* falsehood) about an object (1. 1. 2 and 1.1.3. in Chapter 1). In this chapter, I want to show

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200 Heidegger does of course believe philosophers should bother about Being. To start with, the question of Being “can [and according to Heidegger must] be made visible as a very special one” (*BT*: 24). Moreover: “Does [the question about Being] simply remain –or is it at all- a mere matter for soaring speculation about the most general of generalities, or is it, rather, of all questions, both the most basic and the most concrete?” (*BT*: 29). Heidegger’s italics suggest that to his eyes the answer is affirmative. Finally, and most clearly, “[w]ith the question of the meaning of Being, our investigation comes up against the fundamental question of philosophy.” (*BT*: 50)

201 “What we seek when we inquire into Being is not something entirely unfamiliar, even if at first we cannot grasp it at all.” (*BT*: 25) This received understanding of Being shows itself at its most conspicuous when raising the question “What is Being?” itself, for in raising it we ask precisely what Being is. “We do not know what ‘Being’ means. But even if we ask, ‘What is ‘Being’?’, we keep within an understanding of the ‘is’, though we are unable to fix conceptually what that ‘is’ signifies.” (*BT*: 25).

202 “This guiding activity of taking a look at Being arises from the average understanding of Being in which we always operate and which in the end belongs to the essential constitution of Dasein [human being] itself.” (*BT*: 3)

203 “The very fact that we already live in an understanding of Being and that the meaning of Being is still veiled in darkness proves that it is necessary in principle to raise this question again.” (*BT*: 23)
how according to Heidegger the philosophical tradition has adopted a secondary (not wrong) standpoint toward human being, thus providing us with partial truth (not falsehood) about human being. To defend this claim I need to show that Heidegger believes there are two standpoints we can take over human being (one secondary and one basic). What I do in this section is the preliminary task of showing that Heidegger believes there are two standpoints we can take over entities in general.

Remember, Heidegger starts from the premise that it’s not philosophically clear what it means to be for entities in general. The philosophical tradition has made do with a received, default understanding of what to be means: “to exist,” “to be real;” but whether this is what it means to be for entities in general is, Heidegger urges, up for grabs. What we need to do instead, Heidegger has suggested, is describe how entities appear (to us), without assuming any received, default understanding. But entities, Heidegger wants to contend now, appear (to us) in two fundamentally different ways, and moreover mutually irreducible between them. First, Heidegger claims, entities can appear (to us) as objects; second, entities can appear (to us) as tools. What I want to claim is that, according to Heidegger, there is a standpoint toward entities corresponding to each of these two ways. But first of all, what exactly are these two modes of appearance?

Suppose I step into my office ready to spend an afternoon working there; I pull a chair and sit at my desk, in front of my computer. When doing this, I didn’t stare at the things I see in my office, reflect, and decide that the object “down there” is suitable to sit in, and the object “over here” suitable to work at. On the contrary, I acted in a spontaneous, non-reflective way; only exceptionally does someone “stare” at a chair so as to, after “reflection,” “decide” to sit on it, and so on. Given this spontaneity and non-reflectivity, is it the case that the office, chair, and desk don’t appear (to us)? Evidently not: even if I wasn’t really paying attention to the office, the chair, and the desk, they still appear (to me). Heidegger’s contention now is that the bare fact that I pull a chair and sit on it means that I take this entity as something, namely as, precisely, a chair. But in doing so, Heidegger urges, the chair doesn’t appear (to me) as an object; rather, it appears (to me) as tool to be practically dealt with. (The term “tool” is broader here than in its

204 Which obviously doesn’t mean “unreflective” in the sense of “rash.”
usual sense: what is important to qualify for “tool” in Heidegger’s sense is that I take something to be *dealt-with* (not observed) as this or that; whether the entity is “objectively” a tool, for instance a hammer, is a side issue; remember we’re talking about *how* entities *appear* (to us), not *what* they objectively *are*). A trait of entities appearing (to me) as tools is that they *slip our attention*; their presence, so to say, recedes *into the background*; yet their presence is nonetheless quite conspicuous, even if “peripheral.” In the example above, for instance, my attention was focused (say) on my *tasks*: the book-to-be-read, the report-to-be-written, and so on. In some way, I wasn’t really “aware” that I was pulling a chair. But the chair wasn’t something hidden or mysterious; it was perfectly visible.

My contention now is that Heidegger believes there is a *standpoint toward* entities corresponding to the way entities appear (to us) as tools. My argument is simple: a standpoint, per Chapter 1, must *discriminate* between objects: whatever a standpoint exactly is, and of whatever type, objects must be observed from it as being *something or other*; according to Heidegger, however, entities appearing (to us) as tools appear (to us) as being *something or other* (for instance, my *pulling* the chair to *sit* on involves that the entity in question appears (to me) as *chair* and not, say, as a hammer). Therefore, according to Heidegger, there is a standpoint toward entities from which entities appear (to us) as *tools*, and furthermore, as *something* as opposed to something else. This standpoint I call *pretheoretical*.

In contrast to tools, entities can appear (to us) as *objects*. Suppose that, instead of stepping into my office to work at my desk, I do so to make an inventory of the furniture, which includes as a task elaborating a report of the physical state of each item. If I pull the chair with the goal, *not* to sit on it, but to *observe* its physical state (which involves to ascertain its objective properties — blue, metallic, old, 80 centimeters tall, and so on), the way the chair appears (to me) is, if Heidegger is right, in a radically (and irreducibly) *different* sort of way than it is the case when the chair appears (to me) as I pull it to sit on it. (Remember Heidegger is doing *phenomenology*: Heidegger *doesn’t* claim that, if I observe the chair instead of sitting on it, the chair becomes a different sort of entity; what is different is how the chair *appears* (to us).) In the first place, Heidegger contends, the chair has now become my *focus* of attention, whereas before it *slipped* my attention. In the second place, the chair appears (to me) as *standing out* from the background;
even more, as being *isolated* ("cut off") from its practical surrounding. This is why, Heidegger holds, the chair appears (to me) in such a way that I can relate towards the chair with an eye on how the chair, so to say, is *in itself* ("objectively"). This is the way, Heidegger, concludes, in which an entity appears (to us) as *object*, not as tool. What we have here, I hold, is according to Heidegger a distinctive standpoint we can take over entities, completely different from the previous standpoint and irreducible to it; I call this standpoint *theoretical*.

The thesis by Heidegger that is really important for my purposes is now the following: the *tool*-standpoint, not the *object*-standpoint, is the one allowing entities to appear (to us) in the *first* instance; what is more, entities appear (to us) as objects *on the basis* of them appearing (to us) as tools. In short, entities appearing (to us) as objects is a *secondary* way of appearing; the *basic* way is entities appearing (to us) as tools. Heidegger’s argument for this view rests on his phenomenological insight that entities always appear (to us) as something or other; but the “as” that is phenomenologically given to us in the *first* instance isn’t the “as” of theoretical observation; it is a *pretheoretical* “as” of practical engagement with the world. Heidegger doesn’t obviously deny that a theoretical standpoint toward entities can discover them as they are; what he contends is that this standpoint is able to do so on the basis of a *pretheoretical* revealing of entities that reveals them as something or other in its own right. This pretheoretical standpoint, Heidegger urges, *makes* the theoretical one *possible* to start with: only *because* entities pretheoretically appear (to us) as something or other can they *subsequently* appear (to us) with objective properties, i.e., *theoretically* appear (to us) as something or other. Only because an entity pretheoretically appears (to me) as, say, chair can it *subsequently* theoretically appear (to me) as, say, old, blue, and metallic, and so on. The theoretical standpoint, Heidegger concludes, does not reveal how entities are in a primary manner: this theoretical standpoint, far from being primary, is parasitic on a pretheoretical one, which makes the former possible.  

Let me finish this presentation of these two different standpoints with a couple of remarks about the terms “theoretical” and “pretheoretical.” First of all, these are my terminological choices, not

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205 In Heidegger’s jargon, “To lay bare what is just present-at-hand and no more, cognition must first penetrate *beyond* what is ready-to-hand in our concern.” (*BT*: 101)
Heidegger’s. While the terms aren’t totally satisfactory, alternative ones probably suffer from greater disadvantages. What is important to keep in mind is two things: first, while “theoretical” in Heidegger’s sense partially overlaps with “theoretical” in the usual sense, it doesn’t exactly coincide with it; its sense is significantly broader: we have already seen that to observe an entity from a theoretical standpoint in the usual sense (i.e., with a view to coming out with a theory about the entity) is a specific case of observing an entity from a theoretical standpoint in Heidegger’s sense. Second, the prefix “pre-“ in “pretheoretical” isn’t meant to suggest that this standpoint has a lower status; it simply suggests a standpoint which antecedes a theoretical one in the phenomenologically neutral sense I have just indicated. More importantly, the “pre-“ here doesn’t prejudice any teleology to the effect that a pretheoretical standpoint is bound to become theoretical as soon as we refine our cognitive instruments, whichever they are; a pretheoretical standpoint is for Heidegger autonomous and self-sufficient: whether it becomes theoretical or not is always purely optional. (This is another way to say that according to Heidegger, and using contemporary analytic terminology, the theoretical standpoint toward entities supervenes on the pretheoretical one.)

So far I’ve shown that, according to Heidegger, there are two standpoints we can adopt over entities, the theoretical and the pretheoretical; the theoretical standpoint, moreover, is secondary, whereas the pretheoretical is basic. Remember though that I motivated this distinction by drawing on an example including an office, a chair, and a desk, that is, particular entities. Heidegger’s contention now is that there is both a pretheoretical and a theoretical standpoint toward entities in general (entities qua entities). At the bare minimum, we have a pretheoretical standpoint toward entities just by dealing with them in our everyday lives. From both a theoretical and a pre-theoretical standpoint, our received understanding of what Being is, according to Heidegger, isn’t so much mistaken or false as “vague” and “indeterminate.” Heidegger suggests that this vagueness and indeterminacy are not privative features, to be equated with a lack of distinctness that could be improved on with conceptual refinement. Rather, this vagueness and indeterminacy are positive, philosophically telling features of us, and as such

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206 Heidegger himself uses other terms, including “pre-ontological” versus “ontological” and “pre-phenomenological” versus “phenomenological.”
must be elicited and explained. On the other hand, our pre-theoretical understanding of the meaning of Being is, according to Heidegger, heavily conditioned by baggage whose origin is, in turn, a theoretical standpoint.

It is worth noting that, according to Heidegger, from a theoretical standpoint, the inadequacy in our received understanding of the meaning of Being accounts for the existence of spurious puzzles plaguing the philosophical tradition. What I take Heidegger to be suggesting here is that the philosophical tradition has adopted a theoretical standpoint toward entities (and I will argue in the next section that for Heidegger this involves partial truth, not falsehood, about entities). As we know, to adopt a theoretical standpoint toward entities doesn’t necessarily mean that the tradition has observed entities with a view to offer philosophical theories about them. Prior to that, it means that the tradition has privileged entities appearing (to us) as objects as the default way in which entities in general appear (to us). I will argue in a minute that, according to Heidegger, the philosophical tradition has thereby adopted an inadequate standpoint toward entities in general; this standpoint, however, isn’t inadequate in the sense that is wrong, but in the sense that is secondary: a more basic standpoint, the pretheoretical, makes it possible in the first place. By overlooking the existence of this pretheoretical standpoint, the philosophical tradition hasn’t provided us with a false account of entities in general, but with a partially true one.

The philosophical puzzles Heidegger alluded to above are spurious in the sense that their adequate response doesn’t consist in solving them but in, as Wittgenstein’s picture goes, dissolving them. To “dissolve” a philosophical puzzle is to show that what seems to be a legitimate question to which an answer ought to be given is, rather, an ill-raised, confused question, to which no interesting answer exists. These questions do not pose genuine philosophical problems but, rather, pseudo-problems. Heidegger’s examples of such questions include: can the existence of external reality be demonstrated? Is there truth? Can our knowledge of the truth be proved? Do other human beings exist?, and so on. Whereas Wittgenstein sees a

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207 “[The] very indefiniteness [of this understanding of Being] is itself a positive phenomenon which needs to be clarified.” (BT: 25)

208 “This vague average understanding of Being may be so infiltrated with traditional theories and opinions about Being that these remain hidden as sources of the way in which it is prevalently understood.” (BT: 25)

209 “[T]he ultimate business of philosophy is to preserve the force of the most elemental words in which Dasein [human being] expresses itself, and to keep the common understanding from leveling them off to that unintelligibility which functions in turn as a source of pseudo-problems.” (BT: 262)
confused use of *language* in questions of this sort, the underlying flaw Heidegger sees is a deficient understanding by philosophers of what it means to be for the (putative) entities asked about (external reality, truth, knowledge, other human beings, respectively). According to Heidegger, only by raising the question about Being, that is, by asking what it means to be for entities in general, can the nature of these traditional questions be shown to depend on a prior (and flawed) understanding of something more basic, namely Being.

3.1.3 Partial Truth: Being

By now I’ve covered enough territory to make a first step into showing that, according to Heidegger, the philosophical tradition has provided us with an inadequate account of human being which, however, isn’t false but partially true. What I want to contend in this section is that, to begin with, the philosophical tradition has provided us with an inadequate account of the *proper subject of philosophy*. (We will see how this thesis carries over to human being and human being’s relation to the world; see sections 3.2.4. and 3.3.3 below). This account, however, isn’t false but partially true. I will argue that the problem of this account is best described by saying that, according to Heidegger, it results from having adopted an inadequate standpoint toward entities in general. This standpoint, according to Heidegger, isn’t inadequate in the sense that is wrong but, rather, in the sense that is secondary.

First off, it should be clear by now that Heidegger finds something inadequate about the philosophical tradition generally speaking. I have already shown that, according to Heidegger, the central question of philosophy is the question about *Being*, which asks: what does it mean for entities to *be* in general? But the philosophical tradition, Heidegger complaints, hasn’t raised this question:

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210 “Most of the propositions and questions of philosophers arise from our failure to understand the logic of our language” (*Tractatus* 4.003; Wittgenstein [1922] 1961: 19); “All philosophy is a “critique of language”” (*Tractatus* 4.0031; *loc. cit.); “[P]hilosophical problems are misunderstandings which must be removed by clarification of the rules according to which we are inclined to use words.” (*Philosophical Grammar*, 32; Wittgenstein 1974: 68); “Philosophy is a battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language” (*Philosophical Investigations* §109; Wittgenstein 1953: 47).
On the basis of the Greeks’ initial contributions towards an Interpretation of Being, a dogma has been developed which not only the declares the question about the meaning of Being to be superfluous, but sanctions its complete neglect. (*BT*: 21)

Hitherto our arguments for showing that the question [about Being] must be restated have been motivated in part by its venerable origin but chiefly by the lack of a definite answer and even by the absence of any satisfactory formulation of the question itself. (*BT*: 29)

That according to Heidegger failure to raise the question about Being is philosophically inadequate doesn’t by now need demonstration. But, of course, failure to raise the question about Being is a quite different thing from making a *false* claim about Being. Therefore, a very preliminary result is this: according to Heidegger, the fact that the tradition hasn’t raised the question about Being is philosophically inadequate; but this inadequacy doesn’t consist in the falsehood of a claim (or an account). We need then to get a bit clearer about this inadequacy.

What does failure to raise the question about Being exactly amount to? Once again, the question about Being asks what it means to be for entities in general, and Heidegger’s insight is that the answer is up for grabs: to be might mean different sorts of things for different sorts of entities. The failure to raise the question about Being is equivalent to assuming a *default* meaning of Being applying to entities in general. But this, Heidegger suggests, is precisely what the philosophical tradition has done. What this shows, I contend, is two things: first, the tradition has provided us with an inadequate account of the proper subject of philosophy; second, however, the tradition has had the *right* subject in view when providing us with this inadequate account. This is because, remember, “Being” is short for “what it means to be;” but what it means to be, according to Heidegger, can only be responded to with an eye on the maximum degree of generality, entities *in general*, as opposed to a *specific* sort of entities (for instance, physical as opposed to mental, or timeless as opposed to temporal). Therefore, the proper subject of philosophy, according to Heidegger, is entities in general. But even if we target entities in general, we still need to do so with the highest degree of generality in mind; for it would be possible to consider entities in general *in so far as* they are, say, physical or not physical, temporal or not temporal, and so on. There is the possibility, by contrast, to consider entities in general *in so far as* they are, precisely, *entities*; and this is the only (or at any rate the primary) way in which philosophers, according to Heidegger, should consider entities. According to Heidegger, I conclude, the proper subject of philosophy is *entities qua entities*. 
It is easy to show, however, that Heidegger credits the tradition with having taken entities qua entities to be the proper subject of philosophy. If so, what we have here, I contend, is a situation which is analogous to the one I presented in the example at the beginning of Chapter 1. Let’s remember the example. Suppose I ask you to describe the Statue of Liberty and you answer something like: “It’s a tabula ansata, that is, a tablet evoking the law; on it is inscribed the date of the American Declaration of Independence, July 4, 1776,” and you proceed to describe this tablet with minute detail. As I established in Chapter 1, this description is inadequate, but not exactly false; what is wrong with it is that, instead of describing the Statue of Liberty, you are describing only one part.

Something similar, I contend, is what Heidegger sees as happening in the case. According to Heidegger, the tradition has had in view the right object, entities qua entities. Given that it’d be possible to have in view what according to Heidegger is the wrong object, i.e., not entities in general but a specific sort of entities (for instance, physical, mental, timeless, temporal, and so on), the fact that the tradition targets the proper subject of philosophy involves important truth: it is not trivial that entities qua entities should be the proper subject of philosophy. This suggests that, according to Heidegger, whatever the inadequacies of the tradition about the proper subject of philosophy, it can’t consist in falsehood simpliciter.

Still, Heidegger believes that the tradition has an inadequate view of the proper subject of philosophy. My contention is that this inadequacy consists in partial truth, and I base this claim on the idea that the inadequacy is best described by saying that, according to Heidegger, the tradition has adopted an inadequate standpoint toward entities qua entities. As I showed in my previous section, Heidegger believes there are two standpoints we can take over entities in general, the theoretical and the pretheoretical one. From a theoretical standpoint, entities appear (to us) as objects; from a pretheoretical standpoint, entities appear (to us) as tools. More importantly, Heidegger has shown that the theoretical standpoint is based on the pretheoretical one: only because entities appear (to us) as tools in the first instance can they subsequently appear (to us) as objects. According to Heidegger, the tradition has adopted a theoretical
standpoint toward entities. In so doing, and has overlooked the existence of a pretheoretical standpoint toward them: as a result, it has taken entities appearing (to us) as objects as the proper subject of philosophy. This is easily shown. According to Heidegger:

Even where the issue is not only one of ontical experience but also of ontological understanding, the interpretation of Being takes its orientation in the first instance from the Being of entities within-the-world. Thereby the Being of what is proximally ready-to-hand [tool-like] gets passed over, and entities are first conceived as a context of Things (res) which are present-at-hand. “Being” acquires the meaning of “Reality.” Substantiality becomes the basic characteristic of Being. (BT: 245)

Now if I am right that, according to Heidegger, entities appear (to us) as objects based on their appearing (to us) as tools, the tradition has adopted a secondary (not wrong) standpoint toward entities; while the secondary standpoint targets the right object, i.e., entities qua entities, it only sees an aspect of it: entities appearing (to us) as objects, not as tools.

The tradition, I conclude, has mistaken according to Heidegger the part for the whole, and that’s what is inadequate about its view of the proper subject of philosophy. Obviously, “part” and “whole” here don’t have a literal meaning, but a figurative one; and here, as I suggested in Chapter 1, is where the notion of standpoint fits in. What we have instead of a part versus the whole is a secondary versus a basic standpoint toward entities. If I adopt a secondary standpoint toward entities I see entities appearing (to me) as objects. According to Heidegger, this standpoint toward entities is inadequate because, prior to appearing (to us) as objects, entities appear (to us) as tools, and our goal is to describe how entities appear (to us) at their most general. Now this standpoint isn’t inadequate in the sense that is wrong, but in the sense that is secondary. It is not wrong because, even though entities appearing (to us) as objects doesn’t cover the full spectrum of philosophical investigation, still it’s an important part of this spectrum. This, I conclude, allows us to make sense of the fact that Heidegger both criticizes the tradition for providing an inadequate account of the subject of philosophy and credits it with discovering significant truth about it. The same idea will hold for Heidegger’s criticisms of the account provided by the philosophical tradition about human being.

211 “[I]t has long been held that the way to grasp the Real is by that kind of knowing which is characterized by beholding [das anschauende Erkennen].” (BT: 246)
3.1.4 Summary

Before proceeding to the next section, let me summarize what we have so far. Heidegger believes that the question: What is human being? is philosophically important, but only if it’s taken to ask: What does it mean to be for human being? This question itself is important only with a view to the broader question: What does it mean to be for entities in general? This is the question about Being. The question about Being is the central question of philosophy. “Being” is short for “what it means to be;” the Being of an entity is what it means to be for that entity. The question about Being needs to be asked, by virtue of the fact that we have a received understanding of Being: to exist (to be real); but this understanding is not philosophically clear. Whatever Being may “be,” it’s not itself an entity. Also, “to be” shouldn’t be equated with “to exist.” Heidegger isn’t doing ontology or metaphysics, but phenomenology. Ontology and metaphysics presuppose a default meaning of Being: to exist (to be real); but the point of Heidegger’s question about Being is to avoid this presupposition. The only way to do that is to describe how entities appear (to us): whether an entity appears (to us) is more basic than whether it exists or not: even non-existing entities appear (to us) in one way or another.

Entities appear (to us) in two different, mutually irreducible ways: as objects and as tools. An example of an entity appearing (to me) as tool is a chair I pull to sit at my desk. An example of an entity appearing (to me) as object is a chair I stare at when making an inventory of the furniture of my office. When an entity appears (to us) as tool, it slips our attention, it, so to say, recedes into the background; but it does appear (to us) and, moreover, as something or other (my pulling the chair to sit lets the chair appear (to me) precisely as chair, and not as, say, table). This means that there is a standpoint from which entities appear (to us) as tools, the pretheoretical standpoint. When an entity appears (to us) as object, it becomes the focus of our attention; it, so to say, stands out from the background. Objective properties of entities appear (to us) only when the entity appears (to us) as object. An entity appearing (to us) as object also appears (to us) as something or other (for instance, as chair and not table, i.e., as an “objective” chair and not table). This means that there is a standpoint from which entities appear (to us) as objects, the theoretical standpoint.
According to Heidegger, entities appear (to us) as objects on the basis of entities appearing (to us) as tools. Only because an entity appears (to me) as chair-to-pull-at can it subsequently appear (to me) as a chair as object of perception. According to Heidegger, therefore, the theoretical standpoint is secondary, the pretheoretical basic.

Heidegger believes that the philosophical tradition has an inadequate view of the proper subject of philosophy, but this view can’t be false simpliciter, because, according to Heidegger, the tradition targets the right subject: entities qua entities. What according to Heidegger is inadequate about the tradition on entities qua entities is best described by saying that it adopts an inadequate standpoint toward them, entities appearing (to us) as objects. According to Heidegger, this standpoint isn’t inadequate in the sense that is wrong, but in the sense that is secondary: a more basic standpoint, the pretheoretical one, takes precedence over it and makes it possible in the first place: entities appear (to us) as tools. While the tradition targets the right object, by virtue of the fact that it adopts a secondary standpoint toward it, it overlooks essential aspects of it. This doesn’t prevent the tradition from making true claims about this right object (for instance, that there are two chief modes of cognition by which we access entities, intuition and intellect). But overlooking essential aspect of it is philosophically inadequate.

3. 2 HUMAN BEING

In this section I show that, according to Heidegger, there is an entity which is unique in so far as it relates to entities qua entities, and this entity is, precisely, human being. This uniqueness singles out human being as the entity we should focus on when trying to answer the question about Being: answering the question what it means to be for human being provides us, according to Heidegger, with a methodologically sound and philosophically interesting route to answering the question what it means to be for entities in general. What it means to be for human being, however, is according to Heidegger something radically different from what it means to be for the rest of entities. By overlooking this fact, the tradition provides us with an account of human being that is inadequate. However, I will argue, this account can’t be for Heidegger false simpliciter, because Heidegger credits this account with having providing us with philosophically interesting truth about human being. I square these two aspects of the account of
human being provided by tradition, inadequacy and truth, by claiming that, according to Heidegger, this account is partially true (in the sense sketched in Chapter 1, to be further elaborated on in Chapter 5).

3.2.1 Dasein

We have already seen that one of the problems with the question: what is Being? is its generality. It makes sense to ask what it means to be for e.g. a chair, an elephant, a number, God, and so on, as it perhaps does for e.g. physical, non-physical, timeless, temporal, and so on, entities; but it doesn’t make as much sense for entities in general. It would be nice if there was one entity such that answering the question what it means to be for that entity provided us with a methodologically sound and philosophically interesting route to answering the question what it means to be for entities in general. Is there such an entity? Heidegger answers in the affirmative: it’s “we ourselves.”

What is special about “we ourselves”? Remember, Heidegger’s big question is what to be means for entities in general. But precisely the extreme generality of the question prevents him from assuming a default meaning of “to be,” which is what the tradition has done: “to exist,” “to be real.” What we need to do is to describe how entities appear (to us), because appearing (to us) is more basic than existing or being real (or failing to exist or to be real). But entities appear to us, that is, to “we ourselves:” “we ourselves” are the ones (to whom) entities appear. On the other hand, “we ourselves” are of course human being. Heidegger then needs to show that human being is unique in so far as thinking about what to be means for human being provides us with a methodologically sound and philosophically interesting route to thinking about what to be means for entities in general.

Heidegger shows this by making two claims. First, Heidegger claims that human being is an entity which is unique in so far as it relates to its own Being. Remember, “Being” is short for “what it means to be,” so what Heidegger is saying here is that human being is an entity which is unique in so far as it relates to its own “what it means to be.” This may sound a bit convoluted, but what Heidegger is saying here is, crudely, that what to be means for human being is an open
question, not for momentary lack of an answer, but intrinsically so, according to the type of Being of human being: only by being (crudely, “living”) does human being settle the question what it means to be for itself.\(^{212}\) How does this show though that thinking about what it means to be for human being provides us with a philosophically interesting route to thinking about what it means to be for entities in general? Heidegger’s idea is that human being or, rather, human being’s relating to its own Being, is responsible for the fact that there is such a thing as meaning of Being in general, i.e., what it means to be for entities in general. This idea ties with Heidegger’s second claim, which says that human being doesn’t relate to entities simpliciter, but to entities on the basis of a prior understanding of their Being, i.e., of what it means for them to be. Human being, Heidegger’s insight goes, does not relate to entities simpliciter, but to entities that already appear (to us) as something or other. Since the question “What is Being?” goes hand in hand with the question “What is the meaning of Being?,” an entity which possesses understanding of Being is unique in so far as there is such a thing as meaning of Being for this entity. Now for Heidegger there is Being only in so far as there is meaning of Being, because Being only appears (to us) in so far as we relate to entities, and we relate to entities only in so far as entities are meaningful (to us). This entity is unique in so far as this entity is revelatory of entities qua entities.\(^{213}\) Moreover, Heidegger suggests, only this entity is revelatory of entities qua entities. This means that there is a sense in which, by virtue of this entity, and it alone, there is such a thing as Being in general, a fact that explains why Heidegger takes human being to be a unique entity which is central in a philosophical understanding of reality. This fact doesn’t imply any “subjectification” or “anthropomorphication” of reality, because Heidegger doesn’t take “we ourselves” to be itself a part of reality but, so to say, the locus where reality qua reality appears. (This basically says that, according to Heidegger, human being is an entity which is central in a philosophically understanding of reality in the sense I sketched in Chapter 1, section 1.2.2.)

Let’s quickly summarize Heidegger’s three reasons for singling out human being as the entity that is crucial to help answer the question about Being.

\(^{212}\) “There is some way in which Dasein understands itself in its Being, and ... to some degree it does so explicitly. It is peculiar to this entity that with and through its Being, this Being is disclosed to it.” (BT: 32)

\(^{213}\) Again in Heideggerian jargon, this entity is unique ontologically speaking. “The question of the meaning of Being becomes possible at all only if there is something like an understanding of Being. Understanding of Being belongs to the kind of Being which the entity called “Dasein” possesses.” (BT: 244) “Only as long as Dasein is (that is, only as long as an understanding of Being is ontically possible), ‘is there’ Being.” (BT: 255)
Dasein [human being] accordingly takes priority over all other entities in several ways. The first priority is an *ontical* one: Dasein is an entity whose Being has the determinate character of existence.

First of all, Heidegger contends, human being is special in so far as it relates to its own Being in being what it is, whereas the rest of entities just “are” what they are simpliciter. In other words, as we will see below, human being’s Being is *existence*.

The second priority is an *ontological* one: Dasein is in itself ‘ontological’, because existence is thus determinative for it.

Second, Heidegger tells us that human being is special in so far as this relating to its own Being involves that this Being is “up in the air” while human being is (“lives,” “makes choices,” and so on). Human being, therefore, answers the question what it means to be for it in, so to say, “practical” terms: not by *thinking* about the question and providing answers to it, but by *existing* (crudely, “living”):

But with equal primordiality Dasein also possesses —as constitutive for its understanding of existence— an understanding of Being of all entities of a character other than its own. Dasein has therefore a third priority as providing the ontico-ontological condition for the possibility of any ontologies. Thus Dasein has turned out to be, more than any other entity, the one which must first be interrogated ontologically. (*BT* 34)

Finally, Heidegger contends, human being is special in so far as relating to its own Being involves relates to entities in general. For instance, in deciding to become a philosopher, I become a dedicated student of philosophy, and thereby relate myself to books-to-be-read, papers-to-be-written, colleagues-to-discuss-philosophy-with, and so on. Heidegger’s insight here isn’t that I just happen to relate to specific entities, but to entities in general and thereby to entities qua entities: my relating to books-to-be-read, papers-to-be-written, and so on, involves *ignoring*, for instance, TV programs-to-be-watched, soccer-games-to-played, and so on; but ignoring these entities is still relating to them.

Before going any further let me take care of an objection someone might have at this point: why go so anthropocentric and assume that human being is so special? Don’t entities *other than* human being relate to their own Being too? Don’t these entities then relate to entities qua entities?
Sentient beings, particularly animals, are the obvious candidates. As a response to this objection, two points must be made. First, although Heidegger certainly believes that human being is unique in the sense indicated, he never explicitly rules out that other entities might qualify as being unique in the same sense too. While many things point to the fact that Heidegger would probably deny it, he leaves the question open. Second, more crucially, what is important in Heidegger’s claim that human being relates to entities qua entities is the qualification *qua entities*. To relate to entities qua entities involves relating to entities which aren’t necessarily real, and only human being seems to be able to do that. For example, human being somehow relates to non-existent entities, such as Santa Claus: the fact that Santa Claus does not exist doesn’t collapse Santa Claus into nothing at all: Santa Claus is still *Santa Claus* and not, say, Merlin the Wizard. But sentient animals or plants don’t seem to relate to non-existent entities: even if they did, the entity in question (for instance Santa Claus) wouldn’t appear (to them) as non-existent. More perhaps to the point, human being has an understanding of the very concept of entity, something that sentient animals or plants arguably lack. Third, finally, to reveal entities *qua entities* is not to relate to entities simpliciter, but to relate to them *in so far as* one’s own Being is up for grabs: we relate to entities as a way of relating to our own Being. Given the terms in which Heidegger’s understands this “being up for grabs” of one’s own Being (see below), it is questionable that animals qualify for this sort of being.

The two fundamental features Heidegger has highlighted result from the *twofold* nature of the phenomenon of Being which *BT* is trying to elicit and, with it, from the *double* formulation of the question about Being. Because there is no such a thing as *Being* other than through the “lenses” of the *meaning of Being*, *Being* goes hand in hand with *meaning* of Being and vice versa.  

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214 For example: “Hier [i.e., in Hobbes’ suggestion that the reflection of a man on a mirror doesn’t appear to animals as being true/false, but as being similar/dissimilar to...] meldet sich ... eine große Schwierigkeit, nämlich auszumachen, was den Tieren als Lebenwesen gegeben und wie ihnen das Gegebene enthüllt ist.” “Here a big difficulty makes its presence felt, namely to decide what is given to animals qua living beings, and how what is given is disclosed to them.” (Heidegger [1927] 1975: 270, my translation.)

215 If Heidegger is right that there is an entity to which it is essential to possess an understanding of Being, it is essential to this entity to relate to entities *qua entities*; Dasein, Heidegger says, is ontically distinctive in that it is ontological (*BT*: 32). “All our efforts ... serve the one aim of finding a possibility of answering the question of the *meaning of Being* in general. To work out this question, we need to delimit that very phenomenon in which something like Being becomes accessible –the phenomenon of the *understanding of Being*. (*BT*: 424)
Before going any further let’s briefly discuss Heidegger’s terminological choice for “human being,” as this choice provides us with interesting clues about Heidegger’s view of human being. Heidegger doesn’t use the term “human being,” but the German neologism “Dasein.”216 This awkward choice (in German as much as in English217) is made with a number of things in mind. Remember that Heidegger wants to describe how entities appear (to us) with the goal to avoid presupposing a default meaning of to be; it is therefore important, Heidegger suggests, to do so while minimizing the risk of smuggling in undesired theoretical baggage. To describe how human being appears (to us) is in particular at odds with using traditional terminological choices to refer to this entity. Both the term “man” or “person,” for example, or philosophical terms like “subject,” “I,” or “consciousness,” theological ones like “spirit” or “soul,” scientific ones like “homo sapiens,” and so on, are theoretically loaded in some way or another. However, simply coining an arbitrary term to refer to this entity doesn’t seem to help either. Given the phenomenological nature of Heidegger’s investigation, it seems better a term that both refers to and describes the entity in question; this is what “Dasein” is meant to do. While “Dasein” refers to human being, “Dasein” also characterizes human being as that particular entity which 1) “is there” (Da-ist; da sein means “to be there” in German); 2) “exists” (Dasein means “existence” in German).

3. 2. 2 Existence

Recall that I started this chapter with the question: What is human being? The philosophical tradition has provided a number of answers to this question; but all of them, according to Heidegger, are inadequate. Heidegger thus must have a better answer, but we need to keep in mind that for Heidegger the question: What is human being? is largely bogus: whatever human being may ultimately be, the philosophically interesting question for Heidegger is: What does it mean to be for human being in the first place? But why? What’s wrong with asking “what is human being?” in the standard way? This question makes reasonably good sense, as do a number of plausible answers one might give, for instance that human being is a rational animal, or a

216 “This entity which each of us is himself and which includes inquiring as one of the possibilities of its Being, we shall denote by the term “Dasein.”” (BT: 27) “[T]his entity –man himself- … we denote by the term “Dasein.”” (BT: 32)
217 Not that the word “Dasein” is awkward in German; it is a fairly common word generally meaning “existence.” What is awkward is to use it to refer to human being, as Heidegger does.
social animal, or God’s most perfect creature, or the only living species of the genus *homos*, and so on. There are two things that according to Heidegger are inadequate (but not necessarily wrong) with these sorts of answers, and for the question itself. First, there’s Heidegger’s familiar idea that in giving any of these answer we are *presupposing* a default meaning of to be for human being; Heidegger’s whole question, however, is whether for human being to be has this default meaning or not. Second, which comes down to the same point, none of these answers characterizes human being in the *right way* (which doesn’t mean that they are “false”), because human being doesn’t have any “what” that adequately characterizes it. Human being, Heidegger tells us, has no “essence.”

According to Heidegger, rather, the “essence” of human being is its *existence*. What Heidegger means here requires quite a bit of unpacking. First, Heidegger’s German word for “existence” that applies to human being is *Existenz*, not *Dasein* (this already suggests quasi-technicality, given that *Dasein* is much more common in German than *Existenz*). Second, “to exist,” when applied to human being, does not mean, in fact it is sharply *opposed* to “to exist” in its usual sense. We say, for instance, that horses and New York, but not unicorns and Wonderland, exist. Heidegger would be ok with this. But remember, one of Heidegger’s central insights in *BT* is that to be for human being means a radically *different* thing than to be for the rest of entities; and he believes the term “existence” better captures what to be means for human being. For Heidegger, *to exist* is exclusively reserved to the type of Being of human being. *To exist* means for human being to relate to its own Being, that is, as we have just established, to relate to what it means to be for it. It follows that entities of a nature different from that of human being do not exist or have existence in Heidegger’s sense. (Again, Heidegger doesn’t explicitly rule out the possibility that entities different from human being might exist.) In order to avoid confusion, Heidegger uses the term “to be present-at-hand” (in German, *vorhanden*) to...
mean “to exist” in its usual sense. A horse and New York, as opposed to a unicorn and Wonderland, do not exist, but “are present-at-hand,” in Heidegger’s parlance. “Existence” contrasts to “presence-at-hand” (in German, Vorhandenheit); a more traditional choice, endorsed by Heidegger, is “reality.” (Incidentally, this shows that for Heidegger “to exist” in its usual sense and “to be real” are roughly synonyms).

On the other hand, Heidegger says, human being is characterized by the fact that, what it means to be for it, its Being, i.e., existence, is “in each case mine.”220 Heidegger’s insight here is that, when thinking about human being, we need to think in terms of a first-person perspective. Remember, the fundamental trait about human being is the fact that it relates to itself in being what it is, and that is something, that as far as “I” am concerned, only belongs to “me.” Any terminological or conceptual choice smuggling in assumptions to the effect that human relates to itself in an “indifferent” or “neutral” fashion falsifies what Heidegger thinks is essential to capture here.

3. 2. 3 Pretheoretical versus Theoretical

In section 3.1.2. I showed that, according to Heidegger, we can adopt two different standpoints toward entities in general, a theoretical and a pretheoretical one. Moreover, I argued, the former is based on the latter, so the former can be understood as being secondary, and the latter, basic. My contention now is that, given that human being is itself an entity, both claims should carry over human being for Heidegger too.

It’s easy to show that this is indeed the case. What complicates matters a bit is that the standpoint toward human being which works as contrast pair with “theoretical” isn’t exactly the pretheoretical one. Or rather, it is the pretheoretical one, but this must be understood now in a different sense than before if we want to do justice to Heidegger’s insight that human being is an entity of a radically different sort of nature than the rest of entities. Remember, this difference consists in the fact that human being relates to its own Being in being what it is, whereas the rest of entities just “are” what they are. In other words, the rest of entities have an essence, whereas

220 In German, jemeinig; it can be substantivized as Jemeinigkeit.
human being has *existence*. Remember also that, according to Heidegger, relating to one’s own Being is something that one can do only on his own: only *I* relate to *my* own Being, *you* relate to *your* own Being, and so on. This means that for Heidegger the difference between *other* human beings appearing (to me) and *I* appearing (to myself), that is, between a *third-person* and a *first-person* way of appearing, is philosophically important. From these two insights of Heidegger’s I draw the conclusion that cutting across the *theoretical* versus *pretheoretical* distinction in the standpoints toward entities in general there is a distinction between a *first*-person versus a *third*-person standpoint toward human being. According to Heidegger, in other words, human being can appear (to us) in *two* quite different, mutually irreducible ways: as *other people* and as “*I*.” (If we take seriously Heidegger’s insight that we relate to existence only from a “first-person perspective,” I contend, these must be two different, mutually irreducible ways in which human being appear (to us).) But these two ways in which human being appears (to us) can *themselves* be divided, depending on whether we adopt a *theoretical* or a *pretheoretical* standpoint: *other people* can appear (to me) from *both* a pretheoretical and a theoretical standpoint; *I*, on the other hand, can appear (to myself) from *both* a pretheoretical and a theoretical standpoint.\textsuperscript{221} Let’s see how this distinctions work in more detail.

According to Heidegger, from a theoretical standpoint human being appears (to us) as *object*. This isn’t surprising, because I’ve already established in section 3.1.2. that from a theoretical standpoint entities in general appear (to us) as objects, and that from a theoretical standpoint there isn’t a difference of Being between human being and the rest of entities: they way I appear (to myself) from a *theoretical* standpoint doesn’t differ, as far as Being is concerned, from the way other entities appear (to me) (I certainly appear (to myself) in a more “intimate” way but, if I adopt a theoretical standpoint toward myself, I appear (to myself) still as an *object*). It’s easy to show that, according to Heidegger, human being *can* and does sometimes appear (to us) as *object*; therefore, as I established, from a *theoretical* standpoint. This is true of “theoretical” in Heidegger’s broad sense (for instance, I can observe my office mate to find out whether he is nice, generous, shy, talkative, and so on). But it’s true of “theoretical” also in the narrower sense in which we observe human being to come up with *theories* about it. Heidegger is well aware

\textsuperscript{221} We need to be careful with this sharp distinction between a first-person and a third-person way of appearance: according to Heidegger, our everyday life is characterized by the fact that we live “impersonally” for the most part of the time, thus in such a way that first- and third- person standpoints are largely blurred.

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that there are a variety of both sciences and areas of philosophy that study human being:
anthropology, biology, psychology, sociology, ethics, political philosophy, philosophical
anthropology, and so on; moreover, Heidegger admits, all these disciplines can and do provide us
with theoretically interesting truth about human being:

[T]here are many ways in which [human being] has been interpreted, and these are all at Dasein’s [human being’s]
disposal. Dasein’s ways of behaviour, its capacities, powers, possibilities, and vicissitudes, have been studied with
varying extent in philosophical psychology, in anthropology, ethics, and ‘political science’, in poetry, biography,
and the writing of history, each in a different fashion. (BT: 37)

Whether these disciplines, however, can provide us with philosophically interesting truth about human being is for Heidegger an open question. (I’ll come back to this in a minute).²²²

Let’s consider now the pretheoretical standpoint we can adopt over human being. As I suggested, what we have here is two ways (not just one) in which human being can appear (to us), depending on whether it’s other human beings or “myself” who do so. I have already established that there is a radical, mutually irreducible difference between how other human beings appear (to me) and how I appear (to myself); but this shouldn’t distract us from the present point that, from a pretheoretical standpoint, both of them oppose themselves to human being appearing (to us) as object (a theoretical standpoint).

First, from a pretheoretical standpoint other human beings appear (to me) in a way that Heidegger subsumes under the heading of (what he calls) “Being-with.” Admittedly, it’s a bit difficult to spell out what exactly Heidegger means by “Being-with,” but we can go a long way by drawing on our previous distinction between pretheoretical and theoretical standpoints toward entities in general. Heidegger’s idea here is that, in an analogous way in which things appear (to me) in the first instance as tools, i.e., as things to be practically dealt with (and only subsequently as objects, i.e., as things possessing objective properties such as metallic, 3 inches long, and of 1 pound of weight), other people appear (to me) in the first instance as agents to practically interact with (and only subsequently as “human objects,” i.e., human being with objective

²²² It’d be easy to show Heidegger does distinguish philosophically and scientifically interesting truth, both generally and about human being in particular. Heidegger is furthermore committed to the view that philosophically interesting truth is more basic than scientifically interesting one.
properties, like for instance being blonde, handsome, intelligent, moody, a communist, and so on). Suppose, to look for an example, that I step into my office and find my office mates John, James, and Robert working there. Remember once again that Heidegger is doing phenomenology, because he believes that only from a phenomenological standpoint we are free of the presupposition that to be has a privileged default meaning: to exist, to be real. Heidegger’s contention is that, in the example, John, James, and Robert don’t appear (to me) as objects of perception (that, by way of an addition, happen to be human beings); rather, they appear (to me) as, say, the co-workers I say “Hello!” to, the friends I want to ask about playing soccer next weekend, and so on. The fact that John, James, and Robert are individuals with a number of objective features is indisputable, but those objective features don’t appear (to me) unless I change my standpoint toward my office mates, from agents to practically interact with to objects of perception.

Second, from a pre-theoretical standpoint, I appear (to myself) as existing. This, too, requires quite a bit of spelling out, but at least Heidegger’s negative point is relatively clear: there is a way in which I appear (to myself) that does not consist in my observing myself. Observing oneself involves objectifying oneself, which in turn involves seeing oneself from a third-person standpoint. Heidegger’s idea here is that there is a genuinely first-person standpoint from which we appear (to ourselves). A comparison with the idea of Sartre’s unreflective consciousness might help here. Remember that in Chapter 2 Sartre showed that for consciousness to be conscious of itself, it doesn’t need to reflect, to take itself as an object. Rather, consciousness is non-positionally conscious of itself at the same time that it’s conscious of an object other than itself. Heidegger’s idea is similar, except that he doesn’t locate this pretheoretical standpoint in consciousness, but in human being’s practical engagement with the world. Moreover, Heidegger’s account of this pretheoretical standpoint is much more detailed, built on the idea that there is a temporal dimension to this pretheoretical standpoint. Being temporal, this pretheoretical standpoint is past-, present-, and future-oriented. An example in which we appear (to ourselves) from a pretheoretical standpoint is moods (this is the past-oriented dimension of the pretheoretical standpoint). According to Heidegger, we are never free of moods; if we master a mood, we do it by means of a counter-mood; more importantly, however, human being does

\[ B T: 175. \]
appear (to itself) by means of moods: moods, Heidegger tells us, aren’t inert states of mind sitting there in our consciousness; they are intentional by nature. When I feel sad or cheerful, I appear (to myself) as feeling sad or cheerful.\(^{224}\) Even more importantly, Heidegger argues that by mood, human being appears (to itself) prior to and beyond all cognition and volition.\(^{225}\) Remember that a mood is just an example in which we appear (to ourselves) from a pretheoretical standpoint. Another example is possibilities (projects) (this is the future-oriented counterpart).

### 3.2.4 Partial Truth: Human Being

I have now enough expository material to show that, according to Heidegger, the philosophical tradition has provided us with an inadequate account of human being that, on analysis, proves not to be false, but rather partially true in the sense sketched in Chapter 1, to be further elaborated in Chapter 5. In my next section I will concentrate on human being’s relation to the world and show how my thesis applies to the tradition’s account of this relation too.

The starting point of my case is, once again, Heidegger’s dissatisfaction with the philosophical tradition’s failure to raise the question about Being. This time, however, this dissatisfaction applies to the failure to raise the question, not about the Being of entities in general, but of human being. Here’s how Heidegger expresses his dissatisfaction:

In the course of this history [the history of Greek ontology\(^{226}\)] certain distinctive domains of Being have come into view and have served as the primary guides for subsequent problematics: the ego cogito of Descartes, the subject, the “I,” reason, spirit, person. But these all remain uninterrogated as to their Being and its structure, in accordance with the thoroughgoing way in which the question of Being has been neglected. (BT: 44)

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\(^{224}\) “In having a mood, Dasein is always disclosed moodwise as that entity to which it has been delivered over in its Being.” (BT: 173)

\(^{225}\) BT: 175.

\(^{226}\) It’d be easy to show that, according to Heidegger, the philosophical tradition, including contemporary philosophy, is essentially a two-millennia-long development of Greek ontology: “Greek ontology and its history … in their numerous filiations and distortions determine the conceptual character of philosophy even today.” (BT: 43) “In the Middle Ages this uprooted Greek ontology became a fixed body of doctrine.” (BT: 43) “[T]he [Greek] ontology that it has arisen has deteriorated to a tradition in which it gets reduced to something self-evident —merely material for reworking, as it was for Hegel.” (BT: 43); and so on.
The ego cogito of Descartes, subject, “I,” reason, spirit, person, and so on don’t seem to coincide with human being, but Heidegger takes them to do so nonetheless: it’s easy to show that for Heidegger all these are standard methodological choices of Modern philosophers to find out the nature of human being. In this passage, therefore, Heidegger is making two points: first, the tradition (in its Modern period) has failed to ask the question about the Being of human being; second, this is just as expected, given that the tradition has failed to ask the question about Being in general. But what is exactly inadequate about this failure?

The chief inadequacy about the philosophical tradition, according to Heidegger, is that it replicates, from a theoretical standpoint, the chief inadequacy into which human being falls when it adopts a pretheoretical standpoint toward entities in general. Human being, Heidegger tells us over and over again, tends to understand its own Being in terms of the type of Being of those entities which, precisely, human being is not. Alternatively worded, according to Heidegger, human being tends to understand its own Being in terms of what he encounters most proximally, worldly things or more generally the world:

The kind of Being which belongs to Dasein is … such that, in understanding its own Being, it has a tendency to do so in terms of that entity towards which it comports itself proximally and in a way which is essentially constant — in terms of the ‘world’. In Dasein itself, and therefore in its own understanding of Being, the way the world is understood is, as we shall show, reflected back ontologically upon the way in which Dasein itself gets interpreted. (BT: 36-7)

We will see in our next section that the ‘world’, with scare quotes, is Heidegger’s way to refer to the totality of entities that appear (to us) as objects. Heidegger is thus saying here that human being has a tendency to understand its own Being in terms of entities appearing (to us) as objects. This implies two inadequacies: first, other entities have a Being which is radically different from the Being of human being; second, other entities appear (to us) as objects, but that’s a secondary way in which entities appear (to us): the basic way in which entities appear (to us) is as tools. (I’ll elaborate on these two inadequacies in a minute).

Heidegger expresses the same dissatisfaction about the tradition’s failure to ask about the Being of human being in a different, telling passage, in which he says:
The two sources which are relevant for the traditional anthropology — the Greek definition and the clue which theology has provided — indicate that over and above the attempt to determine the essence of ‘man’ as an entity, the question of his Being has remained forgotten, and that this Being is rather conceived as something obvious or ‘self-evident’ in the sense of the Being-present-at-hand of other created Things. (BT: 75)

Heidegger is saying two things here. First, the tradition sees the Being of human being as something obvious; in the absence of anything philosophically problematic about it, this Being hasn’t even become something to wonder about. Remember, by now we know that the Being of an entity is what it means for that entity to be; and that, according to Heidegger, what it means to be for human being isn’t settled at all, because, more generally, what it means to be for entities in general isn’t settled at all either. But this is what the tradition has done: it has taken for granted a default meaning of Being, namely “to exist,” “to be real,” to apply to human being. Second, the philosophical tradition has taken the Being of human being to be essentially the same as that of the rest of entities, i.e., presence-at-hand, “existence” in the usual sense.

It is worth noting that what Heidegger says of the tradition in the paragraph above holds also for specific figures in this tradition. One of these figures (about whom I shall say more in the next section), an exemplary instance according to Heidegger of how inadequate can philosophical theories of human being go, is Descartes. Heidegger tells us:

The idea of Being as permanent presence-at-hand not only gives Descartes a motive for identifying entities within-the-world with the world in general, and for providing so extreme a definition of their Being; it also keeps him from bringing Dasein’s ways of behaving into view in a manner which is ontologically appropriate. … [Descartes] takes the Being of ‘Dasein’ … in the very same way as he takes the Being of the res extensa — namely, as substance. (BT: 131)

The res extensa is how Descartes’ characterizes the Being of the world. “Substance,” in the way Heidegger understands the term, is roughly another name for presence-at-hand (at least, as far as what it means to be for it). Thus Heidegger is saying in this passage that, according to Descartes, the Being of Dasein is presence-at-hand.227 From what I’ve explained in my section 3.2.2. above, this is of course inadequate for Heidegger: presence-at-hand is what it means to be for entities

227 “Descartes … says that cogitationes are present-at-hand, and that in these an ego is present-at-hand too.” (BT: 254) Descartes’ ego doesn’t prima facie coincide with human being but, as I showed two pages back, Heidegger takes Descartes’ ego to be a methodological choice to study the nature of human being. Heidegger’s view seems to be historically accurate, given that Descartes takes human being to essentially be a res cogitans, and the res cogitans to essentially be (or at least consist of) an ego (we saw this in my chapter on Sartre; see Chapter 2, section 2.1.).
not of the type of Being of human being; whatever means to be for human being, Heidegger urges, it’s not presence-at-hand.

All the evidence I’ve provided up to now simply shows that, according to Heidegger, there is something philosophically inadequate in the way the philosophical tradition has accounted for the nature of human being. That the accounts of human being provided by the tradition are inadequate for Heidegger scarcely needs demonstration. We already know, on the one hand, that Heidegger thinks the Being of human being is not obvious at all, because, more generally, the Being of entities in general is not obvious at all; the question about Being needs to be asked, and that includes, as a preliminary step, to ask the question about the Being of human being. We know, on the other hand, that according to Heidegger the Being of human being is not the same as that of the rest of entities: the latter’s Being is presence-at-hand, whereas the former’s is existence, and, as I explained in section 3.2.2., Heidegger is eager to contrast presence-at-hand with existence:

[O]ur ontological task is to show that when we choose to designate the Being of this entity [human being] as “existence” [Existenz], this term does not and cannot have the ontological signification of the traditional term “existentia;” ontologically, existentia is tantamount to Being-present-at-hand, a kind of Being which is essentially inappropriate to entities of Dasein’s [human being’s] character. (BT: 67)

The crucial question, that I proceed to consider now, is the following: does Heidegger believe that the accounts of human being offered by the tradition are false? On various grounds, I want to answer in the negative. Moreover, I will contend, Heidegger acknowledges that past philosophical accounts of human being contain philosophically interesting truth. To square these two facts, namely, that Heidegger believes these accounts are inadequate, but still admits that they contain philosophically interesting truth, I will suggest that according to Heidegger these accounts are partially true in the sense sketched in Chapter 1, to be further elaborated on in Chapter 5.

First off, and replicating what I already argued when discussing Heidegger on the proper subject of philosophy, there is a relatively innocuous reason why Heidegger doesn’t believe the tradition’s account of human being is false: Heidegger doesn’t take the tradition to be offering any account to start with, if by “account” we understand a set of interconnected theses. It is true
that, according to Heidegger, the tradition is guilty of some serious inadequacies about human being; but this doesn’t necessarily involve making a *claim* about human being, whether true or false. More specifically, the tradition approaches human being (as a philosophical topic) in an inadequate way; but to approach *x* in an inadequate way isn’t of course the same as making a *claim* (true or false) about *x*. Suppose, to illustrate the point, that I address my landlord, whose name is Peter, by calling him John. Of course there is something inadequate in my calling him this way, but one can’t say that I am making any *false* claim about my landlord, for the simple reason that I’m not making any *claim* to start with: to *call* someone John isn’t the same as to claim *that* this person’s name is John. Something similar, I suggest, is going on here: the tradition approaches (i.e., “addresses”) human being in an inadequate way (of course, we still need to spell out what “to approach” means here); but this isn’t the same as saying that the tradition is making a *claim*, whether true or false, about human being.

Of course, this is a very preliminary point that can’t stop us very long. To *call* someone John is obviously a different thing than to claim that this person’s name is John; but to (sincerely) *call* someone John entails that one *believes* that this person’s name is John, and that involves a *claim* (or at least disposition to make a claim). Analogously, the tradition approaching human being as being *x* or *y* entails that the tradition *believes* that human being is *x* or *y*, and that involves a *claim* (or disposition to make a claim). If this is correct, we have to ask ourselves three things. First, according to Heidegger how does the tradition exactly approach human being? Second, according to Heidegger what is the *belief* implicit in the tradition’s so approaching human being? Third, according to Heidegger is this belief *true* or *false*? The two most important questions for my purposes are the second and the third: once we have identified a belief about human being held by the tradition, we’ll have a concrete basis to think whether according to Heidegger there is or there is not falsehood as opposed to partial truth.

Let’s start by considering the first question. Admittedly, “to approach” is a vague term here, and so is the question “how does the tradition exactly approach human being”? We have already seen that Heidegger’s chief concern is that the tradition hasn’t raised the question about the Being of human being; but this is the same as assuming a default understanding of what to be means for human being. Finally, however, Heidegger’s overarching question about Being concerns entities
qua entities. This gives us a clue as to what “approach” means here: to take an entity to be this or that sort of entity. Our question then is: what sort of entity does the tradition take human being to be? Heidegger’s answer is quite clear: an entity like the rest of entities, a present-at-hand entity. This leads us to the second question.

The second question is easily answered; in fact I’ve already answered two pages back: according to Heidegger, the implicit belief in the tradition’s assuming a default understanding of what to be means for human being is that human being is an entity like the rest of entities, i.e., an entity whose Being is presence-at-hand, not existence.228

The third question is more difficult to answer. Remember, the question is whether according to Heidegger the tradition’s belief implicit in its assuming a default understanding of what to be means for human being, i.e., that human being is an entity whose Being is presence-at-hand, is true or false. The obvious candidate answer is clear: according to Heidegger, this belief is false. What I want to contend is that leaving things at that fails to do justice to the circumstance that Heidegger credits the tradition with, in so believing, having contributed philosophically interesting truth about human being. For this reason, I propose to construe Heidegger’s view of the belief under discussion as being partially true, rather than false. As I anticipated in Chapter 1, instrumental to my case is the insight that according to Heidegger the belief in question results from the tradition having adopted a secondary (not wrong) standpoint toward human being.

I will not spend much time showing that Heidegger takes the tradition to believe that human being is an entity whose Being is presence-at-hand, and that Heidegger takes this belief to be false.229 What I want to show is that Heidegger credits the tradition with, in so believing, having providing us with philosophically interesting truth about human being. This significant truth

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228 See quote above: “The two sources which are relevant for the traditional anthropology —the Greek definition and the clue which theology has provided— indicate that over and above the attempt to determine the essence of ‘man’ as an entity, the question of his ‘Being’ has remained forgotten, and that this Being is rather conceived as something obvious or ‘self-evident’ in the sense of the Being-present-at-hand of other created Things.” (BT: 75)

229 [O]ur ontological task is to show that when we choose to designate the Being of this entity [human being] as “existence” [Existenz], this term does not and cannot have the ontological signification of the traditional term “existential;” ontologically, existential is tantamount to Being-present-at-hand, a kind of Being which is essentially inappropriate to entities of Dasein’s [human being’s] character. (BT: 67)
concerns two facts about human being to which Heidegger attaches great philosophical importance.

The first fact is the following: while human being is an entity which is different from the rest of entities in so far as it exists in Heidegger’s sense, human being can be taken to be an entity similar to the rest of entities in so far as it exists in the usual sense too; the fact that human being exists in Heidegger’s sense doesn’t of course prevent it from existing in the usual sense too: otherwise we would be committed to the absurd idea that human being doesn’t exist in the usual sense. But this means, in Heidegger’s parlance: the fact that human being exists doesn’t prevent it from being present-at-hand too; or rather, as Heidegger qualifies, from being taken, in some circumstances, to be present-at-hand too. According to Heidegger,

[...]ven entities which are not world-less —Dasein, for example— are present-at-hand ‘in’ the world, or, more exactly, can with some right and within certain limits be taken as merely present-at-hand. (BT: 82)

This passage clearly indicates that, for Heidegger, taking human being to be an entity present-at-hand can’t be false simpliciter; not, at any rate, “with some right and within certain limits.” But taking human being to be an entity present-at-hand is precisely what, according to Heidegger, the philosophical tradition has done, as I’ve already shown. Therefore, the tradition’s view of human being can’t be false simpliciter according to Heidegger.

Of course, someone will object, but this conclusion rests on a misunderstanding. Human being evidently exists in the usual sense; to deny it would be absurd, and this is what Heidegger is acknowledging in the quote above. But the fact that it exists in the usual sense is true of human being, not of its Being. Remember that Heidegger carefully distinguishes between an entity and the Being of an entity: an entity is something or other, for instance human being or a chair; the Being of an entity is what means to be for that entity, for instance what it means to be for human being or a chair. Clearly, what it means to be for x is not the same thing as x itself. From the fact that human is present-at-hand (i.e., exists in the usual sense) doesn’t follow that what it means to be for human being is presence-at-hand (i.e., “to exist” in the usual sense). The former,
Heidegger is telling us, may well be true, but the latter is certainly false. What Heidegger has taken the tradition to believe about the former is relatively beside the point: the philosophically important question, per section 3.1.1., is what it means to be for human being; in this respect, Heidegger is clear that he takes the tradition to believe the latter, and the latter according to Heidegger is false.

My response to this objection is simple: Heidegger does distinguish between an entity and the Being of an entity, but the tradition, precisely, does not. Of course, this is according to Heidegger something inadequate on the part of the tradition; but I’ve already shown that failure to distinguish between an entity and the Being of an entity doesn’t involve making a false claim about an entity. More to the point, in the absence of this distinction, the belief held by the tradition that human being is an entity which is present-at-hand can be interpreted in two ways: (a) human being is an entity which is present-at-hand; (b) the Being of human being is presence-at-hand, and it’s not clear to which Heidegger gives preference to. As I’ve already shown, Heidegger believes that (b) is false simpliciter; however, he believes that (a) is true, at least “with some right and within certain limits.”

The second fact to which Heidegger attaches importance concerns the uniqueness of human being. According to Heidegger, human being is a unique entity. I take it as evident that this is a quite committed philosophical claim that not all philosophers will be happy to share. Those who do, and especially those who first defended it, must for Heidegger have contributed philosophically interesting truth. Now it’s easy to show that Heidegger takes the philosophical tradition to have defended that claim. Therefore, the philosophical tradition has according to Heidegger contributed philosophically interesting truth about human being. From this simple fact it follows that, whatever the inadequacies of the philosophical tradition on human being, they can’t be explained in terms of falsehood simpliciter.

Remember that, per section 3.2.1., the uniqueness of human being for Heidegger comes down to its ontico-ontological priority over the rest of entities: human being is ontically unique in so far

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[^230]: This could be shown with the following quote: “Dasein [human being] is essentially not a Being-present-at-hand.” (**BT**: 138)
as it relates to its own Being in being what it is; and is *ontologically* unique in so far as, in so relating to its own Being, it relates to entities qua entities. In plainer terms, human being is unique in so far as it “makes up” its “essence” itself, instead of receiving a ready-made one; and in doing so, human being doesn’t relate to things simpliciter, but to *things taken to be* something or other. I don’t think it requires a lot of effort to show that this claim of Heidegger’s is quite philosophically committed. Many philosophers, both contemporary and traditional, and on a variety of grounds, refuse any sort of uniqueness to human being. For these philosophers it is then the case that human being is *not* a unique entity (in the sense indicated). From the fact that Heidegger’s claim is philosophically committed, I take it to be non-trivial. And from this fact I deduce that any philosophical view of human being in which it is included that claim in question provides us according to Heidegger with philosophically interesting truth. Now it’s possible to show that, according to Heidegger, the *tradition* has *defended* such a view. Heidegger tells us in the first place that

Dasein’s ontico-ontological priority was seen quite early. (*BT*: 34)

Remember that the claim that human being has an ontico-ontological priority is defended by Heidegger; as we have just seen, moreover, this claim is quite philosophically committed. Heidegger elaborates in detail on the same idea in the following passage:

Aristotle says … “Man’s soul is, in a certain way, entities.” … Aristotle’s principle, which points back to the ontological thesis of Parmenides, is one which Thomas Aquinas has taken up in a characteristic discussion. … Thomas has to demonstrate that the *verum* is … a *transcendens*. He does this by invoking an entity which, in accordance with its very manner of Being, is properly suited to ‘come together with’ entities of any sort whatever. This distinctive entity … is the soul (*anima*). *Here the priority of ‘Dasein’ [‘human being’] over all other entities emerges.* (*BT*: 34, my emphasis)

There can be no doubt that in this passage Heidegger is crediting the tradition with holding that human being has a priority over the rest of entities. He mentions three figures he takes to be quite central in the tradition, Parmenides, Aristotle and Aquinas, who seem to be saying something about the soul. (Of course, whatever the soul may exactly be, it doesn’t seem to exactly coincide with human being; but Heidegger clearly connects the two, and his last sentence suggests that he takes the soul to be a standard choice by Ancient and Medieval philosophy to pick out human
being under a different concept (this assimilation of “soul” to “human being” by Heidegger merits further discussion)). According to Heidegger, then, Parmenides, Aristotle, and Aquinas have realized that human being is an entity which is unique in so far as it lets entities qua entities appear. This shows that Heidegger credits the tradition (Parmenides, Aristotle, and Aquinas in this case) with having discovered philosophically interesting truth about human being.

What we have as a preliminary result is that, first, Heidegger finds something significantly inadequate about the philosophical tradition while, on the other hand, he credits the tradition with having discovered philosophically interesting truth. How do we square these two facts? Once again, my answer is partial truth in the sense sketched in Chapter 1 (to be further elaborated on in Chapter 5). Remember that I understand partial truth as truth of part of an object, based on the fact that one is adopting a standpoint toward an object which is secondary (not wrong) with respect to a more basic one, which takes precedence over it and makes it possible in the first place. The problem with the tradition’s view of human being according to Heidegger, I contend, is best described by saying that, according to Heidegger, it results from having adopted an inadequate standpoint toward human being. Remember, I have already argued in section 3.1.2. that Heidegger believes there are two standpoints we can take over entities in general, a theoretical and a pretheoretical one; moreover, the theoretical one is according to Heidegger grounded on, that is, secondary with respect to, the pretheoretical. I have argued in section 3.2.3., furthermore, that this distinction carries over to two standpoints we can take over human being too: there is both a pretheoretical and a theoretical standpoint. Moreover, the theoretical standpoint we can adopt over human being is based on the pretheoretical; the theoretical standpoint is secondary, the pretheoretical one is basic. What I contend now is that, according to Heidegger, the chief inadequacy of the philosophical tradition about human being is best described by saying that the tradition has adopted a theoretical standpoint toward human being, instead of a pretheoretical one. In doing so, what the tradition has been able to observe of human being isn’t an altogether wrong object (something that is not what human being is about), but the right object; still, it has been able to observe only a “part” (i.e., a mode, an aspect) of it.

This is perhaps best shown in a negative way: according to Heidegger, the tradition has overlooked the pretheoretical standpoint toward human being. Remember that from a theoretical
standpoint human being appears (to us) as object; from a pretheoretical standpoint human being appears (to us) as Being-with (other people) or as existing (‘me’). According to Heidegger, then, the tradition has overlooked the fact that human being appears (to me) as Being-with (other people) and as existing (I myself). Moreover, I showed that according to Heidegger the pretheoretical standpoint toward human being makes the theoretical one possible: only because I appear (to myself) as existing can I subsequently appear (to myself) as an object; only because other people appear (to me) as Being-with can they subsequently (and artificially) appear (to me) as objects. The theoretical standpoint toward human being, in other words, is according to Heidegger secondary with respect to the pretheoretical one.

According to Heidegger, the tradition has had in view the right object, human being in so far as it relates to entities qua entities. Given that it’d be possible to have in view what according to Heidegger is the wrong object, i.e., human being simpliciter (i.e. human being, not as revelatory of entities qua entities, but as a further entity among entities) the fact that the tradition targets the right object involves philosophically interesting truth: it’s not trivial that human being in so far as it relates to entities qua entities is the right object to account for when thinking philosophically about human being. This suggests that, according to Heidegger, whatever the inadequacies of the tradition about the proper subject of philosophy, they can’t be accounted for in terms of falsehood simpliciter. By drawing on the distinction between a pretheoretical and a theoretical standpoint toward human being, it’s possible to make the case that the tradition has provided us with partial truth, not falsehood, over human being: by adopting a secondary standpoint toward human being, the tradition has only been able to observe a secondary aspect of it (presence-at-hand), not its basic one (existence).

3.2.5 Summary

Before proceeding to the last part of the chapter, let me summarize this second part. According to Heidegger, there is an entity which is unique among the rest of entities, in so far as answering the question what it means to be for this entity provides us with a methodologically sound and philosophically interesting route to answering the question what it means to be for entities in general. This entity happens to be “we ourselves,” human being, which explains why, according
to Heidegger, human being plays a central role in a philosophical understanding of reality. The reason why answering what it means to be for “we ourselves” provides us with a route to answering what it means to be for entities in general is that, first, we are the ones to whom entities in general appear; second, “we” doesn’t pick us here as a further entity among entities but, rather, as the locus where there being such a thing as entities in general, i.e., entities qua entities takes place. Getting clear about what it means for “we ourselves” in so far as we are this locus therefore provides us with a philosophically interesting route to getting clear about what it means to be for entities in general. From the fact that we are this locus, and not a further entity among the rest of entities, it doesn’t however follow that “we ourselves,” human being, is not itself an entity; it is, but a unique one: what we need to do is to get clear about its nature.

First, human being is unique in so far as it, and it alone, is what it is by virtue of relating to its own Being, as opposed to the rest of entities, which are what they are simpliciter. Human being, in other words, has no “essence” but, rather, existence. Second, human being is unique in so far as it, and it alone, relates to entities qua entities: not entities in so far as they are, say, this chair or that table versus this desk or that computer, or in so far as they are physical versus non-physical, timeless versus temporal, existing versus non-existing, and so on; but in so far as they just are something or other at all. Both features go hand in hand: human being relating to its own Being by way of relating to entities qua entities; and it relates to entities qua entities by way of relating to its own Being. Additionally, to exist for human being is something that each human being can only do on its own: only I relate to my own Being in being what I am, you relate to your own Being in being what you are, and so on.

There are two standpoints one can adopt towards human being, a theoretical and a pretheoretical one. From a theoretical standpoint, human being appears (to us) as an object. In this case, it holds that human being has the type of Being of the rest of entities: thing-like as opposed to human-like. From a pretheoretical standpoint, human being appears (to us) in two further different ways, depending on whether it’s other human being or I myself who do so. From a pretheoretical standpoint, other human being appear (to me) in the mode of Being-with: as practical agents to interact with, not as objects of perception. From a pretheoretical standpoint, I appear (to myself)
as existing: for instance, through moods I appear (to myself) as, say, sad, bored, or cheerful, prior to any way in which I might appear (to myself) by observing myself as an object.

According to Heidegger, the philosophical tradition has provided us with an inadequate account of human being, but this account isn’t for Heidegger false simpliciter, for three reasons. First, preliminarily, the tradition hasn’t strictly speaking provided us with an account (true or false) of human being; according to Heidegger, the tradition has failed to ask the question about the Being of human being: but failing to ask about the Being of human being isn’t the same as making a claim (true or false) about this Being. Second, the belief implicit in the tradition’s philosophical approach to human being (i.e., an approach based on the failure to ask the question about its Being), i.e., that human being is an entity which is present-at-hand, can’t be false simpliciter for Heidegger, because Heidegger credits the tradition with having discovered significant truth about human being: first, human being exists in the usual sense, in addition to existing in Heidegger’s sense; second, more importantly, human being is an entity which is unique in so far as it reveals entities qua entities.

The best way to square inadequacy with truth on the part of the tradition is to describe in terms of adopting an inadequate standpoint what according to Heidegger is inadequate about the tradition: according to Heidegger, the tradition has adopted an inadequate standpoint toward human being, the theoretical one. This standpoint isn’t inadequate in the sense that it’s wrong, but in the sense that it’s secondary: a more basic standpoint, the pretheoretical one, makes it possible in the first place.

3.3 HUMAN BEING AND THE WORLD

Recall that at the beginning of this chapter I claimed that, according to Heidegger, the best past accounts of human being derive their philosophical significance, not from accounting for the nature of human being in general, but from accounting for this nature focusing on a specific
aspect of human being.\textsuperscript{231} I have already given a clue of why Heidegger believes this is the case: in the first place, human being hasn’t a nature to begin with; if philosophers ask themselves about the “nature” of human being, it is only to the extent that getting clear about this “nature” provides us with a philosophically interesting route to getting clear about the “nature” of entities in general. This already shows that, according to Heidegger, philosophical accounts of human being can’t derive their philosophical significance from accounting for the “nature” of human being in the abstract. However, up to now I have been discussing human being in relation to entities in general and Being, without focusing on specific aspects of human being as an entity. Heidegger believes human being has some aspects which are philosophically important in so far as getting clear about those aspects provides us in turn with a philosophically interesting route to getting clear about what it means to be for human being. In this section, I conclude my case about Heidegger on the tradition and human being showing that, according to Heidegger, the tradition has provided with an inadequate account of one of these aspects, human being’s relation to the world; on inspection, I will claim, this account isn’t inadequate in the sense that it is false, but in the sense that it is partially true. The significance of this conclusion rests on our enabling us to provide an account of Heidegger’s relation to the tradition that does justice to the fact that he both criticizes it and credits it with discovering significant philosophical truth.

3.3.1 World

A cardinal feature of human being is according to Heidegger its relation to the world.\textsuperscript{232} We are constantly interacting with things as well as with other people, and sometimes we engage in theoretical activities that involve cognizing things and other people. If we go from particular things and people to all things and people, it seems there is a totality of things and people, and this totality, or so it seems, is the world. How does human being relate to the world? Heidegger’s

\textsuperscript{231} In my footnote 4 in this chapter I claimed that the idea of a special philosophical discipline dedicated to investigate the nature of human being in general, i.e., a philosophical anthropology, is, despite appearances, relatively recent.

\textsuperscript{232} There is a philosophically interesting story by Heidegger that explains why a relation to the world is a cardinal feature of human being in the first place. Given the complexity of this story, I can’t go into details here, but it is crucially connected to Heidegger’s overall insight that time (or rather, what he calls temporality) is the ultimate background from which human being understands such a thing as Being in general (this is incidentally \textit{BT}’s overall chief thesis). Now there are three dimensions to this basic temporality, past, present, and future, and human being’s relation to the world goes a long way into making sense of the present dimension.
chief contention is that we have a strong tendency, from a pretheoretical standpoint, to think of this relation in terms of a relation between two entities *themselves* in the world.

This view, according to Heidegger, is philosophically inadequate: whatever the relation between human being and world is, it’s *not* a relation between two entities within the world (like, for instance, the water and the glass or the clothes and the cupboard). More importantly for my purposes, Heidegger argues that the philosophical tradition, despite sustained attempts at avoiding this inadequate view, has nonetheless failed to do so. On inspection, Heidegger suggests, the inadequacy of the tradition is to have replicated at a theoretical level the pre-theoretical tendency we have when thinking of this relation. According to Heidegger, this circumstance has led key figures in the philosophical tradition (Descartes and Kant, in particular) to see a philosophically legitimate problem in the de facto relation between human being and world; more specifically: in whether there is a relation in the first place. The legitimate problem takes the form of questions such as: is there a world “out there”? is there an external reality?, do we actually relate to a world? Heidegger makes quite clear that there is something inadequate, not simply about the answers the tradition has given to these questions, but before anything else about the questions themselves. Heidegger’s chief insight, the one I want to draw on to make my present case, is that questions like these make sense only if we *presuppose* a view of both human being and world which, he thinks, is inadequate. What I want to argue is that, according to Heidegger, these views are inadequate, not in the sense that are false, but in the sense that are partially true. Once again, I will base my case in the fact that Heidegger distinguishes between two standpoints we can adopt over the world, a secondary and a basic one.

Let’s start with a very preliminary question: What is the world? Our spontaneous response is to look around, consider things like chairs, trees, buildings, cities, and so on, jump to things like planets, stars, galaxies, and so on, perhaps round out the picture with intangible things like moral values, numbers, maybe God, and conclude with the claim that the world is the *totality* of these things. Alternatively, we might think that the world is something, presumably *thing*-like too, *wherein* all these things are. In the first case we have a *totality* of things; in the second, a “container” of a totality of things. After my previous explanations in this chapter, it doesn’t require a lot of work to show that, according to Heidegger, either picture of the world is based on
a default understanding of what it means to be (in this case for the world), namely, to exist, to be real.

Heidegger believes that this is indeed the way we tend to think of the world in our everyday life. Now philosophers, being presumably more insightful and conceptually sophisticated, should improve on our everyday stance and come up with a more refined (and true) picture of what the world is. Yet the philosophical tradition, Heidegger suggests, doesn’t essentially improve on our everyday stance, and tends to understand the world as a totality of things or as a “container” of this totality. Of course, this is not the impression we get if we read the accounts that different figures in the tradition offer of the world, for instance Descartes and Kant (I focus on Descartes and Kant following Heidegger, who devotes important and detailed discussions on these two figures about human being’s relation to the world): their accounts are based on a number of finely grained conceptual distinctions and insightful points, and we get the feeling that the world, for these authors, is something much more complex than a mere totality of things. But this, Heidegger suggests, is only appearance: behind the most refined accounts of the world we can find in the tradition, the default understanding of Being as to exist, to be real, is at work. How does Heidegger justify this suggestion?

Remember once again that Heidegger is interested in the question what it means to be for entities in general, and all his diagnoses of what is right and wrong about the tradition is framed in terms of how right or wrong is the tradition in assuming a default meaning, for each respective entity or the aspect of an entity under discussion. I have already shown that Heidegger takes the tradition to have assumed a default understanding of what to be means in general, namely to exist, to be real (section 3.1.2.). Something similar, Heidegger believes, is going on in the case of the world: according to Heidegger, the tradition has assumed a default understanding of what to be means for the world, which is to exist, to be real too. (Remember once again that to assume that to be means to exist, to be real, is not the same as holding that the only way to be for an entity is to exist, to be real; it means that to exist, to be real, is the paradigm case of entity; what to be means for non-existent, non-real entities is then explained negatively in terms of what it means to be for existent, real ones). The way the tradition has framed this default understanding of the Being of
the world has resulted, according to Heidegger, in understanding the world in terms of presence-at-hand, as what Heidegger calls Nature:

A glance at previous ontology shows that … [o]ne tries … to Interpret the world in terms of the Being of those entities which are present-at-hand within-the-world … —namely, in terms of Nature. (BT: 93)

According to Heidegger, there is something inadequate about thinking philosophically about the world by interpreting the world in terms of the Being of present-at-hand entities. But, according to Heidegger, what exactly is inadequate in this case? My contention is that, whatever this inadequacy exactly consists in, it can’t be explained in terms of falsehood simpliciter.

A quick way to show how this holds is to show how Heidegger admits that the world can appear (to us) as Nature. Remember once again that Heidegger is doing phenomenology, not because he believes how entities appear (to us), as opposed to how things are “in themselves,” is a better methodological ground to look for philosophically interesting results; but because what the expression “how things are ‘in themselves’” means is philosophically up in the air until we get clear about what to be means in the first place, and the only way to avoid presupposing a default meaning is describe how entities appear (to us) (see section 3.1.1.). All the phenomenologist’s business in the case of the world is consequently to get clear about how the world exactly appears (to us); this will help us settle the question what to be means for the world. In this respect, Heidegger is quite clear that the world does or, more accurately, can in some situations appear (to us) as Nature, i.e., as something present-at-hand:

If one understands Nature ontologico-categorically, one finds that Nature is a limiting case of the Being of possible entities within-the-world. Only in some definite mode of its own Being-in-the-world can Dasein [human being] discover entities as Nature. (BT: 94)

Heidegger is making a negative point here: Nature is not the primary way in which the world appears (to us); but he concedes that the world can appear (to us) as Nature. Therefore, it can’t be false simpliciter to hold, as the tradition does, that the world appears (to us) as Nature.

Still, once again, the tradition has an inadequate view of what the world is, and we need to find out what according to Heidegger is exactly inadequate with this view. My contention is that, according to Heidegger, what is inadequate with this view is best described by saying that it
presupposes an inadequate standpoint toward the world. This standpoint isn’t inadequate in the sense that is wrong, but in the sense that is secondary with respect to a more basic one.\textsuperscript{233} Heidegger makes the negative point clearer in the following passage:

*Neither the ontical depiction of entities within-the-world nor the ontological Interpretation of their Being is such as to reach the phenomenon of the ‘world’. In both of these ways of access to ‘Objective Being’, the ‘world’ has already been ‘presupposed’, and indeed in various ways. (BT: 92)*

Remember that an ontical claim is for Heidegger a claim about an entity; whereas an ontological claim is a claim, account, description, etc. about the Being of an entity, i.e., about what it means to be for that entity. What Heidegger is thus saying in this passage is that to provide a philosophically adequate account of the world (both ontical and ontological) what we should not do is provide an account of entities within-the-world. But it’s easy to show that Heidegger identifies entities-within-the-world with present-at-hand entities.\textsuperscript{234} Therefore, according to Heidegger, to provide a philosophically adequate account of the world what we should not do is provide an account of present-at-hand entities. Furthermore, Heidegger suggests in this passage, to provide an account of present-at-hand entities is inadequate because, in so doing, the ‘world’ has been “presupposed’. What I take this to mean is that, according to Heidegger, to provide an account of the world in terms of entities present-at-hand rests on a secondary, not wrong, standpoint toward the world. If so, however, the account can’t be false simpliciter at least in so far as, once again, the right (as opposed to the wrong) object is targeted. What we need to do now is show that, according to Heidegger, targeting the right object involves in this case having contributed philosophically interesting truth.

3.3.2 Pretheoretical versus Theoretical

Remember, per section 3.1.3., that according to Heidegger there are two mutually irreducible ways in which entities in general appear (to us), as objects and as tools; and that each of these two modes of appearing (to us) presupposes a standpoint, the theoretical and the pretheoretical one, respectively. In section 3.2.3. I claimed that this distinction between a theoretical and a

\textsuperscript{233} “[T]o Dasein, Being in a world is something that belongs essentially.” (BT: 33)

\textsuperscript{234} “The derivative form ‘worldly’ will then apply terminologically to a kind of Being which belongs to Dasein [human being], never to a kind which belongs to entities present-at-hand ‘in’ the world. We shall designate these latter entities as “belonging to the world” or “within-the-world.” (BT: 93)
pretheoretical standpoint carries over for Heidegger to possible standpoints toward human being. My contention now is that this distinction carries over for Heidegger to possible standpoint we can adopt towards the world too. According to Heidegger, we can adopt two standpoints toward the world, a theoretical and a pretheoretical one. From a theoretical standpoint, the world appears (to us) as the totality of entities present-at-hand, as Nature. From a pre-theoretical standpoint, the world appears (to us) as the totality of entities ready-to-hand, as (what Heidegger calls) environment. The world can appear (to us) as a an objective totality of entities like things like chairs, trees, building, cities, and so on; but it can appear (to us), Heidegger suggests, as the totality of entities appearing (to us) as something to practically deal with.\textsuperscript{235}

Heidegger’s next claim parallels the priority relation already seen in my previous sections: the theoretical standpoint toward the world is based on the pretheoretical one; the latter makes the former possible in the first place. Only because the world appears (to me) as a totality of tools to practically deal with can it subsequently appear (to me) as a totality of objects to observe in perception.

Heidegger’s contention that there is more basic standpoint toward the world than the secondary one privileged by the philosophical tradition, involves a terminological change in derivatives and cognates of the term “world.” A worldly entity, in Heidegger’s jargon, is not an entity found in the world, like for instance a tree, a mountain, snow, a hammer, a chair, a city, and so on. Strictly speaking, Heidegger contends, only human being is a worldly entity, since only human being “has world,” i.e., is world-oriented. Heidegger introduces the adjectival term innerworldly to refer to entities found in the world: a tree, a mountain, snow, a hammer, a chair, a city, and so on, are in Heidegger’s jargon innerworldly, not worldly, entities.

3.3.3 Human Being’s Relation to the World

On the basis of my distinction between a pretheoretical and a theoretical standpoint we can adopt over the world, together with my previous point that we can adopt a pretheoretical as well as a

\textsuperscript{235} For example, the work-world of the craftsman (\textit{BT}: 153) is more basic than the world taken as Nature, i.e. qua object of study of the physicist.
theoretical standpoint toward human being, we can now consider the relation between human being and world. Here we have a case in which the tradition, according to Heidegger, has provided us with an account that is false simpliciter (flat-out wrong, not partially true). On inspection, this account is according to Heidegger false simpliciter because underlying it is a view of both world and human being that is philosophically inadequate, but not exactly false.

To start with, both Descartes and Kant agree that, in principle, the relation between human being and the world is philosophically problematic: there is a genuine philosophical problem about this relation. The philosophical problem, moreover, concerns the de facto relation of human being to the word: it is philosophically problematic, according to Descartes and Kant, whether there in fact is a relation between human being and the world in the first place: crudely, human being might conceivably lack a world (in contemporary terms, we might be brains in a vat). Of course, this is Descartes’ and Kant’s starting point. They quickly (or not so quickly) come to the conclusion that we do relate to a world, that human being does not lack a world. Descartes starts from the absolute certainty of the cogito, goes through a proof of God’s existence, and comes to the conclusion that, while we can be mistaken about individual facts about the world (for instance, that there is a chair in front of me), we can’t be mistaken about global facts about the world, i.e., that there is a world at all in the first place. Kant finds Descartes’ proof faulty and offers a different sort of proof in the “Refutation of Idealism” section of his Critique of Pure Reason,\(^\text{236}\) whereby he equally shows that human being does relate to the world.

According to Heidegger, however, the chief flaw remains, and is common to both Descartes and Kant: while they “show” that human being relates to a world, they agree that human being might fail to do so: that is, precisely, why they demand (and offer) a philosophical proof that this relation does in fact exist. Now Heidegger is very clear that Descartes’ and Kant’s claim is false simpliciter (flat-out wrong, not simply partially true): according to Heidegger, human being cannot conceivably lack a world. Here we have an example of a philosophical account of the relation between human being and world (in this case, for illustrative purposes, Descartes and Kant) that includes what Heidegger takes to be falsehood simpliciter. My claim is that this account includes (presupposes) a view of both human being and world that is according to

Heidegger not really false, but partially true. I contend, then, that it is important to distinguish two things here: first, the object (in this case, both human being and world) that philosophers (in this case, Descartes and Kant) target when giving a philosophical account, and the theory about the object. The account may well be false, but justice must be made of the fact that the account targets the right philosophical object (which, per Chapter 1, section 1.2.2., involves the circumstance that interesting truth is being discovered). What I suggest to do justice to this fact is a strategy analogous to the one I used in the case of the proper subject of philosophy and of human being: accept that the account (or claims therein) are false by way of taking the part for the whole.

3. 4 CONCLUSION

To conclude, let me summarize my chief results in this chapter. According to Heidegger, the best past philosophical accounts of human being have been inadequate, but not exactly false; rather, they have been partially true (in a philosophically interesting sense to be further elucidated in my final chapter).

Given the amount of past philosophers whom Heidegger targets in his criticisms, I’ve decided to make my case by drawing on the blanket term “the philosophical tradition” to cover, not all of them, but a position that, according to Heidegger, is common to all of them. Further, because past philosophical accounts of human being derive their significance from illuminating specific aspects of human being, not its nature in general, I’ve focused on one of those aspects, which Heidegger takes to be central: human being’s relation to the world. The account of the philosophical tradition of how human being relates to the world is based on a view of both human being and world which is inadequate but not exactly false (rather, partially true).

According to Heidegger, the question: What is human being? is important in philosophy only to the extent that what is being asked is: What does it mean to be for human being? This question itself, however, is important only with a view to the broader question: What does it mean to be for entities in general? This question, which Heidegger calls the question about Being, needs to be asked: in so far as we deal with entities, we already have a sense of what it means to be for
entities; to *explicitly* make the question is thus to exploit a possibility which is already dictated by this sense. The question about Being can be rephrased as: what makes entities be entities in general?, and Heidegger’s preliminary answer is: Being. Whatever Being might be, it’s not itself an entity. The method to be used when answering this question is *phenomenological*: we need to describe how entities appear (to us) and classify them into different categories, according to how entities differ in what to be means for each sort.

There are two chief ways in which entities appear (to us), entities qua objects and entities qua tools. Correlatively, there are two standpoints we can adopt towards entities in general, the theoretical and the pre-theoretical. To adopt a theoretical standpoint toward an entity doesn’t mean, in Heidegger’s sense, to observe an entity with a view to develop a *theory* about it. It simply means to observe the entity as an *object*. Examples include staring a hammer with a view to its objective properties. From a pre-theoretical standpoint, entities appear (to us) as “tools.” Examples include using a hammer to nail. According to Heidegger, the theoretical standpoint toward entities is secondary, the pre-theoretical one is basic: the latter makes the former possible.

According to Heidegger, there is an entity which is unique, in so far as an understanding of Being belongs to its type of Being (i.e., to what it means to be for it). This singles out that entity as the one we should we starting with when answering the question about Being. This entity is “we ourselves.” Human being is unique as an entity, in so far as what it means to be for it involves *dealing with* entities qua entities, and moreover with a pre-theoretical understanding of their Being; furthermore, human being is unique as an entity in so far as what it means to be for it involves letting *appear* entities qua entities in the first place: human being (and it alone) is revelatory of entities qua entities. This is why human being, according to Heidegger, is so central in a philosophical understanding of reality in general: whatever reality may ultimately be, it is what it is in so far as it appears (to human being); furthermore, the question: what is reality? presupposes the question: what it means to be in general? But this question can only be answered by asking first: what it means to be for human being. Therefore, the question: what it means to be for human being is a necessary step into asking: what is reality?
The two chief characteristics of human being, which Heidegger calls *Dasein*, are its *existence* and its being “myself.” Existence involves that to be for human being, in radical contrast to the rest of entities, consists in relating to itself.

The two standpoints we adopt towards entities in general apply towards human being too. From a theoretical standpoint, human being appears (to us) as object. From a pre-theoretical standpoint, other human beings appears (to us) as Being-with and ready-to-hand. From a pre-theoretical standpoint, I appear (to myself) as existence. The philosophical tradition (at least the figures Heidegger considers worth criticizing) has taken human being to be an entity which is indeed unique in so far as it’s different from the rest of entities, and in that respect its account of human being includes significant truth; it follows then that, according to Heidegger, it can’t be false simpliciter. However, by failing to account for this uniqueness in the *correct* way: by appeal to the fact that to be for human being means a radically different thing than from the rest of entities (a failure that connects with the failure to ask in the very first place what it means to be for entities in general, i.e., the question about Being), the philosophical tradition has a flawed understanding of human being.

A cardinal feature of human being is its relation to the world. The philosophical tradition takes the world to be the totality of entities. According to Heidegger, this view of the world is inadequate but not exactly false; what is inadequate about it is that it’s *secondary* with respect to a more basic one: the world as *background* of our *dealing with* (not observing) entities. The world as background of our dealing with entities appears (to us) when we stand on a pre-theoretical, not theoretical, standpoint toward entities. *On the basis of* this standpoint, we can observe entities (i.e., adopt a theoretical standpoint toward them), consider them as a totality, and thus have the world appear (to us) in a *secondary* sense.
“We are perhaps too much inclined to regard idealism, especially German idealism, as a pure play of abstractions. The great problem of ‘idealism’, however, is the problem of reality: fundamentally, idealism is the doctrine that the distinction between the ideal and the real is itself entirely ideal.” (Paul Ricoeur)\(^{237}\)

According to Hegel, the Absolute\(^ {238}\) plays a central role in a philosophical understanding of reality, but the Absolute has a unique and elusive nature, which is a challenge for philosophy to capture. Now Hegel believes that the best past theories of the Absolute have been inadequate. At its most general, the thesis I want to defend in this chapter is that, under analysis, these theories are, according to Hegel, inadequate but not exactly false; what is inadequate about them is that they provide us with only partial truth about the Absolute (in the sense sketched in Chapter 1, to be elaborated on in Chapter 5). To defend my thesis I will proceed as follows. First, I will claim that the problem with the best past theories of the Absolute is best described by saying that, according to Hegel, they result from adopting an inadequate \textit{standpoint toward} the Absolute. Second, I will claim that, according to Hegel, this standpoint is not inadequate in the sense that is wrong, but in the sense that is \textit{secondary}: a more basic standpoint takes precedence over it and makes it possible in the first place. Third, according to Hegel, what we are able to know about the Absolute from the secondary standpoint isn’t so much false as, rather, partial.

To make my case, I will draw on two early prefaces by Hegel: the \textit{Preface} to \textit{The Difference between the Systems of Fichte and Schelling} (\textit{Preface-Difference}) (1801) and the \textit{Preface} to the \textit{Phenomenology of Spirit} (\textit{Preface-PhS}) (1807).\(^ {239}\) The significance of both \textit{Preface-Difference} and \textit{Preface-PhS} rests on the circumstance that prefaces are Hegel’s standard choice to discuss the goals, method and scope of philosophy in its most general fashion.\(^ {240}\) This allows for a number of important self-contained claims that are difficult to find in the rest of Hegel’s corpus.


\(^{238}\) Alternative names used by Hegel include Spirit (\textit{Geist}), God, Reason (or the Rational), and the True (\textit{das Wahre}).

\(^{239}\) Hegel \textit{Preface-Difference} (Hegel 1977a) and \textit{Preface-PhS} (Hegel 1977b), respectively.

\(^{240}\) Although this can be taken to be common to other philosophers, Hegel’s prefaces can be seen, as R. Schacht does, as “a class in themselves;” for “of virtually no other philosopher can it be said that, if his introductory material [i.e., prefaces] alone remained available to us, we would be still in a position both to understand the essentials of his philosophy and to apprehend his greatness.” (Schacht 1975: 41)
Preface-PhS is in this respect particularly significant; in it, Hegel most sharply differentiates his own views from those of other contemporary philosophers. In so doing, Hegel advances his most important insights in an unusually bold and thus helpful way (even if Hegel’s philosophical statements remain legendarily obscure and thus in need of interpretation). Last but not least, these two prefaces, especially Preface-PhS, can be read as two condensed programs for Hegel’s whole philosophy, familiarity with which is going to be necessary to follow my case.

Before starting to make my case, let me make two preliminary methodological remarks. First, while the term “Absolute” is relatively traditional in philosophy, Hegel’s own notion of the Absolute is so idiosyncratic that one may wonder whether philosophers before him really had in mind the same object, even if they used the same term. If that’s the case, someone might protest, it is misguided to talk about philosophers before Hegel as proposing theories of the Absolute in Hegel’s sense, which is what I intend to do in this chapter. My response to this worry draws on the distinction between theories and beliefs about theories that I raised in Chapter 1 (section 1.2.1.). I admit that it is open to debate whether philosophers before Hegel defended theories and theses about the Absolute in Hegel’s sense (most likely not). But it’s less open to debate that Hegel (in a way that needs spelling out) does take them to have done so. Given that, as I established in Chapter 1 (section 1.2.1.), this study concerns philosophers’ beliefs about theories rather than theories themselves, I take it that my case will go through as long as Hegel is indeed committed to this view (something that, as I will demonstrate later, it’s relatively easy to show). The reason is simple: in this chapter, I defend the thesis that, according to Hegel, past philosophical theories of the Absolute have been partially true rather than false.

Second, Hegel’s notion of the Absolute is so encompassing that when he argues that the best past philosophical theories of the Absolute have been inadequate, he targets many different figures, and on many different grounds. Given that to cover all these figures and grounds is impossible in

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241 This is historically true of Preface-PhS, which is a preface to Hegel’s whole System, not just to Phenomenology (Köhler and Pöggeler 1998: 2, Jaeschke 2005: 181, Westphal 2009: xvii)
242 Preliminarily, some quotes from Hegel’s lectures on the history of philosophy can help: “Plato first comprehended the Absolute as the Being of Parmenides.” (Hegel 1996: 250) “Plato’s inert ideas and numbers thus bring nothing into reality; but far different is the case with the Absolute of Aristotle.” (Ibid., 341) “Even Rousseau represented the absolute to be found in freedom; Kant has the same principle, but taken rather from the theoretic side.” (Ibid., 576) “It is the absolute form which Fichte laid hold of, or in other words, the absolute form is just the absolute Being-for-self.” (Ibid., 632)
the context of this chapter, I need to decide what specific figures I want to focus on to make my case manageable. This methodological difficulty can be put in different terms in the following way. As we will see, one of the senses that Hegel’s Absolute admits is “reality,” whereby to argue that, according to Hegel, the best past philosophical theories of the Absolute are partially true amounts to arguing that, according to Hegel, the best past philosophical theories of reality are partially true. Whether true or not, this obviously is a very sweeping claim to make, quite falling outside the scope of the present chapter. Accordingly, what I need to do is to follow a strategy similar to the one I adopted in the case of Heidegger in order to make my task more manageable: to focus on a specific aspect about the Absolute that, for some reason or other, is interesting to discuss with respect to the notion of partial truth, and to construct my case around this aspect. For reasons that I will present in its due course, I propose to focus on language and, more specifically, on the expression of linguistic truth about the Absolute (specifically in the form of one single proposition). According to Hegel, I will then argue in this chapter, past philosophical theories about linguistic truth about the Absolute are inadequate, but not exactly false; rather, they are partially true (in the sense sketched in Chapter 1, to be further developed in Chapter 5). (We will later see that, above the rest, Hegel targets his predecessors Kant and Fichte (see below, section 4.2.2. and 4.4.)).

4. 1 THE ABSOLUTE

In this first section I want to explain what Hegel understands by the Absolute. This task faces considerable difficulties and brings us head on into substantial interpretative issues. In the case of Sartre and Heidegger, things were not as difficult, because “consciousness” and “human being” more or less coincide with our ordinary understanding of these terms (even if, philosophically speaking, Sartre’s and Heidegger’s theories clash at many points with our ordinary understanding of these objects). Hegel’s Absolute, by contrast, doesn’t have an ordinary equivalent that might be used as easily as a starting point. Perhaps a good choice of a term which, understood ordinarily, more or less coincides with Hegel’s notion of the Absolute would be God, for two reasons. First, Hegel himself sometimes uses “God” (Gott) as an alternative to the term

243 It is hardly an exaggeration to say that to explain what Hegel means by the Absolute is almost equivalent to spelling out his entire philosophy.
“the Absolute.” Second, similar to God as we ordinarily understand it, Hegel’s Absolute is an entity\textsuperscript{244} on which all the rest of entities depend, but which itself doesn’t depend on any entity. However, different from God as ordinarily understood, Hegel’s Absolute is not a transcendent entity, access to which is for us impossible, indirect, or faith-based; rather, Hegel’s Absolute is immanent to reality as we know it and accessible to reason,\textsuperscript{245} if only the right standpoint toward it is found and adopted.

4.1.1 Science and Knowledge

It will soon become clear that, according to Hegel, genuine knowledge of the Absolute is philosophical and, conversely, genuine philosophy is essentially knowledge of the Absolute. So a good place to start discussing what, according to Hegel, the Absolute is and what is inadequate with past philosophical theories of the Absolute, is to discuss what, according to Hegel, is inadequate with past views about the proper goals and tasks of philosophy.

Hegel shares with Descartes and Kant, among others, but not with Hume or Locke, among others, the view that philosophy occupies a privileged position with respect to the rest of sciences. Hegel differs from Descartes and Kant, however, in two aspects: first, in the way Hegel accounts for this privileged position; second, in the way he moreover radicalizes it, to the point of considering philosophy, quite unlike Descartes or Kant, the only science worth of this name. We will see in a minute that this circumstance ties in with the idea that in the last analysis, according to Hegel, there is one single object of knowledge, the Absolute and, conversely, there is only one sort of knowledge of the Absolute. But let’s first consider closer how Hegel’s notion of philosophy departs from a more traditional one.

To start with, Hegel does not believe that philosophy is privileged by being a form of knowledge separated from the rest of sciences, contributing to their ultimate validity; in quite different

\textsuperscript{244} Broadly construed; as we will see, the Absolute for Hegel is not really an entity, if by entity something self-identical and more or less permanent is understood.

\textsuperscript{245} Indeed, as we will see, for Hegel the Absolute and reason are the same thing under two different names. But then, again, what reason means for Hegel needs substantial spelling out.
senses, this was both Descartes’ and Kant’s views. Instead, Hegel believes that philosophy and the sciences form a continuum or, rather, that philosophy contributes sciences’ scientific status across the board, at every point of their development. Additionally, Hegel believes that there ultimately is one single science, namely philosophy itself, a form of knowledge that Hegel calls, precisely, “Science” (Wissenschaft). Again against Descartes and Kant (among others), it is Hegel’s view that the rest of sciences, paradigmatically logic, mathematics and physics, presumably privileged in virtue of the kinds of truth they deliver, derive their scientific status from philosophy alone; if left by themselves, Hegel holds, their validity is relative. As we will see, for Hegel there is such a thing as absolutely, not just relatively valid knowledge; and absolute knowledge is knowledge of the Absolute. (This will involve the consequence that adopting the right standpoint toward the Absolute is for Hegel crucial to have the right theory of the Absolute. Past philosophers may well have had in view the right object as far as the Absolute is concerned; but by failing to have adopted the right standpoint toward it, what they have been able to observe is only an aspect of it.)

Of course, Hegel holds such a prima facie extreme view about science and philosophy because his notions of both science and philosophy differ substantively from that of Descartes and Kant, or for that matter from that of any other past (and future!) philosopher. It is important to keep in mind that the terms “science,” “Wissenschaft,” and “scientific,” “wissenschaftlich,” have for Hegel a somewhat idiosyncratic meaning which greatly differs from what we understand by them nowadays. To start with, in Hegel’s writings “science” does not refer to specific sciences, in particular “hard sciences,” that is, sciences based on the mathematical treatment of phenomena aiming at establishing universally valid laws (physics as a paradigm, and sciences inspired by physics subsequently). This is what we typically associate with the terms “science”

246 According to Kant, for instance, critical philosophy, “does not aim at the amplification of the cognitions themselves but only at their correction.” (Critique of Pure Reason, A12/B26; Kant 1998: 149).
247 Conversely, and this is a point too usually forgotten, Hegel believes that without the rest of sciences, empirical ones in particular, philosophy on its own would not have been able to advance from the point at which the Greeks left it (Jaeschke 2005: 339).
248 Not so idiosyncratic, if we keep in mind that, in German, Wissenschaft is a wider-encompassing word than the English equivalent “science,” including humanistic disciplines such as history, philology, etc. It is also important to keep in mind that Fichte, Hegel’s most immediate predecessor after Schelling, introduced the term Wissenschaft (specifically, Wissenschaftslehre, “doctrine of Science”) as a quasi-technical term for what we would call “philosophy.” As opposed to practical disciplines, perhaps a better translation of Wissenschaft and wissenschaftlich is, in the context of German Idealism, theory and theoretical, respectively.
and “scientific” today. Instead, Hegel uses the term “science,” “Wissenschaft,” to refer to one single type of knowledge, in which, moreover, by no means does mathematization play a central role.\textsuperscript{249} Science in Hegel’s sense, furthermore, is not a theoretical stage that human cognition may achieve by way of an addition; rather, Hegel thinks, knowledge is bound to become Science by its very nature.\textsuperscript{250} Thus, Science in Hegel’s sense opposes itself both to ordinary knowledge and to scientific knowledge. A sign of Hegelian Science is that, unlike these two types of knowledge, with a focus on finite objects, its object is, rather, infinite ones.\textsuperscript{251} Preliminarily, I understand by finite objects determinate objects, that is, anything in so far as it is something as opposed to something else, whatever it may be.\textsuperscript{252} This provides us with our first clue concerning what the Absolute is, according to Hegel: whatever the Absolute may eventually be, it is an infinite sort of thing, indeed the only truly infinite. Alternative terms used by Hegel, as we will see below, are unlimited and unconditioned. Of course, this characterization of the Absolute is by now insufficient, but I will argue in my next section that this infinite, unlimited, and unconditioned sort of thing is, ultimately speaking, the whole of what there is, reality. Reality, as Hegel understands it, is the object of philosophy, that is, Science. Science in Hegel’s sense is cognition of the Absolute, but Science in Hegel’s sense opposes itself to non-conceptual cognition of the Absolute.\textsuperscript{253} To stress this fact, Hegel claims that Science has the Notion (Begriff) as the element of its existence.\textsuperscript{254}

\textsuperscript{249} Hegel is quite critical of the idea, quite extended in Modern Rationalism (Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, and Christian Wolff), that mathematics is an exemplary type of knowledge. More specifically, Hegel is opposed to the view that mathematics is the type of knowledge philosophy should model itself on: “Spinoza, Wolff, and others let themselves be misled in applying it [the method of pure mathematics] to philosophy and in making the external course followed by Notion-less quantity, the course of the Notion, a procedure which is absolutely contradictory.” (Hegel 1998: 53) According to Hegel, philosophical and mathematical truth are two radically different types of truth, and the former stands higher in virtue of the Wirklichkeit (actuality, reality) of its object. See Preface-PhS: 24-27.

\textsuperscript{250} "The inner necessity that knowing should be Science lies in its nature.” (Preface-PhS:3)

\textsuperscript{251} We shall see in a minute what “finite” and “infinite” are supposed to mean here.

\textsuperscript{252} In my previous chapter on Heidegger, I used a similar definition of “entity” as opposed to Being.

\textsuperscript{253} That is, immediate knowledge of the Absolute or, in other words, knowledge of the Absolute by means of intuition or feeling (Preface-PhS:4) According to Hegel, the goal of an intuitive knowledge of the Absolute expects of philosophy, not so much insight, as edification (Preface-PhS:5).This edification, “this modest complacency in receiving, or this sparingness in giving, does not, however, befit Science. … [P]hilosophy must beware itself of the wish to be edifying.” (Preface-PhS:5-6)

\textsuperscript{254} “[T]he true shape of truth is scientific –or, what is the same thing, … truth has only the Notion as the element of its existence.” Preface-PhS:4. “What, therefore, is important in the study of Science, is that one should take on oneself the strenuous effort of the Notion.” (Preface-PhS: 35)
What I want to argue now is that, according to Hegel, Science isn’t really knowledge about an object, but an overcoming of the gap in virtue of which the former happens to be “about” the latter. This insight of Hegel’s, I will moreover suggest, provides us with a good way of further characterizing the Absolute and show that, according to Hegel, the Absolute is the whole of what there is, that is, reality. I will unpack later on the prima facie obscure formula that Science isn’t really knowledge about an object, but an overcoming of the gap in virtue of which the former happens to be “about” the latter, but by now it should be clear that neither logic nor mathematics nor physics, nor any other science as usually understood (indeed, not even philosophy itself), can be genuine science on Hegel’s standard: all of them attempt to acquire knowledge about something, instead of attempting to suppress the gap between knowledge and whatever knowledge is about.

4.1.2 Absolute Knowledge

How is this suppression supposed to be understood? Hegel gives us a clue in Preface-PhS with his huge statement that what he attempts to do is to transform philosophy from being “love of knowing” to being actual knowing, or Science. According to Hegel, this enterprise includes as one of its tasks grasping the True not only as Substance, but equally as Subject. The True, Hegel claims no less famously, is the whole. Knowledge, Hegel elaborates on, must be exposed as a System. Philosophy’s goal, finally, is to present the Absolute as Spirit (Geist).

All of these claims have virtually become slogans for Hegel’s whole philosophy, but what do they mean? Answering this question will help us demonstrate that for Hegel the Absolute is the whole of what there is, reality, and that the best past theories of the Absolute have been partially true rather than false; so it is worth stopping for a while and spend some time on it.

255 “The standpoint of [an individual’s] consciousness which knows objects in their antithesis to itself, and itself in antithesis to them, is for Science the antithesis of its own standpoint.” (Preface-PhS:15) “[K]nowing is not an activity that deals with the content as something alien, is not a reflection into itself away from the content.” (Preface-PhS: 33) “[The] nature of scientific method … consists in not being separate from the content…” (Preface-PhS:35) “[I]t is only in absolute knowing [Science] that the separation of the object from the certainty of itself [knowledge] is completely eliminated.” (Hegel 1998: 49)
256 Preface-PhS: 3.
257 Preface-PhS: 9-10.
258 Preface-PhS: 11.
259 Preface-PhS: 13.
260 Preface-PhS: 14.
By way of an answer, let us concentrate on what arguably is Hegel’s most important claim so far, namely that the Absolute must be conceived not only as Substance, but also as Subject.261 This formula gives Hegel’s programmatic recipe for both synthesizing and overcoming two opposite extremes into which Modern philosophy fell, at two different times. It is not mere chance, but of the greatest philosophical significance, that these two positions can be situated in relation to Kant, one before and one after. Kant is significant here because his philosophy strikes a historical divide in favor of idealism, against realism, as what might be called epistemology’s “default” position.262 (This circumstance will help us to understand why Hegel believes that philosophers before him have targeted the Absolute as a philosophical object about which theories or theses should be defended.) Probably the first Modern philosopher who, according to Hegel, was observing the right object as far as the Absolute is concerned was Spinoza, something that can be shown by briefly considering the terms in which Modern philosophy handles a debate in epistemology and metaphysics that can be traced much further back.

The debate between realism and idealism is as old as philosophy itself, and it is relevant at this point, because Hegel’s notion of Absolute arises as an attempt to overcome it. Realism claims that there is an objective reality independent of human knowledge. Idealism claims that there isn’t such independent objective reality, but that reality totally or partially depends on our knowledge of it. To simplify things a bit for the purposes of this section, we can start from the fact that in Modern philosophy, the dispute between realism and idealism turns around the question what comes first, the subject or the object, that is, knowing or being. What is being asked here is: is there first being (i.e., an independently existing reality) out of which our knowing of being subsequently emerges? Or is there first knowing of being, out which questions and answers about the nature or being subsequently emerge? This question can be raised epistemologically or metaphysically, that is, from the standpoint of our knowledge or from the standpoint of being, independently from our knowledge. From either standpoint, either realism

261 This is one of, or perhaps the most famous and difficult claims of Hegel’s. What I offer here isn’t a complete interpretation, but a brief sketch of what stands at its background. For recent discussion see Jaeschke 2005: 182 ff.

262 One can further refine the picture by distinguishing naïve realism prior to Descartes and Locke, for which we perceive things as they are, from the latter’s sophisticated realism, for which we partially perceive things as they are; the refinement can be completed by pointing out that Berkeley and Hume took a further step, and rejected realism as a tenable position (Schacht 1975:19-20).
or idealism can be defended (although defending one of the alternatives from a standpoint typically results in defending the same alternative from the other). In either case, however, there is (or so Hegel is going to argue) a common philosophical assumption: knowing and being stand in a sort of relation of which both knowing and being are real factors with equal right. In different words, in the debate between realism and idealism in Modern philosophy (roughly, from Descartes to Kant), the relation between knowing and being, regardless of which one comes first, is pictured in analogy with a relation, or more precisely put, with a relation between two entities (or processes). This assumption, Hegel suggests, is potentially harmful regarding that factor, knowing, of which it’s least clear that it should be thought of in analogy with an entity (or process). To see what the problem could be, let us consider the philosophical position holding that knowing arises from being, that is, realism.

Traditional realism claims that being, independent from knowing, is primary. Knowing, it is then argued, comes from being. How is this “coming-from” typically accounted for, however? At some point or another, it is argued, being produces knowing or, alternatively worded, being creates knowing, being causes knowing, being brings forth knowing, and so on. One can see that all these terms suggest a relation between being and knowing which is thought of in analogy with one holding between two entities (or processes) (for instance, heat in the water produces vapor, certain chemical reactions produce life, and so on). We can say that the relation as thus represented is that of cause to effect (broadly conceived).

Realism thus claims that, in virtue of having emerged out of being, knowing is somehow dependent on being, whereas being is, allegedly, independent from knowing. But is being, thus pictured, really independent from knowing? What is overlooked here, or so Hegel believes, is that in a relation of cause to effect, even if pushed to the limits of the whole of what there is, the cause is as much dependent on the effect as the other way round. By causing knowing, being is somehow dependent on it, even if, metaphysically and epistemologically speaking, being takes precedence over knowing. Traditional realism, Hegel concludes, is a self-defeating doctrine: if we accept that there is an objective reality independent of our knowledge, and we are committed

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263 This holds for dualism too. Descartes held that the mutual relation between res cogitans (knowing) and res extensa (being) not only was real, but it could be located somewhere in the human body (the pineal gland in the brain): The Passions of the Soul art. 34 (Descartes [1649] 1985:341)
to the view that this reality has at some point produced knowledge, in the sense that knowledge is
an effect of reality, we will be forced to admit that reality somehow depends on knowledge
(because a cause doesn’t exist totally unrelated to its effect), which is what realism, precisely,
wants to deny.

Is there any alternative picture? The picture offered by what I will call “absolute realism” (to
make a first step into construing Hegel’s notion of the Absolute; as opposed to simple, or
metaphysical realism) is that of knowing as a mode or attribute of being. For someone
committed to absolute realism, the relation between being and knowing is no longer seen as that
of cause to effect, but rather, using traditional terminology, as that of substance to accident. This
philosophical maneuver drops the picture of knowing and being as two real components of what
there is, and accepts instead one single component, being, of which knowing is, not a product or
an effect, but an accident (or property): being has knowing as one of its accidents (properties). In
so doing, being knows itself (as being). The idea here is that being is no longer being as opposed
to knowing, as it usually happens in traditional realism. Rather, being includes knowing as one of
its aspects. We thus have a new notion of being that, Hegel believes, goes beyond the customary
one in so far as it is neither metaphysically nor epistemologically basic in relation to knowing,
but both of them at the same time, or (using Hegelian jargon) absolutely so. I contend that this
notion of being is what Hegel refers to as the Absolute (although, as we will see in a minute, this
is just a partial aspect of it).

What is important to stress now, as a second step into construing Hegel’s notion of the Absolute
is that the notion of Absolute so far construed is, interestingly, non-committal regarding the
choice between realism and idealism. One can indeed defend that knowing is an accident of
being but, conversely, one can defend that being is (what is traditionally called) an accident
(property) of knowing. This doesn’t need to commit one to Berkeleyan idealism; the picture of
how exactly being is an accident of knowing can be more sophisticated than Berkeley’s
(especially after Kant). Historically, the notion of Absolute thus constructed arose against
metaphysical realism (more accurately put, against Descartes’ metaphysical dualism), as (what I
called) “absolute realism.” Being precedes knowing both metaphysically and epistemologically,
thus absolutely so. Knowing is dependent on being, not as an effect from a cause, but as an
accident (or attribute, or mode) of a substance. Thus, we can say, following historical terminology, being is *Substance*. This is, in a nutshell, what can be called *Spinoza’s* theory of the Absolute, one of the extremes that Hegel has in mind in his formulation that the chief task of philosophy is to grasp the Absolute not only as Substance, but equally as Subject (recall that our preliminary task is to explain this formulation). When Hegel affirms that the Absolute must be grasped not only as Substance, but also as Subject, he has Spinoza in mind as far as the *first* half of the formula is concerned. It would be easy to show that Hegel *both* rejects Spinoza’s theory of the Absolute as being philosophically inadequate *and* acknowledges that it contains philosophically interesting truth (if only because the *right* object, the Absolute, is being targeted; something which, per Chapter 1, section 1.2.2.). This suggests that, whatever the inadequacies Hegel sees in Spinoza’s theory of the Absolute, they can’t be spelled out in terms of falsehood simpliciter. (However, in the remainder of this chapter I will put Spinoza aside and focus on Kant and Fichte for my case).

What about the other extreme? It consists in admitting Spinoza’s model of an absolute Substance of which knowing is one of its accidents. However, it is the opposite version of this model, since this time *knowing* is the Absolute, on which being depends. Historically, it was *Fichte* who endorsed this view, or rather, according to Hegel, who made a first step towards it. As suggested before, it is not a chance that Fichte’s endorsement of an Absolute in the form of knowing comes right *after* Kant’s idealistic turn (as Spinoza’s came *before*). In summary, Hegel’s famous formula according to which the Absolute must be grasped not merely as substance, but just as much as subject, contains an allusion to Spinoza (with his conception of the absolute as substance) and Fichte (with his conception of the absolute as ego or subject). What Hegel wants is *neither* of these two alternatives but *both* of them at the same time.

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264 Of course, this is no more than a barebones picture of Spinoza’s theory. I focus only on what is necessary to understand what the Absolute is according to Hegel, and what is inadequate with past theories of it.

265 The circumstance that Fichte’s Absolute seems to be the exact opposite of Spinoza’s was already felt by Fichte’s contemporaries. Most famously, according to the critic of the Enlightenment and of Kant’s and Fichte’s philosophies F. H. Jacobi, Fichte’s *Wissenschaftslehre* is “an inverted Spinozism.” (Jacobi 1799: 4).

266 Fichte’s term for this Absolute was “Ego” or “Ich” (“I”).


268 The point can be elaborated on by saying that Hegel wants to endorse a view of the absolute *both* as an “unchanging, determinate character” (Spinoza’s absolute as substance) and as “pure activity or dynamic agency” (Fichte’s absolute as subject) (Schacht 1975: 45).
Loosely following Hegel, I have sketched the notion of an *Absolute* understood as the whole of what there is, the whole of reality. It is reasonable to hold that knowledge of the Absolute is the object of philosophy. The notion of Absolute thus constructed is supposed to make philosophical progress over the dualist picture of being and knowing opposing each other, an ongoing source of puzzles and difficulties in Modern philosophy up to Kant (included). The progress allegedly consists in claiming that instead of being and knowing *opposing* each other, or instead of either of them *producing* the other, one of them is an *aspect* of the other. However, and again very crudely put, we have thus reached *two* possible choices: the Absolute as *Object* (Spinoza) or the Absolute as *Subject* (Fichte), that is, Absolute Being or Absolute Knowing.

Before going any further, I must point out that my exposition so far is somewhat faulty as far as Fichte is concerned. In my attempt to oppose Fichte to Spinoza, I have said that Fichte’s Absolute is analogous to Spinoza’s in so far as being is (somehow) an attribute of knowing, in exact opposition to Spinoza’s picture in which knowing is an attribute of being. In fact, or at least Hegel thinks so, it seems more accurate to say that Fichte *attempts* to reach this picture, without succeeding. Hegel believes that Fichte’s attempt fails, because the Absolute in the way Fichte accounts for it turns out to be only *partially* absolute.

4. 2 STANDPOINT: SPECULATIVE VERSUS REFLECTIVE

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269 Given the crudeness of my account, my terminology is somewhat sloppy. For example: Spinoza never talks of “Absolute” or “Object” (these terms were introduced by the philosophers of German Idealism, the period to which Hegel historically belongs); rather, Spinoza talks of “God” or “Substance”: “Deus, sive Substantia” (Spinoza [1677] 1914: 43). This is not simply a terminological issue. Spinoza didn’t think of himself as defending what I have called “(Absolute) realism.” Realism as a thesis that needs defending did not arise until Kant’s *idealistic* turn made that maneuver necessary.

270 For the sake of completion of exposition, a *third* alternative, suggested before, should be mentioned: the Absolute is both Substance and Subject; but this unity of Substance and Subject is *immediate*, available to intellectual intuition. This is *Schelling’s* position. To sum up, and as Hegel makes plain (Preface-PhS:10), Hegel’s thesis that the Absolute should be grasped both as Substance and as Subject, has *three* targets, not two: 1) Spinoza’s idea that, ultimately speaking, the whole of reality is *Substance*, Being alone; 2) *Fichte’s* idea that, ultimately speaking, the whole of reality is *Subject*, Knowing alone; 3) *Schelling’s* idea that the Absolute is an *original* and *immediate* unity of Substance and Subject. Against 1) and 2), Hegel argues that reality must be grasped as both Substance and Subject. Against 3), Hegel stresses that the *true* unity of Substance and Subject is *not* immediate, but *mediated*, *not* an origin but a *result*: “Only this self-restoring sameness, or this reflection in otherness within itself—not an original or immediate unity as such—is the True.” (Preface-PhS:10); “Of the Absolute it must be said that it is essentially a *result*, that only in the *end* is it what it truly is; and that precisely in this consists its nature, viz. to be actual, subject, the spontaneous becoming of itself.” (Preface-PhS:11)
4. 2. 1 Reflection and Speculation

Recall from Chapter 1, section 1.1.2., that standpoints toward objects can be seen to be phenomenologically (or epistemologically) grounded on other standpoints. A standpoint is grounded on another standpoint when the latter takes precedence over the former and makes it phenomenologically (or epistemologically) possible to begin with.\(^{271}\) We have just seen that, according to Hegel, the Absolute is a philosophical object, and what sort of object it is. What I want to argue in this section is that, according to Hegel, we can adopt two different standpoints toward the Absolute, and that, furthermore, one of them is grounded on the other. Using the terminology I introduced in Chapter 1, section 1. 1. 2., I will say that one of them is secondary with respect to the other, which is basic. To understand the nature of these two standpoints, we need to supplement my previous introductory exposition with an exposition about the difference between what Hegel calls reflection (Reflexion) and speculation (Spekulation). As we will see in a minute, Hegel ties each of these two standpoints toward the Absolute with what can be called a cognitive faculty: Reason (Vernunft) and understanding (Verstand).

I will start explaining what, according to Hegel, is the basic standpoint we can adopt over the Absolute. This is the speculative standpoint. According to Hegel, from a speculative standpoint toward the Absolute, we observe the Absolute as it truly is. This happens because, according to Hegel, speculation is the cognitive act by which an insight of the Absolute is achieved. This insight is not “mystical” or “ineffable,” an intuition of a whole without determinations. On the contrary, this cognitive act by which an insight of the Absolute is achieved is characterized by a quite specific sort of intuition.\(^{272}\) In particular, Speculation includes three moments: 1) the consciousness that our consciousness faces, and so opposes itself to, whatever consciousness is conscious of; 2) the consciousness of this consciousness itself; entailing (or so Hegel thinks) that

\(^{271}\) As said in Chapter 1 (pg. 6), an alternative terminological option is to say that the former phenomenologically (or epistemologically) supervenes on the latter.

\(^{272}\) My formulation is again somewhat sloppy. According to the Hegel of Phenomenology, what speculation achieves at first is not an insight of the Absolute, but, rather, of the first appearance of the Absolute in consciousness. In terms of the historical appearance of speculation, and thus of the notion of Science, this insight of the Absolute “comes on the scene for the first time in its immediacy or its Notion. Just as little as a building is finished when its foundation has been laid, so little is the achieved Notion of the whole the whole itself.” (Preface-PhS:7) An insight of the (whole) Absolute is achieved, if at all, at the end of a long process in which consciousness traverses a host of incomplete forms until it eventually achieves a complete and adequate concept of the Absolute. Only then the Absolute can be effectively known. This last stage is called Absolute Knowing.
3) the original opposition between consciousness and what consciousness is conscious of is (what Hegel calls) “cancelled” (aufgehoben), that is, deprived of its primitive\textsuperscript{273} status.\textsuperscript{274} In other words, speculation is the (second-order) cognition that the opposition between our cognition and the object of our cognition is not an ultimate given.\textsuperscript{275} Everyone’s everyday consciousness is able, indeed bound, to raise a distinction between the world (“out there”) and one’s consciousness of the world. By in turn becoming conscious of this distinction, what Hegel calls “absolute” opposition between world and consciousness does not disappear, if by that is meant that, say, a divine force fuses together world and consciousness in a quasi-pantheistic intuition; but that what at first seems an ultimate opposition does become relative to this latter consciousness. This can only mean, or so does Hegel think, following Fichte and Schelling, that the apparently primitive, ultimate opposition between world and consciousness is not really primitive, but grounded on, and so secondary with respect to, an original identity of both.

Hegel uses a number of alternative ways to characterize this cognitive act, including the following: speculation is consciousness of the identity of subject and object,\textsuperscript{276} speculation is Reason’s self-intuition,\textsuperscript{277} speculation is a cognitive grasp of the whole,\textsuperscript{278} and so on. All these expressions seem to mean different things, but they rather express the same insight in different ways.\textsuperscript{279}

Following Hegel, I want to contrast the speculative standpoint toward the Absolute with the reflective one which, I want to argue, is the one Hegel takes his predecessors to have adopted. The reflective standpoint toward the Absolute is secondary with respect to the speculative one. This happens because, negatively characterized, reflection is the cognitive act that lacks speculation. By means of reflection, in more positive terms, we grasp and set limitations and

\textsuperscript{273} In Hegel’s terms, “absolute.”\
\textsuperscript{274} “In empirical intuition, subject and object are opposites; the philosopher apprehends the activity of intuiting, he intuits intuiting and thus conceives it as an identity.” (Preface-Difference: 120)\
\textsuperscript{275} “[P]ure science [speculation] presupposes liberation from the opposition of consciousness.” (Hegel 1998: 49)\
\textsuperscript{276} “The principle of speculation is the identity of subject and object.” (Preface-Difference: 80)\
\textsuperscript{277} “Speculation is the activity of the one universal Reason directed upon itself.” (Preface-Difference: 88)\
\textsuperscript{278} “Speculation acknowledges as the reality of cognition only the being of cognition in the totality. For speculation everything determinate has reality and truth only in the cognition of its connection with the Absolute.” (Preface-Difference: 99)\
\textsuperscript{279} Here is evidence that Hegel’s earliest characterization of the concept of speculation stays intact in his mature position (in the Logic): “It is … in the grasping of opposites in their unity or of the positive in the negative, that speculative thought consists.” (Hegel 1998: 56)
oppositions. Reflection is thus the faculty of the limited or of the finite. Hegel distinguishes two types of reflection. By lacking any insight of the Absolute, ordinary reflection is opposed to speculation. Philosophical reflection, however, is a synthesis or mediation between the non-Absolute and the Absolute. Philosophical reflection nullifies the finite by being conscious that it is finite. Thus, philosophical reflection opposes itself to common or ordinary reflection. The Reason-driven, that is, rational aspect of reflection is connected to the Absolute; as such, it can nullify itself and the limitations. Only in this connection can reflection become real, genuine knowledge. Does this mean that speculation and reflection oppose to each other? Yes, from a purely logical point of view; but in reality, Hegel suggests, speculation must somehow include reflection, because reflection sets up limitations, and it is precisely through limitation, more precisely, through overcoming it, that the speculation, and thus genuine knowledge of the Absolute, gets off the ground. Eventually, the Absolute is only real as a result, not as an original given, and reflection, as much as speculation, makes the Absolute a result, not a mere given.

With this, we have a first tentative, preliminary elaboration of the suppression of the gap between knowledge and whatever knowledge is knowledge of, which I indicated above as constituting the fundamental feature of Science (i.e., philosophy) as Hegel understands it. I said that whereas both ordinary and scientific knowledge consist in knowledge about objects, philosophy as Hegel sees it goes a step further by having as its task the suppression of this gap

280 “Reflection in isolation is the positing of opposites, and this would be a suspension of the Absolute, reflection being the faculty of being and limitation.” (Preface-Difference: 94). “Reflection [is] the faculty of the finite …” (Preface-Difference: 96)
281 “Like everything else, reflection has standing only in the Absolute; but as reflection it stands in opposition to it.” (Preface-Difference: 94)
282 “The Absolute is to be posited in reflection. But then it is not posited, but cancelled; for in having been posited it was limited [by its opposite]. Philosophical reflection is the mediation of this contradiction.” (Preface-Difference: 94)
283 “Yet the final act of philosophical reflection is still lacking; that is to say, the consciousness of the nullification of these finite things [i.e., matter and Ego as the two finite poles at their furthest distance from ordinary common sense].” (Preface-Difference: 101)
284 “But reflection as Reason has connection with the Absolute, and it is Reason only because of this connection. In this respect, reflection nullifies itself and all being and everything limited, because it connects them with the Absolute.” (Ibid).
285 “Only so far as reflection has connection with the Absolute is it Reason and its deed a knowing.” (Preface-Difference: 97)
286 “Reason, therefore, is misunderstood when reflection is excluded from the True, and is not grasped as a positive moment of the Absolute.” (Preface-PhS:12)
287 “It is reflection that makes the True a result.” “[R]eflection does not have a subordinate place in the system, and … the two standpoints, that of speculation and that of reflection, are absolutely necessary and without union at the center of the system.” (Preface-Difference: 122)
between knowledge and its object. The suppression of this gap doesn’t mean that ordinary knowledge must come back to a primitive ignorance. On the contrary, ordinary (everyday and scientific) knowledge must be preserved. But in order to become actual knowledge of its object, ordinary knowledge must incorporate the extra insight that the object qua brute given “out there” does not oppose itself to consciousness ultimately speaking, but only relatively so. Speculation, by being aware that ordinary reflection is a legitimate, but incomplete form of consciousness, does not directly suppress the gap between knowledge and its object, if this means that the object is intuited as just belonging to consciousness, as in Berkeley’s idealism. But the possibility of a methodical, step-by-step suppression of this gap is indeed opened by speculation.

4. 2. 2 Understanding and Reason

Perhaps a good way to elaborate on the two different standpoints Hegel believes we can adopt over the Absolute (i.e., the whole of what there is), is to consider the two traditional terms Hegel couples with each standpoint. Hegel opposes Reason (Vernunft) to Understanding (Verstand). These terms, or rather, their philosophical import, derive from Kant.288 Whereas Understanding is the cognitive capacity to know finite items, Reason is the cognitive capacity to know infinite items. Thus, Understanding and reflection, on the one hand, and Reason and speculation, on the other, go together. Intellect is finite thought;289 Reason is an infinite one. Understanding is the faculty to set limits;290 Reason is the faculty to overcome these limits, or to apprehend the unlimited. The Understanding is the faculty of determination;291 Reason is the faculty to capture the indeterminate, or, more accurately speaking, the supra-determinate.292 The Understanding, however, possesses “the most astonishing and mightiest of powers, or rather the absolute power,” namely, “the activity of dissolution.”293

289 “Reason as a practical faculty had been presented [by Kant] as it must be conceived by finite thought, i.e., by the intellect [Understanding].” (Preface-Difference: 81, my emphasis)
290 “The intellect [understanding], as the capacity to set limits, [erects a building and places it between man and the Absolute].” (Preface-Difference: 89)
291 “The intellect essentially aims at thoroughgoing determination.” (Preface-Difference: 95)
292 The indeterminate understood as that which has no determinations at all, is nothing in Hegel’s view; or else, being indeterminate is still a (privative) determination of something.
293 Preface-PhS:18.
Kant’s thesis is that whereas the Understanding can attain to objective truth, Reason can not.\textsuperscript{294} According to Kant, our knowledge is, ultimately, knowledge only of the finite and conditioned; as for the infinite and unconditioned it remains a purely subjective demand, never to be fulfilled on pain of internal contradictions in our knowledge.\textsuperscript{295} Hegel’s criticism to Kant is simple: exactly the inverse picture holds.\textsuperscript{296} According to Hegel, Reason attains to real truth; Understanding does not. Real knowledge is knowledge of the infinite and unconditioned; as for the finite and conditioned, it is only partial, and thus not ultimately real, knowledge. Only speculative knowledge is true knowledge. Speculative knowledge is both knowledge of specific items and knowledge or intuition of the whole in which the specific items occur.\textsuperscript{297} The Understanding, according to Hegel, plays a significant role in eventually achieving a view of the absolute substance as being, commented before.\textsuperscript{298} In fact, Understanding is itself Reason, without being aware of this circumstance.\textsuperscript{299}

With these terminological resources in mind, we can come back to Fichte and Hegel’s dissatisfaction with Fichte’s position. Fichte’s point of departure seems to Hegel adequate enough: instead of being and knowing opposing each other, knowing and being, subject and object, result from one single principle, knowing (subject) itself. Again, in other words, the opposition between being and knowing, or object and subject, is not a primitive one (in Hegel’s terms, an absolute one). This is the principle of speculation at the basis of Fichte’s philosophical system, which Hegel, against Kant, emphatically endorses. Hegel, however, raises a distinction between Fichte’s speculative principle,\textsuperscript{300} the ground insight from which alone philosophy is

\begin{itemize}
\item[294] “The transcendental use of reason is not objectively valid at all, thus does not belong to the logic of truth, i.e., the analytic, but rather, as a logic of illusion, requires a special part of the scholastic edifice, under the name of transcendental dialectic.” A131/B170 (Kant 1998: 267)
\item[295] Critique of Pure Reason, Concluding Remark to the entire antinomy of pure reason, A565/B593-A567/B595 (Kant 1998: 549-550).
\item[296] “[Kant’s] result is … that reason is incapable of knowing the infinite; a strange result for –since the infinite is the Rational –it asserts that reason is incapable of knowing the Rational.” (Hegel 1998: 56, translation altered).
\item[297] “In philosophizing the Absolute gets produced by reflection for consciousness, it becomes thereby an objective totality, a whole of knowledge, an organization of cognitions. Within this organization, every part is at the same time the whole; for its standing is its connection with the Absolute.” (Preface-Difference: 98)
\item[298] “[W]e can now see clearly … its [i.e., the Understanding’s] significance in reference to the determination of substance as being.” (Preface-PhS: 33-4).
\item[299] “[C]ommon understanding, too, is a becoming, and as this becoming, it is reasonableness.” (Preface-PhS:34).
\item[300] “The Principle of Fichte’s system is the pure thinking that thinks itself, the identity of subject and object, in the form Ego=Ego.” (Preface-Difference: 81)
\end{itemize}
possible, and Fichte’s philosophical system in which this principle is developed.\(^{301}\) Whereas the principle adequately grasps the Absolute, the system inadequately develops this very same principle and inadequately reconstructs the Absolute. According to Hegel, this inadequacy of Fichte’s philosophical system goes quite beyond a simple inadequacy of exposition that could be solved by choosing a better one. If the philosophical System does not succeed in reconstructing the Absolute in the form of Absolute Knowledge, the principle, although correct in its beginning, gets infected by this inadequacy, and thus reveals itself to be inadequate after all.\(^{302}\) We will see in a minute how this can be seen to happen in more precise terms (see section 4.4.).

4.3 PARTIAL TRUTH

Perhaps a good way to prepare the discussion on partial truth that is going to follow is to briefly consider what, according to Hegel, truth is, or rather, what truth is not. There are three points to consider on this score: first, Hegel does not believe that truth consists in a correspondence between our knowledge and reality (4.3.1.); second, Hegel does not believe truth opposes itself to falsehood on final philosophical analysis (4.3.2.); third, Hegel credits his predecessors with having contributed philosophically interesting truth about the Absolute, whereby, whatever the inadequacies Hegel sees in their theories, they can’t be spelled out in terms of falsehood simpliciter (4.3.3.).

4.3.1 Truth and Correspondence

\(^{301}\) "There are two sides of Fichte’s system. On the one hand it has established the pure concept of Reason and of speculation and so made philosophy possible. On the other hand, it has equated Reason with pure consciousness and raised Reason as apprehended in a finite shape to the status of principle." (Preface-Difference: 82). "[W]e are concerned … with Fichte’s philosophy as a system and not as authentic philosophizing. As philosophy it is the most thorough and profound speculation." (Preface-Difference: 118) More in general, "[i]t can happen that an authentic speculation does not express itself completely in its system, or that the philosophy of the system and the system itself do not coincide." (Preface-Difference: 114)

\(^{302}\) "[Fichte’s] pure ego … is not … the familiar, ordinary ego of our consciousness … That act ["the absolute act through which the ego purges itself of its content and becomes aware of itself as an abstract ego"], strictly speaking, would be nothing else but the elevation to the standpoint of pure knowing where the distinction of subject and object has vanished. But as thus immediately demanded, this elevation is a subjective postulate; to prove itself a genuine demand, the progression of the concrete ego from immediate consciousness to pure knowing must have been indicated and exhibited through the necessity of the ego itself." (Hegel 1998). This progression is what the Phenomenology of Spirit describes.
While Hegel’s concept of truth opposes itself to various alternative concepts, there is one chief target concept of truth that Hegel attacks: the traditional one of truth as correspondence between our knowledge and an independently existing reality. Here is how Hegel himself characterizes the position he wants to attack:

Truth is the agreement of thought with the object, and in order to bring about this agreement – for it does not exist on its own account- thinking is supposed to adapt and accommodate itself to the object.303

While Hegel agrees that, to some extent, truth can be defined in this way, he rejects this definition of truth as being the one of interest to philosophy. What Hegel objects to is not so much the notion of correspondence as the idea that the philosophically interesting correspondence is the one occurring between our knowledge and an independently existing reality. Hegel is happy to admit that this kind of correspondence can occur (or fail to occur), and that this circumstance has some interest for philosophy. However, Hegel thinks that the kind of correspondence which philosophy must chiefly focus on is an altogether different kind: correspondence between an object and itself. According to Hegel, correctness (Richtigkeit) is the “correspondence of an object with our representation,” whereas truth (Wahrheit) is the “correspondence of an object with itself.” What is this supposed to mean, though? Perhaps the best way to put it is to have in mind that, according to Hegel, truth in its basic sense is a metaphysical category: truth is not known, believed, asserted, predicated, and so on, but truth somehow is (whatever this ultimately means).

Absolute truth (the Absolute). According to Hegel, truth is what (ultimately) exists; truth is the (ultimate) substance of reality. Of course, this notion of truth strongly diverges from our contemporary use. In this sense, “truth” is for Hegel a term that is equivalent to “the Absolute,” “Spirit,” “God,” and so on. Hegel also uses, particularly in Phenomenology, the substantivized adjectival form to refer to truth in this metaphysical sense: “the true” (das Wahre). Thus used, “true” is for Hegel equivalent to “real” or “actual;” “the true,” for Hegel, is what is real, what is

303 Hegel 1998: 44. Of course, there are two claims here, not one: first, truth is correspondence between our thought with the object; second, our knowledge must correspond to an independently existing reality, not the other way round.
actual. Taken in its logical aspect, Hegel calls truth so understood the Idea. This is the most important concept of truth for Hegel; all the rest are founded on it.  

Relative truth. In another sense, truth for Hegel is not reality itself, but the finite entities included therein. These finite entities are abstract moments of the Absolute. They don’t have self-standing ontological reality. However, in this relative sense, these finite entities can still be true (or false). For example, a table, a planet, a friend, a state, a work of art can be true (or false). Succinctly put, e.g., a true table is an object that matches the concept of a table, false otherwise; a true friend is a person who matches the concept of a friend, false otherwise; and so on. This is the sense in which, for Hegel, truth consists in a correspondence of an object with itself.

4. 3. 2 Truth and Falsehood

From the point of view of common sense, truth opposes itself to falsehood, and vice versa. Up to a point, Hegel doesn’t dispute this everyday truism, not even if pushed a bit further into a quasi-robust logical, semantic, or epistemological thesis; from the point of view of our knowledge, Hegel admits, truth and falsehood oppose each other. What Hegel objects to, however, is the view that truth and falsehood oppose each other ultimately (i.e., on final philosophical analysis). The received opposition between truth and falsehood as an ultimate given is emphatically rejected by Hegel. This was to be expected; as we saw in my expository introduction that for Hegel there is no such a thing as “ultimate givens” in philosophy. According to Hegel, ultimately given oppositions constitute the starting point of philosophy, not its result. I said before that, according to Hegel, the fact that there apparently is a primitive, irreducible opposition between our consciousness of the world and the world itself can only mean that, on final philosophical analysis, this opposition is secondary with respect to an identity between the

304 “The Absolute alone is true, or the truth alone is absolute.” (Preface-PhS)
305 “The Absolute, Spirit, God, and so on.
306 Indeed, it is the existence of this opposition what defines this kind of knowledge as being knowledge “for us,” that is, as being finite, not absolute knowledge.
307 To some extent, Hegel defines philosophy as the type of knowledge for which there can’t be “ultimate givens.”
308 Still stronger, philosophy arises according to Hegel only when those oppositions come to be seen as insurmountable; before that, philosophy does not really have a substantial point. “When the might of union vanishes from the life of men and the antitheses lose their living connection and reciprocity and gain independence, the need of philosophy arises.” (Preface-Difference: 91)
two. The same holds in the case of truth and falsehood; its prima facie irreducible opposition is secondary with respect to an original identity between the two. This underlying identity between truth and falsehood deserves, according to Hegel, to be called *truth* in a more pregnant and robust sense than truth as opposed to falsehood;\(^{309}\) it’s this underlying truth the one with which philosophy is concerned.

4.3.3 Past Philosophers on the Absolute: Philosophically Interesting Truth

It is easy to show that Hegel acknowledges past philosophers with having contributed philosophically interesting truth about the Absolute. In other words, the circumstance that, according to Hegel, past philosophers have adopted a secondary standpoint toward the Absolute doesn’t exclude the fact that their theories contain philosophically interesting truth. What is necessary, Hegel suggests, is to separate what past philosophers *say* (which is wrong) from the *insight* behind what they said (which may well be right). That is why, for instance, “the Kantian philosophy needed to have its spirit distinguished from its letter;”\(^{310}\) because the *letter* is wrong,\(^{311}\) but the *spirit* behind it right.\(^{312}\) Indeed, even though Kant’s philosophy embodies, as Hegel sees it, the reflective (secondary) standpoint at its quintessential, there is, unbeknownst to Kant, a speculative (basic) standpoint behind his best insights. Thus Hegel can say that Kant’s philosophy requires “to have its purely *speculative* principle lifted out of the remainder that belonged to, or could be used for, the arguments of reflection.” (Difference: 80, my emphasis)

Fichte, Hegel admits, made a big step towards getting the nature of the Absolute\(^{313}\) right. However, despite his progress, he was still situated on the secondary standpoint: “These are the two sides of Fichte’s system. On the one hand it has established the pure concept of Reason and of *speculation* and so made philosophy possible. On the other hand, it has equated Reason with

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\(^{309}\) Again, we find an intriguing parallelism between Hegel and Heidegger on this point. In my previous chapter, I showed how, according to Heidegger, there is a notion of truth which underlies the opposition between (derivative) truth and falsity. That notion of truth, *truth as aletheia*, Heidegger claims, is a more pregnant one than the truth as correspondence. Despite dramatic differences in this more pregnant notion of truth itself, Hegel seems to defend an analogous thesis.

\(^{310}\) *Preface-Difference*: 80.

\(^{311}\) “Letter” can be taken to be what is said about the Absolute as observed from the secondary standpoint.

\(^{312}\) “Spirit” can be taken to be what is said about the Absolute as observed from the basic standpoint.

\(^{313}\) Fichte’s term is “I.”
pure consciousness and raised Reason as apprehended in a finite shape to the status of principle.”
(D: 82, my emphasis)

4. 4 PARTIAL TRUTH: ABSOLUTE BASIC PROPOSITION

By now we have all the elements necessary to construct my case. Recall that my goal is to show that, according to Hegel, past philosophical theories about linguistic truth about the Absolute are inadequate, but not exactly false; rather, they are partially true (in the sense sketched in Chapter 1, to be further developed in Chapter 5). What I intend to do is to make my focus even more narrow and consider Hegel on propositional truth about the Absolute, that is, truth about the Absolute expressed by means of a single proposition. It is common to Hegel’s predecessors the view that a single proposition can be (or fail to be) true of the Absolute. While Hegel is committed to the view that truth about the Absolute can (indeed, must) be known and linguistically communicated, he believes (or so I shall argue) that a single proposition is true, at best, of a part (or aspect) of the Absolute (which I will construe as: true of the Absolute as observed from a secondary standpoint). Accordingly, my goal in what follows is to show that, according to Hegel, one single proposition is true of only part of the Absolute (is partially true of the Absolute, following the terminology I introduced in Chapter 1, section 1.1.3., two final paragraphs). The strategy I will follow focuses on a special kind of proposition, what Hegel calls, following Fichte (and, indirectly, Kant), an Absolute Basic Proposition (Absolut Grundsatz).

Suppose that a proposition expresses the Basic Principle of a philosophical System.\(^{314}\) Since a philosophical System, in Hegel’s view, is the totality of knowledge or Science, a Basic Principle of a philosophical System is the Basic Principle of the totality of knowledge or Science. A Basic Principle, as Hegel understands it, is a proposition expressing a (putative) absolutely unconditioned truth.\(^{315}\) Being absolutely unconditioned, this truth founds the rest of truths of the

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\(^{314}\) “Suppose that the Absolute is expressed in a fundamental proposition, validated by and for thinking, a proposition whose form and matter are the same.” (Hegel Preface-Difference: 103) Hegel borrows the terms “matter” and “form,” bizarre-looking in talk about propositions, from Fichte’s Grundlage der Gesamten Wissenschaftslehre (Jaeschke 2005).

\(^{315}\) The idea of an absolutely unconditioned principle goes back to Kant via Fichte (and Schelling). Here is how Kant presents the idea in the Critique of Pure Reason: “Reason in its logical use seeks the universal condition of its judgment (its conclusion), and the syllogism is nothing but a judgment mediated by the subsumption of its condition under a universal rule (the major premise). Now since this rule is once again exposed to this same attempt of reason,
totality of knowledge or Science. An absolutely unconditioned truth, according to Hegel, is a truth that holds true logically, epistemologically and metaphysically, that is, absolutely so (I will explain what this means, although I have already partially explained it in the expository part). Let us suppose that (at least) one proposition successfully expresses this Basic Principle. Hegel’s claim is that the truth that such a proposition expresses, even when by hypothesis is absolutely unconditioned, is conditioned by the fact that it is expressed by a proposition, which Hegel equates with an expression from the reflective standpoint. I will translate Hegel’s claim into my own terms. According to Hegel, I will claim, a proposition successfully expressing a Basic Principle of a philosophical System, if it exists, is partially true, that is, it’s true of only part of the Absolute (i.e., it’s true of the Absolute as observed from a secondary standpoint).

4.4.1 System and Foundation

Let us start with the very idea of an absolute basic proposition. Hegel starts by assuming (so, to say, for the sake of the argument) that a system, i.e., a set of propositions true of the Absolute and related among themselves in terms of grounding, must be itself grounded on an absolute basic proposition; but he claims that such an assumption is wrong. This is how Hegel puts the point in a nutshell:

One might demand that the system as an organization of propositions should present the Absolute which lies at the basis of reflection in the fashion of reflection, that is, as the highest, or absolutely fundamental proposition [absolut Grundsatze]. But such a demand entails its own nullity.316 For a proposition [Satz], as something posited by reflection, is something limited and conditioned on its own account.317

Hegel’s basic idea is, at least at its most general level, relatively simple. The Absolute, the systematic cognition of which is the chief goal of philosophy, is an infinite sort of object. Recall

and the condition of its condition thereby has to be sought (by means of a prosyllogism) as far as we may, we see very well that the proper principle [Grundsatz] of reason in general (in its logical use) is to find the unconditioned for conditioned cognitions of the understanding, with which its unity will be completed.” (A307/B364; Kant 1998: 391-2)

316 The same contradiction is suggested by Hegel in a previous passage: “The task of philosophy is to construct the Absolute for consciousness. But since the productive activity of reflection is, like its products, mere limitation, this task involves a contradiction.” (Preface-Difference: 94)

317 Preface-Difference:103. On second thought, I suspect that the correct translation of Satz in this passage shouldn’t be proposition, but rather principle. For Hegel seems to refer to a propositional content in so far as this content founds other propositional contents, not by itself. What is defective in a Satz, according to Hegel, is not its content per se, but the fact that, by itself, it cannot found the rest of (organized) Sätze making up the system.
from section 4.1.1. that alternative terms for infinite are unlimited and unconditioned. According to Hegel, then, the Absolute, is an unlimited and unconditioned sort of object. As Hegel conceives it, a philosophical System is, however, organized (i.e., systematic) knowledge of the Absolute. This organized knowledge of the Absolute, that is, a philosophical System, Hegel claims, consists of an organizaton of propositions. Since this organization of propositions concerns the knowledge of the Absolute, however, one can expect to find one proposition in which, in some way or other, the rest of propositions are founded. The right to this expectation rests on three assumptions. First, this organized whole of knowledge is knowledge, precisely, of the Absolute, which is unconditioned. Second, this fundamental trait of the absolute must be present in the knowledge of the Absolute itself, which must be likewise unconditioned. Third, this knowledge of the Absolute is, however, an organized whole of (discrete) propositions, related among themselves in terms of foundation (condition). A first, unconditioned proposition must therefore found the rest. The proposition in which the rest of the propositions of the System are founded would be the absolutely unconditioned Principle of Knowledge. But, Hegel claims, a proposition, as something “posited by reflection,” is “limited on its own account.” Therefore a proposition, on its own, cannot adequately express an absolutely unconditioned Principle of Knowledge. Another, more economical way to put the whole point is simply to say that, according to Hegel, the notion of an absolutely fundamental proposition (absolut Grundsatz) involves a contradiction on its own terms.

We must see first what exactly makes a proposition something limited and conditioned such that the task of expressing an unconditioned principle becomes impossible for it. Then we must consider why this circumstance entails (in my terms) that, should there be a proposition expressing the absolutely unconditioned principle of the totality of knowledge, this proposition

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318 Hegel is (polemically) assuming, via Fichte, a Kantian picture of cognition, according to which Reason “uniquely prescribes and seeks to bring about … the systematic in [the Understanding’s] cognition, its interconnection based on one principle” Critique of Pure Reason, B673 (Kant 1998: 591). This view is put forcefully by early Schelling in the following way: “Wissenschaft überhaupt – ihr Inhalt sey, welcher er wolle- ist ein Ganzes, das unter der Form der Einheit steht. Dieß ist nur insofern möglich, als alle Theile derselben Einer Bedingung untergeordnet sind, jeder Theil aber den andern nur insofern bestimmt, als er selbst, durch jene Eine Bedingung bestimmt ist. Die Theile der Wissenschaft heißen Sätze, diese Bedingung also Grundsatz. Wissenschaft ist demnach nur durch einen Grundsatz möglich.”: “Science as such (regardless of its content) is a whole, which stands under the form of unity. This fact is only possible in so far as all its [i.e., Science’s] parts are subordinated to one [single] condition, [and] each part determines another part only in so far as the first is determined itself by that one condition. The parts of Science are called propositions, and this condition [is called], therefore, fundamental proposition. Science is therefore only possible in virtue of a fundamental proposition.” Schelling [1794] 1985, I :16, my translation).
would be partially true, that is, true of only part of the Absolute (i.e., of the Absolute as observed from a secondary standpoint).

At the most general level, Hegel says that what makes a proposition something limited and conditioned is the fact that a proposition is “posited by reflection.”

Recall from section 4.2.2. that, according to Hegel, reflection is the faculty to cognize the limited and conditioned. All of its products are limited and conditioned. A proposition, being a product of reflection, is thus limited and conditioned. (Or rather, more exactly put, the cognitive content of a proposition is something limited and conditioned.) The content of a proposition is conditioned, that is, in relation to other cognitions. Now other cognitions are expressed, in the System, also by propositions. But the relation of proposition to proposition is (directly or indirectly) that of foundation. This explains why Hegel claims that a proposition is conditioned because “it requires another proposition as its foundation [Begründung], and so on ad infinitum.” (Preface-Difference: 103) Here is how the passage continues:

One might demand that the system as an organization of propositions should present the Absolute which lies at the basis of reflection in the fashion of reflection, that is, as the highest, or absolutely fundamental proposition. But such a demand entails its own nullity. For a proposition, as something posited by reflection, is something limited and conditioned on its own account. It requires another proposition as its foundation, and so on ad infinitum.

What does “foundation” (Begründung) mean here? According to Hegel, when a proposition is founded by another proposition, the latter is more basic than the former, as far as the truth of the proposition is concerned. But what kind of priority does Hegel have in mind? Is it logical, epistemological, metaphysical—or still another kind of priority? Since Hegel is concerned with a potential principle as the basis of the totality of knowledge, Hegel’s foundation must go beyond logical priority, logic being only concerned with the form of knowledge, abstracting from the question whether knowledge is true knowledge of its object. This means that epistemology, not only logic, must be taken into account here. Thus, any proposition is conditioned because

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319 Hegel Preface-Difference: 103.
320 Preface-Difference: 103.
321 Hegel is (polemically) assuming a Kantian(-Fichtean) notion of logic (against which he reacts). “General logic abstracts … from all content of cognition, i.e., from any relation of it to the object, and considers only the logical form in the relation of cognitions to one another, i.e., the form of thinking in general.” Critique of Pure Reason, A55/B79 (Kant 1998: 195-6)
another proposition, according to Hegel, is epistemologically more basic, and so on ad infinitum. In this sense, a proposition is epistemologically founded on another proposition if, in order to know the former to be true, we need to have known the latter to be true (but not the other way round). Recall from section 4.1.2., moreover, that Hegel is committed to the view that our knowledge of reality and reality independently from our knowledge are, in fact, two non-autonomous sides of what is one and the same thing, namely reality-coming-to-know-itself; therefore, for Hegel epistemological priority involves metaphysical priority. In this sense, a proposition is metaphysically founded on another proposition if, for what the former expresses to be the case, what the latter expresses must be the case (but not the other way round). In short, Hegel’s “foundation” concerns epistemological and metaphysical priority, not (or not only) logical priority. Or rather, Hegel’s term “foundation” concerns logical, epistemological, and metaphysical priority together, since for Hegel logic, epistemology, and metaphysics are different cognitive aspects of what ultimately is the same thing, Absolute Knowledge, or the Absolute-coming-to-know-itself. According to Hegel, thus, (the truth of) any proposition, in so far as it is a proposition, is logically, epistemologically and metaphysically founded by (the truth of) another proposition, and so on ad infinitum.

Is Hegel right in this claim, however? Is any proposition necessarily founded, logically, epistemologically, and metaphysically, on another proposition, and so on ad infinitum? Can’t there be (at least) one proposition that is neither logically, nor epistemologically, nor metaphysically founded on another proposition? One might consider plausible candidates from Modern philosophy, such as, paradigmatically, Descartes’ “I think,” as examples of propositions prima facie not founded on another and, thus, absolutely unfounded. But this brings us to the crucial point: Hegel’s claim does not concern specific propositions, but, rather, any proposition in general, that is, the propositional form itself. Let us therefore be clear from now on that Hegel’s claim that a proposition “is conditioned on its own account” applies to any proposition qua proposition (including, for example, Descartes’ “I think”), not to such and such specific proposition. According to Hegel, thus, a (putative) absolutely unconditioned truth expressed by a (single) proposition is conditioned, precisely, by the propositional form that (by hypothesis, truly) expresses that truth. This propositional form, according to Hegel, not what is expressed by it, makes a putative Absolute Basic Proposition fail to be absolutely unconditioned, and thus, I will
argue, to be true of only part of the Absolute. We need to see, however, how this is supposed to happen, and this is what I am going to consider now in some detail.

Let us suppose that there is a proposition $P$ not founded on any other proposition, neither logically, epistemologically nor metaphysically. Such proposition, if it exists, can be considered a Basic Principle of a philosophical System, that is, the Basic Principle of the totality of knowledge. This proposition can be called (and Hegel does call it) an Absolute Basic Proposition ("absolut Grundsatz")$^{322}$. I will follow Hegel in showing that although the truth expressed by $P$ can be taken to be (by hypothesis) absolutely unconditioned, the propositional form in which this truth is expressed renders that truth conditioned. I will take this to mean that an Absolute Basic Proposition is true from the reflective standpoint only, that is, true of the Absolute as observed from a secondary standpoint.

4.4.2 Hegel’s Semantics of the Absolute Basic Proposition

To follow Hegel’s case I am going to consider the propositional form in general, that is, a proposition qua proposition, and I will elicit what we may call Hegel’s implicit semantics for it (Hegel would not admit this term as adequate). This resource of making explicit a Hegelian semantics (even though informal and sketchy) will be helpful for explanatory purposes. However, or so I want to argue, appealing to semantics is supported by a substantial working hypothesis, namely that Hegel’s views of partial truth are at least sometimes intimately related with questions of meaning. In particular, Hegel’s idea that the Absolute Basic Proposition is true of “part” of the Absolute can be seen to amount to the idea that the Absolute Basic Proposition fails to really mean what it apparently means.$^{323}$

My strategy will be as follows. First, I will show that, according to Hegel, the propositional form has three layers of meaning, a logical, an epistemological and a metaphysical one. Second, I will follow Hegel in considering the Principle of Identity, that is, “$A$ is $A$,” as the (putative) Absolute

$^{322}$ Hegel Preface-Difference: 103.
$^{323}$ With this approach, I seem to join forces with what might be called a “semantic turn” increasingly discernible in Hegel studies. See for example Berto 2007. According to Berto, Hegelian dialectics “investigates the meanings of conceptual terms, shared by competent speakers and constituting their lexical competence.” (Berto 2007:19) See also Stekeler-Weithofer 1991 and 1996.
Basic Proposition, and will use the three layers of meaning just elicited to explain why Hegel (polemically) assumes, following Fichte, that the Principle of Identity is the (putative) Absolute Basic Proposition. Third, I will show that whereas the Principle of Identity, qua Absolute Basic Proposition, can be held to be true of the Absolute logically and (perhaps) epistemologically speaking, it turns out to be true of only part of the Absolute metaphysically speaking. Fourth, finally, I will conclude that, according to Hegel, the Principle of Identity, qua Absolute Basic Proposition, is true of only part of the Absolute, i.e., of the Absolute as observed from a secondary standpoint.

Let us start by considering the three layers of meaning Hegel assumes to be present in any proposition qua proposition.

I consider first the logical layer of meaning of a proposition. In its most basic form a proposition expresses that something is something, in the form “S is P.” The crucial question I will be concerned with is: what does “S is P” mean? Let us consider examples such as “The Earth is round,” “A horse is an animal,” “Obama is American,” and so on. What do these propositions mean? Prima facie, these propositions mean, or refer to, facts (in the world), namely that the Earth is round, that a horse is an animal, that Obama is American, and so on. Now in principle facts are complex. Facts, that is, involve (at least) two components. Neither the Earth nor being round (roundness) suffice, on their own, to constitute a fact. For a fact to take place, the Earth and being round (roundness) are needed, not either of them alone (the Earth, for example, is not a fact, it is an entity with such and such properties). The same goes for horse and animal-ness, Obama and American-ness, and so on. Now whereas meaning (referring to) two components is a necessary condition in the semantics of a proposition, it is not sufficient. Also the expressions “Earth, roundness” (or “Earth and roundness”), “Horse, animal-ness,” “Obama, American-ness,” and so on, refer to (the same) two components. However, these expressions are not propositions. For a proposition to take place, the existence of a link between the two components must be expressed. Typically, the link between these two components is expressed by the verb “to be.” What does the verb “to be” link? In logically-grammatical terms, “to be” links a subject and a

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324 Or that something is not something, but I shall take the affirmative form as being the primitive one.
325 Throughout this discussion I talk about facts in a metaphysically non-committal sense.
**Predicate.** Logically-grammatically speaking, the meaning of a proposition of the form “S is P” includes three components: a subject, a predicate, and a link between them, typically in the form “is.” And what the proposition means is that there is an (objective) link between S and P. “The Earth is round,” for example, means, logically speaking, that there is a link between the Earth and roundness.

Let us consider now Hegel’s epistemological layer in the meaning of a proposition. When we state (or believe) that the Earth is round, that a horse is an animal, that Obama is American, and so on, we link something to something. The question now is: what do we link? Apparently, we link two entities (in the world). (More exactly put, we link two terms referring to two entities). These two entities (terms referring to entities) are able, if linked in some way or other, to constitute (express) a fact. Now whereas the Earth, a horse, Obama, and so on, are entities, round-ness, animal-ness, American-ness, and so on, are best described, instead, as properties. (If Kantian terminology is preferred, we can say that the former are intuitions and the latter concepts.)

In principle, the crucial difference between an entity and a property is that whereas an entity is (ultimately) an individual item, a property is a general trait. Many entities can share a property (the Earth is round, a plate is round, and so on). Thus, in a proposition of the form “S is P,” we typically link an entity to a property (Earth and roundness, horse and animal-ness, Obama and American-ness and so on) (or rather, strictly speaking, a property to an entity.)

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326 A sample of the same idea put by an analytic philosopher: “The traditional doctrine we have to investigate is the doctrine that particulars can appear in discourse as subjects only, never as predicates; whereas universals, or non-particulars generally, can appear either as subjects or predicates.” (Strawson 1959:137) Also Quine: “The basic combination in which general and singular terms find their contrasting roles is that of predication: ‘Mama is a woman’, or schematically ‘a is an F’ where ‘a’ represents a singular term and ‘F’ a general term. Predication joins a general term and a singular term to form a sentence that is true or false according as the general term is true or false of the object, if any, to which the singular term refers.” (Quine 1970: 96) Compare mature Hegel: “[T]he judgment [of existence] considered in respect of its form asserts that the individual is universal.” (Hegel 1998: 635) Quine’s sense of predication is narrow: a quite specific case in which we express in a proposition things true of things. According to Kant, “The power of judgment in general is the faculty for thinking of the particular as contained under the universal.” (Critique of the Power of Judgment, IV; Kant 2000: 66) The view that any judgment ultimately traces back to judgment about an individual traverses different philosophical traditions. Late Husserl, for example, endorses this view thusly: “Original substrates are therefore individuals, individual objects, and every thinkable judgment ultimately refers to individual objects, no matter how mediated in a variety of ways.” (Husserl [1939] 1973: 26)

327 Hegel is going to argue against this, as commentators point out (for instance, Pippin 1989: 237: “Hegel objects to any abstract distinction between sheer particularity, on the one hand, and the universality of concepts, on the other, as if the latter are abstracted common features of the former.”)
As far as Hegel’s semantics of “S is P” is concerned, thus, the subject means (refers to) an entity, and the predicate means (refers to) a property.

This brings us, finally, to the metaphysical layer of the meaning of a proposition. Whereas the entity is supposed to be real, the property is supposed to be ideal or conceptual (Hegel is going to argue against this, but he assumes these commitments for the sake of his critique). In different words, whereas entities are found in the world, properties are abstracted from entities, and, as abstracted, they are contributed by our cognition. In Kant’s terms again, whereas entities are immediately found (intuited) in the world, properties are mediately found (thought), by means of our cognition (thinking a common trait that many entities share). Let us thus say that, metaphysically speaking, entities belong to reality, whereas properties belong to our cognition. In the terms I introduced in section 4.1.2., entities belong to being, whereas properties belong to knowing. Thus, as far as the metaphysical level of Hegel’s semantics of “S is P” is concerned, “S” means (refers to) real items, things (entities) in the world, whereas “P” means (refers to) ideal items, concepts (properties) in our cognition.

To summarize: as far as truth or falsity is concerned, Hegel believes that any proposition of the form “S is P” has three relevant layers of meaning, a logical, an epistemological and a metaphysical one; in other words, any proposition of the form “S is P” is saying three things at the same time: something logical, epistemological, and metaphysical. Logically, “S is P” says that P is true of S. Epistemologically, “S is P” says that P is a property that is true of an entity (for instance, being American is true of Barack Obama). Metaphysically speaking, “S is P” says that P is something contributed by our cognition, whereas S is an entity existing in the world (reality).

Second, let us see why Hegel, (polemically) following Fichte, assumes that the Principle of Identity, “A is A,” must be the Absolute Basic Proposition.328 (In part, this has already been suggested in my exposition in section 4.1.2. above). First, logically speaking, “A is A” means that there is an objective link between the subject and the predicate. Now in the case of the

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328 A=A can be seen as a generalization of Fichte’s chief principle Ego=Ego. “[I]n Fichte’s system Ego=Ego is the Absolute.” (Preface-Difference:117) “The foundation of Fichte’s system is intellectual intuition, pure thinking of itself, pure selfconsciousness, Ego=Ego, I am.” (Preface-Difference: 119)
Principle of Identity, “A is A,” the subject and the predicate are the same. There is identity regarding what the subject and the predicate refer to. Subject and predicate refer to the same thing (entity or property). Second, “A is A” means that there is identity between A, whatever it is, qua entity, and A, whatever it is, qua property. This means, epistemologically speaking, that there is identity between A, whatever it is, qua real and A, whatever it is, qua conceptual (or ideal). Third, metaphysically speaking, “A is A” means that there is identity between reality (as a whole) and cognition (as a whole). This last meaning is the most important one to explain why Hegel accepts (again, for polemical purposes) that the Principle of Identity is the Absolute Basic Proposition: prima facie, the Principle of Identity successfully expresses the identity between reality and cognition, which is the principle of speculation at the basis of true philosophy, and thus the Absolute Principle of a philosophical System as Hegel conceives it.

4.4.3 Absolute Basic Proposition as Partial Truth

Third, finally, let us see why Hegel thinks that, whereas the Principle of Identity is true logically and (perhaps) epistemologically speaking, it is not true metaphysically speaking. The proposition “A is A” shares with propositions like “The Earth is round,” “A horse is an animal,” “Obama is American,” and so on, the form “S is P.” When we state (or believe) the Principle of Identity, “A is A,” we state (or believe) that something is something too. There is an obvious but fundamental difference, however, namely that the subject and the predicate in the Principle of Identity are the same. However, the crucial circumstance remains that in “A is A” there is a subject and a predicate, and that, logically (not to mention grammatically) speaking, the subject is different from the predicate. Whereas A is not different from A (indeed, that is what the principle of identity says!), A qua subject is different from A qua predicate. Thus, in the Principle of Identity, A both is and is not A. On the one hand, A is A because, quite simply, that is what the Principle of Identity (truly) says. On the other hand, however, A is not A, in so far as in this proposition, one “A” is the subject and the other “A” is the predicate.

This difference of subject and predicate is best seen on the basis of a further semantic commitment that Hegel, this time not following Fichte, introduces and explicitly endorses. Whenever we say that something is something, i.e., that S is P, Hegel believes, we are
simultaneously saying that, on the other hand, something is not something, i.e., that \( S \) is not \( P \). Whereas the former is what we explicitly assert, the content of the assertion, the latter is what we implicitly co-assert, the form of the assertion. If I assert, for example, that snow is white, I am implicitly co-asserting that snow and being white, either as meanings or as entities or properties in the world, stand apart before the assertion; that is why, precisely, I can meaningfully join them in an assertion. The insight here is basically that an assertion both connects and separates simultaneously, not only the former (Heidegger makes a big deal of the same point, with different purposes). Of course, what is explicit is the connection; by hypothesis, we assert that something is something, thus connecting something to something (for example, whiteness to snow). But to connect two things, Hegel suggests, is to simultaneously acknowledge them as being separate. Thus, Hegel concludes, in the Principle of Identity A both is and is not A. On the one hand, A is A because, quite simply, that is what the Principle of Identity (truly) says. On the other hand, however, A in the subject is not A in the predicate, in so far as what is being connected in the assertion must somehow be separate prior to our asserting it, if it can be meaningfully connected at all.

Thus, what is originally one (namely, A), splits itself into two different sides as soon as we assert the proposition “A is A.” This split, however, belongs to our cognition, not to A itself. Our cognition links A to itself in the form “A is A.” For Hegel, this means that the link thus established remains external to A. Thus, the propositional form “S is P” conditions, and thus alters, what the Principle of Identity expresses. A is A, yet A is not A.

Still in different words, Hegel contends, the Principle of Identity does not express real identity, since the very possibility of meaningfully expressing this identity in a proposition piggybacks on an unexpressed prior difference of the two things being, precisely, identified. But the fact that the Principle of Identity does not express real identity suggests that the Principle of Identity does not really express identity, contra what the Principle seems to express.

What I want to conclude from this analysis is that, according to Hegel, if the Principle of Identity, “A is A,” is taken to be an Absolute Basic Proposition, then it is true of the Absolute as observed from a secondary standpoint, i.e., it is true of only a part (an aspect) of the Absolute. “A is A” is
prima facie true of the Absolute, in so far as, at face value, A is A; “A is A” is, in fact, true of only part of the Absolute, in so far as, at a higher level of philosophical insight, A is not really A. Semantically put, what Hegel is suggesting is that “A is A” fails to really mean what it apparently means. Moreover, crucially, this failure in meaning is due to the propositional form in which the truth is expressed.  

Thus, Hegel concludes, the idea that the Basic Principle of a philosophical System can be adequately expressed by a proposition, indeed the idea that there is a Basic Principle of a philosophical System at all, must be rejected. Instead, Hegel claims, the highest (although imperfect) form in which the Absolute Principle can be expressed is, precisely, in two contradictory propositions, that is, in (what Hegel, following Kant, calls) an antinomy.  

If at (what I have called) the metaphysical level of meaning, A is not A, we can supplement the Principle of Identity, “A is A,” with its contradictory, namely “A is not A,” or rather, “A is B.” When linked to the Principle of Identity, “A is B” means, according to Hegel, that whereas “A is A” expresses the logical and (perhaps) epistemological identity of “A” and “A,” A qua subject and A qua predicate, “A is A” fails to express its metaphysical identity. “A is B” acknowledges this failure. Metaphysically speaking, “A” is not really “A” (in the proposition “A is A”). Thus A is not A, A is another thing, say B. At the metaphysical level of meaning, “A is A,” while apparently saying “A is A,” really says “A is B” (that is, “A is not A”). Incidentally, “A is B,” on its own, is partially true as much as “A is A” is. For whereas metaphorically speaking, “A is B” means that A and B are (two) different things, and thus that A is not B, logically speaking, “A is B” is implicitly saying that A is B. Thus of course we can say that A is B as far as the Absolute is concerned, for instance that the Absolute is Being (or Subject, or God, or what have you). This is by hypothesis true for Hegel. However, it is true of the Absolute as observed from a secondary standpoint (from a reflective standpoint). If I am right that, according to Hegel, adopting a reflective standpoint toward the Absolute doesn’t involve observing the wrong object, but the right object but still a part of it, then any proposition of the form “A is B” true of the Absolute is partially true in the sense I am construing this notion.

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329 For a discussion of Heidegger on the principle of identity, see Der Satz der Identität (Heidegger 1957).
331 Hegel can be seen to suggest here a contradiction between the propositional form’s extension and its intension.
My claim is that Hegel’s conclusion is the following. Taken on their own, that is, as propositions, both “A is A” and “A is B” fail, on final philosophical analysis, to (really) mean what they (apparently) mean. “A is A” fails to (really) mean what it (apparently) means because, while this proposition (explicitly) (expresses, on the one hand, the identity of A and A, this proposition (implicitly) expresses, on the other, the difference of A and A. “A is B” fails to (really) mean what it (apparently) means because, while “A is B” (explicitly) expresses the difference of A and B on the one hand, this proposition (implicitly) expresses their identity, on the other. In this light, one can say that, as propositions, both “A is A” and “A is B” fail to capture the truth despite expressing what (by hypothesis) is true.332

Taken together, however, that is, as an antinomy, “A is A” and “A is B,” explicitly mean what they implicitly mean on their own. They mean, that is, that there is a contradiction. Different from a proposition that misses the truth, a contradiction (antinomy) that acknowledges itself as such “hits on” (as opposed to “misses”) the truth, if only formally speaking. This is meant by Hegel in such a robust sense that, moreover, lack of contradiction is for him, quite simply, index of falsehood.333 It is in effect Hegel’s claim that, since “A is A” and “A is B” together effectively express a contradiction acknowledging itself as such, they attain to the highest formula of truth formally speaking.334 The caveat “formally speaking” is necessary, and it stresses that even when an antinomy or contradiction acknowledging itself as such contains more truth than a proposition qua proposition, still it lacks real truth until the contradiction is, in turn, sublated.

We can understand better now what a Principle of a philosophical System really is, and why Hegel claims that there simply can not be any genuine Principle, qua Principle, for philosophy. A Principle is a proposition which allegedly is true of the Absolute (simpliciter). It is able to found the rest of true propositions of a philosophical System. According to Hegel, however, the Principle, if by hypothesis true, is true of only part of the Absolute, i.e., the Absolute as observed

332 “A=A expresses merely an identity of the intellect.” (Preface-Difference: 116) I take this quote to show that for Hegel A=A is true only from a reflective standpoint, which is what I want to claim in this section.
333 “Contradictio est regula veri, non contradictio falsi.” “Contradiction is a standard of truth, non-contradiction of falsehood.” (Hegel 1970, vol. II: 533)
334 “If one reflects only on the formal aspect of speculation and holds fast to the synthesis of knowledge [only] in analytic form, then antinomy, that is, the contradiction that cancels itself, is the highest formal expression of knowledge and truth.” (Preface-Difference: 107)
from a secondary standpoint, that is, not true of the Absolute simpliciter.\textsuperscript{335} A Principle can only be an absolutely true principle for a System that fails to become Science (real knowledge, knowledge (really) true of its object). A Principle, in other words, can only be absolutely true for knowledge, not for reality. It is in this way that, according to Hegel, a Principle is true of only part of the Absolute, i.e., of the Absolute as observed from a secondary standpoint.\textsuperscript{336}

4. 5 SUMMARY

To conclude this chapter, let me summarize the chief claims I have defended in it. In this chapter I have argued that, according to Hegel, the best past theories of the Absolute have been inadequate but not exactly false; rather, they have been partially true in the sense sketched in Chapter 1 (to be further elaborated in Chapter 5). To make my case I’ve drawn on Hegel’s prefaces to his first significant philosophical publication, The Difference between the Systems of Fichte and Schelling, and to his most influential work, The Phenomenology of Spirit. Because Hegel’s notion of the Absolute is so encompassing, it’s best to focus on a specific aspect and construct the case based on it. An aspect well suited to connect with the notion of partial truth is cognition of the Absolute and the expression of linguistic truth about it, particularly by means of a single proposition. While Hegel targets many figures in the Western philosophical tradition, his most significant targets are their immediate predecessors Kant, Fichte, and Schelling (with Spinoza in the background). According to Hegel, Kant is committed to the idea that the Absolute is beyond our cognition, and no proposition about it can be true; whereas Fichte is committed to the idea that the Absolute is within the reach of our cognition, and cognition of the Absolute rests on an absolute basic proposition. The thesis I have defended in this chapter is that, while Hegel believes that both Kant’s and Fichte’s theses about the Absolute are false simpliciter, what it’s really at stake for Hegel is Kant’s and Fichte’s underlying view of the Absolute, a view which is

\textsuperscript{335} Whereas in Preface-Difference, Hegel thus attacks the idea of an Absolute Principle of philosophy, and thus Fichte, in Preface-PhS, he links the idea of an Absolute Principle with that of absolute intuition, thus attacking Schelling as well. According to Hegel, the notions of Absolute Principle and Absolute Intuition, Fichtean and Schellingian respectively, include an analogous flaw: “If the form is declared to be the same as the essence, then it is ipso facto a mistake to suppose that cognition can be satisfied with the in-itself or the essence, but can get along without the former --that the absolute principle or absolute intuition makes the working-out of the former, or the development of the latter, superfluous.” (Preface-PhS:11)

\textsuperscript{336} In Preface-PhS, Hegel reiterates the same point thus: “A so-called basic proposition or principle of philosophy, if true, is also false, just because it is only a principle.” (Preface-PhS: 13)
not really false but partially true. Crucial to my claim is the idea that, according to Hegel, what is inadequate in Kant’s and Fichte’s views of the Absolute is their having adopted a standpoint toward it which is inadequate; this standpoint isn’t inadequate in the sense that is wrong, but in the sense that is secondary: a more basic standpoint toward the Absolute takes precedence over it and makes it possible in the first place.

To understand what the Absolute exactly is for Hegel faces more difficulties than in the case of consciousness for Sartre and human being for Heidegger, as the latter two more or less coincide with our ordinary understanding of those terms; not so with the Absolute. A possible choice is God, given that Hegel himself uses “Gott” (“God”) as an equivalent term for the Absolute, and that, similar to God, Hegel’s Absolute doesn’t depend on any other entity, whereas the rest of entities depend on it. However, different from God, Hegel’s Absolute isn’t a transcendent entity, but immanent to reality as we know it; also, knowledge of it isn’t impossible, indirect, or faith-based, but accessible to Reason, if only the right standpoint toward it is found and adopted. Another possible choice as ordinary equivalent to Hegel’s Absolute is reality. To flesh out what “reality” means in this case, however, it is important to get clear about Hegel’s views of what the proper tasks and goals of philosophy are.

According to Hegel, philosophy is ultimately speaking knowledge of the Absolute and, conversely, genuine knowledge of the Absolute is philosophical. Philosophy, Hegel urges, is a privileged sort of knowledge, unlike the rest of the sciences; what is more, philosophy is the only science worthy of this name. What characterizes philosophy as Science (Wissenschaft) is that it cognizes infinite, that is, unlimited and unconditioned sorts of objects. Ultimately speaking, Hegel suggests, there is only one infinite sort of object, the Absolute or reality. Philosophy can thus be defined as knowledge of the Absolute. Conversely, the Absolute can be defined as reality plus philosophical knowledge of it, i.e., reality knowing itself as such. For Hegel, this means that philosophical knowledge isn’t knowledge about something (in this case, the Absolute) but, rather, the overcoming of the gap in virtue of which the former happens to be “about” the latter. To overcome this gap, according to Hegel, involves the task of transforming philosophy from being “love of knowing” to being actual knowing; of grasping the True not only as Substance, but equally as Subject; of exposing knowledge as a System; and of presenting the Absolute as Spirit.
(Geist). To understand what the Absolute is, according to Hegel, and to show that the Absolute so understood is for Hegel the whole of what there is, i.e., reality, a good way to proceed is to consider what reality, for Modern philosophy, ultimately is, i.e., what comes first, being or knowing.

According to realism, there is an objective reality independent of human knowledge; according to idealism, there isn’t such independent objective reality: reality totally or partially depends on our knowledge of it. Regardless of which option is defended, both traditional realism and idealism share one common assumption: being and knowing are thought in analogy with a relation between two entities, one of which produces, causes, brings about, etc. the other. What according to Hegel both traditional realism and idealism overlook is that in a relation of cause to effect, the cause is as much dependent on the effect as the other way round; given that the goal of traditional realism and idealism is to establish than one of the sides (being and knowing, respectively) is independent of the other (whereas the other depends on it), both traditional realism and idealism fail to be tenable or coherent philosophical pictures of the whole of what there is, i.e., of reality.

An alternative picture is what can be called absolute (as opposed to traditional) realism or idealism. According to absolute realism, defended by Spinoza, being is basic and knowing is secondary; however, knowing isn’t an effect or product of being, but an accident or property thereof. According to absolute idealism, defended by Fichte, knowing is basic and being is secondary; however, being isn’t an effect or product of being, but an accident or property thereof. Despite the fact that Hegel acknowledges philosophical progress in Spinoza’s and Fichte’s options, he rejects both of them for being partial (not false): according to Hegel, the Absolute is both Spinoza’s being (Substance) and Fichte’s knowing (Subject), not either of them. This means that for Hegel it must be shown that the true Absolute is both (absolute) being and (absolute) knowing interacting with each other in a process in which, at the end, the Absolute knows itself as being. This process is what Hegel calls Absolute Knowledge. Absolute Knowledge is according to Hegel nothing other than the Absolute itself, that is, the whole of that there is, i.e., reality, knowing itself as such. This is what Hegel understands by the Absolute, and the object of which, I defend, he takes past theories to have been inadequate but not exactly false.
According to Hegel, there are two standpoints philosophers can adopt over the Absolute: the reflective and the speculative one. From a reflective standpoint, the Absolute appears as something about which we can’t have knowledge (Kant) or something about which we can have knowledge that can be expressed in true single propositions (Spinoza, Fichte). Reflection, according to Hegel, is the cognitive capacity that both sets oppositions, limitations, and conditions and is able to cognize finite, limited, and conditioned entities (for instance, numbers, nature, the mind, history, etc.). From the reflective standpoint, the Absolute can be cognized; but only a part (aspect) of it can be cognized. Speculation, by contrast, is according to Hegel the cognitive capacity to overcome oppositions, limitations, and conditions and thus to cognize infinite, unlimited, and unconditioned entities (that is, ultimately speaking, the Absolute). Correlating with each of these two cognitive capacities there is two cognitive faculties, Reason and Understanding. According to Hegel, Reason is the faculty able to adopt a speculative standpoint toward entities and thus cognize them over the background of infinite, unlimited and unconditioned ones; the Understanding is the faculty able to adopt a reflective standpoint toward entities and thus cognize them as finite, limited, and conditioned.

According to Hegel, one of these two standpoints is grounded on the other, which makes the former possible in the first place: the reflective standpoint is grounded on the speculative one. Using the terminology I introduced in Chapter 1, I say that, according to Hegel, the reflective standpoint is secondary with respect to the speculative one, which is more basic. According to Hegel, Spinoza, Kant, and Fichte have all adopted a reflective standpoint toward the Absolute. What is philosophically inadequate about adopting a reflective standpoint toward the Absolute isn’t that this standpoint is wrong, but that is secondary: a more basic standpoint, i.e., the speculative one, takes precedence over it and makes it possible in the first place. (Using the alternative terminology introduced in Chapter 1, section 1. 1. 2, we can say that, as far as the Absolute is concerned, a reflective standpoint toward it supervenes on a speculative one).

There are a number of ways it can be shown that, according to Hegel, a reflective standpoint toward the Absolute isn’t wrong but secondary and, moreover, adopting a secondary standpoint toward the Absolute provides us with, not falsehood, but partial truth about the Absolute. In this
chapter I have chosen to focus on the expression of linguistic truth about the Absolute, particularly in the form of a single proposition. Suppose there is a proposition that can play the role of the Basic Principle of Science (*Wissenschaft*), that is, of a philosophical System. Such a proposition, if it exists, must be absolutely unconditioned, and thus true of the Absolute. Arguing by *reductio*, it turns out that this proposition, if it exists, is true of only a part of the Absolute, that is, true of the Absolute as observed from a secondary standpoint. To show this, I showed that, according to Hegel, there are three layers of meaning in the propositional form (that is, in what any proposition qua proposition has in common with any other proposition), a logical, an epistemological, and a metaphysical one. By virtue of the logical layer, any proposition qua proposition says that *something is something* (for instance, that Barack Obama is American). By virtue of the epistemological layer, any proposition qua proposition says that a predicate, contributed by our cognition, is true of a subject, an existing entity in the world (for instance, that being-America is true of Barack Obama). By virtue of the metaphysical layer, any proposition qua proposition says that the predicate is contributed by our cognition, whereas the subject refers to an entity in the world. Given these semantic commitments of Hegel, the most plausible candidate for Absolute Basic Proposition is “A is A,” the principle of identity. Logically speaking, “A is A” says that the subject and predicate are the same thing, i.e., something is *itself*. Epistemologically speaking, “A is A” says that there is identity between A qua existing in the world and A qua contributed by our cognition. Metaphysically speaking, “A is A’ says that there is identity between reality (as a whole) and cognition (as a whole).

According to Hegel, “A is A,” the principle of identity *seems* to be an unconditionally true proposition, i.e., a proposition true of the Absolute. However, he suggests that, under analysis, this proposition fails to be true of the Absolute. While “A is A” explicitly says that A *is* A, it *implicitly* says that A *is not* A, by virtue of its propositional form. This doesn’t entail that “A is A” is false of the Absolute, only that it is partially true: true, but only of a *part* (an aspect) of the Absolute.
CHAPTER 5
THEORY, FALSEHOOD, AND PARTIAL TRUTH

In this final chapter, I want to draw some conclusions concerning the three notions around which this study revolves, object, standpoint, and partial truth. Rather than summarizing my chief claims in the central chapters, I will concentrate on the notions of object, standpoint, and partial truth themselves and will look for more substantial results. My overall suggestion will be that the notions of object, standpoint, and partial truth, as I construe them, can help us to make sense of a sort of relation sometimes established between philosophers and their predecessors that, I claim, constitutes a significant pattern in the philosophical praxis and the history of philosophy. For this suggestion to be philosophically interesting, however, I need to give the notion of partial truth a more robust content than I have so far. I will argue that this content is given by the unique nature of the entities to which partial truth can be seen to apply (in this study, consciousness, human being, and the Absolute), in virtue of which a philosophical theory that fails to be based on a basic standpoint, not a secondary one, is bound to misrepresent their nature, instead of simply failing to capture it.

5.1 PARTIAL TRUTH AND FALSEHOOD

In the first place, I want to make a case for the legitimacy of the notion of partial truth as sketched in Chapter 1 and put to practice in Chapters 2, 3, and 4, however we later philosophically spell out that notion in more detail. Essentially, I argue that the notion of partial truth is needed in at least some cases in which philosophers reject theories by their predecessors, specifically when they reject these theories while acknowledging that they contain philosophically interesting truth. I leave for the second part of this chapter the attempt to characterize with more precision the notion of partial truth so construed.

I start from two facts. First, philosophers tend to reject, much more than to accept, past philosophical theories of \( x \) (reality, knowledge, morality, language, the mind, etc.)\(^{337}\). Second,
philosophers don’t hesitate, in many instances, to admit that the theories they reject contain philosophically interesting truth. Our first problem is to square these two facts: how can philosophers reject philosophical theories that, they acknowledge, contain philosophically interesting truth?

The obvious candidate answer is that philosophical theories can well combine truth with falsehood, and it’s on account of the latter that they are rejected. I want to contend, however, that this answer isn’t quite satisfactory, for at least two reasons. First, if we accept the answer as it stands we are still confronted with the task of explaining how exactly truth and falsehood are combined, a task which, I show below, brings us back to our original problem, namely to explain why some philosophers reject theories that, they acknowledge, contain truth. Second, more decisively, some theories can be constructed as containing only truth (thus no falsehood), while they are still rejected. This circumstance constitutes a straight counterexample to our first candidate answer and forces us to look for a different one. Under the plausible assumption (which I will briefly discuss below too) that philosophical theories are ultimately evaluated and thus accepted or rejected in terms of truth and falsehood, I will conclude that, at least in some instances, the only adequate way to square the two facts above mentioned is with help of the notion of partial truth as construed in this study. This will be my answer to our first problem.

5.1.1 Combination of Truth and Falsehood as Explanation

Let me show in the first place that arguing that theories can combine truth with falsehood doesn’t explain why some philosophers reject theories that, they acknowledge, contain philosophically interesting truth. I obviously don’t dispute that philosophical theories can (and do) combine truth with falsehood, something that is difficult to deny. What I’ll dispute is that this fact provides us with an explanation (straight one, at any rate) of the puzzle at hand.

The basic problem is that truth and falsehood can be combined in a variety of ways, and that an adequate classification requires philosophical, not just taxonomic work; but this philosophical work requires elucidating, for each sort of combination, to what extent what prima facie is falsehood is genuine falsehood, which leaves up in the air, for at least some cases, whether what
prima facie is a combination of truth and falsehood isn’t something else, for instance truth with no falsehood. In other words, the expression “combination of truth and falsehood” is by no means univocal, and one of the options that this expression allows, depending on how far we stretch its meaning, is, precisely, that of partial truth as construed in this study.

Consider, to illustrate the point, a toy philosophical theory consisting of the claim that reality consists of numbers, physical material, and God. Suppose that a philosopher rejects this theory while acknowledging that the theory contains philosophically interesting truth. If we ask ourselves why this philosopher rejects a theory that, she acknowledges, contains truth, and someone answers that it is because the theory combines truth with falsehood, we don’t know if this should be taken to mean that, according to this philosopher, the theory contains falsehood in addition to truth (for instance, she believes it’s false that reality consists of, say, numbers, but believes it’s true that it consists of physical material and God) or that, according to this philosopher, the theory is only partially true with no falsehood (if it’s the case that she believes that reality consists of numbers, physical material, God, and something else, say moral values); in some sense, this can still count as a “combination of truth and falsehood,” as the theory can be seen to be true, given that reality consists of, say, numbers, physical material, and God, but also false, in so far as it’s false that this is all reality consists of.\textsuperscript{338} In short, nothing in the expression “combination of truth and falsehood” rules out, without further philosophical elucidation, the possibility of partial truth with no falsehood.

Roughly the same conclusion can be established by means of a different, a bit more elaborate argumentative strategy. Let’s think of possible ways in which truth and falsehood can be combined in terms of a spectrum going from a less to a more essential combination (or a more to a less non-essential one),\textsuperscript{339} the criterion consisting, crudely, in how easy is to pull apart falsehood from truth in each case.\textsuperscript{340}

\textsuperscript{338} I will come back to this “combination of truth and falsehood” in section 5.2.1. (methodological solution to robust rejections of partially true theories).

\textsuperscript{339} Of course, the term “combination” is somewhat question-begging, since it suggests non-essential rather than essential unity. By now I use the term non-committedly.

\textsuperscript{340} The formula “how easy is to pull apart falsehood from truth” is of course casual; refinement would be needed to make it more precise and rigorous.
At its most non-essential (least essential), truth and falsehood can be easily pulled apart, as in the case of statements combined truth-functionally (at its most simple, in the case of a conjunction of a true and a false statement). For instance, the assertion “Barack Obama is the 44th president of the USA and Barack Obama is a Republican” can be said to combine truth with falsehood, but in a quite non-essential manner, probably at the low end of the spectrum: if we remove the false statement “Barack Obama is a Republican,” the statement “Barack Obama is the 44th president of the USA” remains unaffected in its truth.\(^\text{341}\)

At its most essential, truth and falsehood can be seen as being so tightly tied together that it’s very difficult (at the limit, impossible) to pull them apart; crudely, removing the falsehood affects its truth counterpart significantly (at the limit, completely).\(^\text{342}\) Examples are more difficult to find in this case, but perhaps dialetheias (statements which, according to some philosophers, are genuinely both true and false) or semantic paradoxes might work. The Liar paradox, for instance in the form “This sentence is not true,” can be seen as combining truth with falsehood, but arguably in a more essential (less accidental) way than in the case of a conjunction of a true and a false statement: it is precisely because the statement is false that is true, and vice versa; if we remove the falsehood (supposing we can), its truth counterpart is significantly affected: if we think of the statement as not being false, it is eo ipso no longer true.

Along the spectrum, we can think of intermediate sorts of combinations of truth and falsehood, partly non-essential and partly essential. The statement “The sky is blue,” for instance, can be seen as combining truth with falsehood, in the sense that the statement is true at face value (as opposed to, for instance, “The sky is red”), but false in reality (the sky isn’t blue outside the Earth atmosphere; more abstractly, and assuming a commitment to anti-realism about secondary qualities, things are colorless; etc.). Even though you can pull apart falsehood from truth (i.e., you can say that the statement is true at face value, false in reality), there is a connection between them that is more essential than the conjunction of a true and a false statement.

\(^{341}\) Both regarding the brute fact that it is true and regarding what makes it true.

\(^{342}\) This “affects” would of course need to be spelled out in more detail.
If we keep in mind the distinction between essential and non-essential combination of truth and falsehood and come back to our candidate answer, its inadequacy can be shown in the following way. Suppose someone claims that some philosophical theories combine truth with falsehood, and that this circumstance can explain why some philosophers reject theories that, they acknowledge, contain philosophically interesting truth. Suppose we ask ourselves: how essentially (or non-essentially) are truth and falsehood combined in this case? We have two possible responses (or, rather, two directions of response along the spectrum), and my contention is going to be that neither one shows that the theory is rejected on account of its falsehood.

First, if truth and falsehood are combined non-essentially (at the limit, at its low end: the theory is, say, a conjunction of true and false assertions), the situation is best described by saying that it’s the false statements in the theory, not the theory, that are being rejected. Suppose, to illustrate the point, that we have a “philosophical” theory about Barack Obama consisting of a conjunction of two statements, one true and one false: “Barack Obama is the 44th President of the USA and Barack Obama is a Republican,” and that a philosopher rejects this theory, while acknowledging that it contains interesting truth. I contend that it’d be perverse to describe this situation by saying that what this philosopher is rejecting is a theory about Barack Obama; what she is rejecting, rather, is a false statement in the theory (“Barack Obama is a Republican”), while (presumably) acknowledging the other as containing interesting truth. What I conclude is that the more non-essential the combination of truth and falsehood is, the less sense it makes to appeal to this combination to argue that the theory, as theory, is being rejected.

Second, if truth and falsehood are combined essentially (at the limit, at its top end: it’s impossible to pull apart falsehood from truth), it’s unclear to what extent it’s really on account of falsehood that the theory is being rejected (even if we grant that the theory does contain falsehood). Suppose, to illustrate the point, that we have a “philosophical” theory consisting of the single claim “This sentence is not true.” I contend that we can reject this theory and we

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343 Of course, the philosophers rejecting the theory may be mistaken that the statements are false to begin with, but that’s a different issue.
344 Of course, a conjunction of a true and a false statement gives us a false statement anyway, but that affects the operation of truth values, not truth and falsehood proper.
345 That certainly would be a weird theory; what is important though isn’t the semantic paradox form, but the fact that truth and falsehood are combined essentially.
can take it to combine truth and falsehood; but it’s unclear whether we’re rejecting the theory because it combines truth and falsehood. If we take the theory to be false with no truth at all, then we’re rejecting the theory without acknowledging that it contains truth in the first place; but this is not, by hypothesis, the case to be accounted for (we want to account for the case in which a philosopher rejects a theory that, she acknowledges, contains philosophically interesting truth).

If, on the other hand, we take the theory (in this case, assertion) to contain truth at all, it seems contradictory (or non-rational) to reject it on the grounds that it contains an alleged falsehood that (in some loose sense that would require spelling out) “contributes” to its truth: for, remember, it’s because the sentence “This sentence is not true” is false that is true, and vice versa. What I conclude in this case is that the more essential the combination of truth and falsehood is, the less sense it makes to argue that the theory is rejected on account of its falsehood.

What I conclude from the overall argumentative strategy deployed in my last seven paragraphs is the following: on the non-essential side of the spectrum, we are not rejecting a theory on account of its falsehood, at least qua theory: what we are rejecting is the false assertions therein. On the essential side, we are not rejecting a theory on account of its falsehood; if anything, we are rejecting truth and falsehood together, given that one affects the other. My overall conclusion is: surely we can reject a theory while we acknowledge that it contains interesting truth, and do so on the grounds that “it combines truth and falsehood;” but it’s unclear whether falsehood is doing here the explanatory job required to make sense of the puzzle: for all we know, it’s still possible that falsehood doesn’t play a role in our rejection, which leaves us with partial truth, with no falsehood, as a possible option for rejecting a philosophical theory.

My argumentation so far doesn’t establish that we can’t reject a theory on the grounds that it combines truth with falsehood; only that this combination doesn’t rule out the possibility of partial truth. Partial truth, in other words, is a possible reason why philosophers reject theories that, they acknowledge, contain philosophically interesting truth. But is it in fact the reason why this happens? Is it, in particular, in the case of Sartre, Heidegger, and Hegel on consciousness, human being, and the Absolute?
From this point onwards we have two possible routes to press the need for the notion of partial truth as construed in this study: an ambitious one on the one hand and a moderate one on the other. The ambitious route results from arguing that, at least in some cases, in particular Sartre, Heidegger, and Hegel in this essay, philosophical theories can be construed as containing only truth while they are still rejected. It thus follows that they can’t be rejected on the grounds of falsehood; partial truth would then be the natural explanation of why they are being rejected. The moderate route results from pressing the point that Sartre, Heidegger, and Hegel believe the theories they reject are false or wrong, not partially true or misleading; if that’s the case, partial truth can’t be construed as truth and only truth of part of an object, but as truth of part of an object combined with falsehood after all, in a way that needs further spelling out.

What I do in what follows is to consider the two alternatives, first the ambitious and then the moderate. In either case, I believe partial truth emerges as a useful notion to make sense of at least some instances in the pattern that is the goal of this study to elucidate: rejection of a philosophical theory that, it is acknowledged, contains philosophically interesting truth.

5.1.2 Ambitious Route: Theories Construed as Only True

Let’s attempt the ambitious route in the first place. It consists in arguing that, at least in some cases, a combination of truth and falsehood cannot be a reason why philosophers reject theories that, they acknowledge, contain philosophically interesting truth (and in my next section I will conclude that, in this case, partial truth is the only reason why philosophers do so). The argument is straightforward: at least in some cases, theories can be construed as containing only truth (thus no falsehood), while they’re still rejected. It then follows that they aren’t rejected because they combine truth with falsehood. For this argument to be persuasive, however, we need first to clarify what is meant by construing a philosophical theory as containing only truth and no falsehood, as it’s highly doubtful that any philosophical theory has ever achieved this desideratum.346

346 And probably, on a purely priori grounds, that the desideratum can ever be achieved.
Of course, the point is that a theory can be *construed* as containing no falsehood, not that it doesn’t contain any. Now construing a theory as containing no falsehood obviously involves a significant amount of idealization, as, again, it’s highly doubtful that any philosophical theory has ever achieved this desideratum. The question is: how much does this idealization affect my claim that these theories are not rejected on account of their falsehood? Remember, the goal in the ambitious route is to argue that some theories can be construed as containing no falsehood, while they are still rejected; and to do so, in particular, by presenting as examples the cases of Sartre, Heidegger, and Hegel in Chapters 2, 3, and 4 of this study. But here’s an obvious worry: doesn’t construing the best past theories of consciousness, human being, and the Absolute as containing no falsehood achieve the goal trivially? For trivially, indeed, if we construe a theory as containing no falsehood, it can’t be on account of its falsehood that the theory is rejected. The defender of the ambitious route responds that the appearance of triviality is misleading: while it is trivial that, if we construe a theory as containing no falsehood, it can’t be on account of its falsehood that the theory is rejected, it’s *not* trivial that the theory be construed as containing no falsehood in the first place. For this response to be convincing, however, we need to think of good reasons to construct theories as containing no falsehood.

The first thing to realize is that *any* theory, even the most prima facie implausible ones, can *always* be construed as containing no falsehood. All we need to do is be charitable enough interpreting its claims, accommodating evidence against it, adding ad hoc hypotheses, and so on. At the limit, even the theory that, say, there is a planet called Vulcan between Mercury and the Sun can be construed as containing no falsehood; all we need to do is to refuse to acknowledge the empirical evidence, cook up a story explaining why the existence of Vulcan can’t be empirically ascertained, appeal to cosmological non-entities that exist, etc. However, it’s more plausible for some theories than for others to be construed as containing no falsehood. For instance, it’s more plausible for Newtonian mechanics or Darwin’s theory of Natural Selection than for Ptolemaic heliocentrism or Lamarckism; and so on. Now the problem under discussion, namely why philosophers reject theories that, they acknowledge, contain truth, doesn’t concern theories, but *beliefs* about theories (see Chapter 1, section 1.2.1.). What we need to take into account, I contend, is the *grounds* on which theories are rejected, in addition to what the theories themselves say. If we consider these grounds, it’s more plausible for some theories to be
construed as containing no falsehood than for others, and that puts a constraint on what we take theories to contain; it then isn’t trivial to construct a theory as containing no falsehood.

Suppose, to illustrate the point, that a biological theory about elephants consists of the single assertion “Elephants can fly,” and that two philosophers (or biologists in this case) reject this theory, one of them on the grounds that elephants can’t fly, and the other on the grounds that the expression “to fly” is vague (depending on the meaning of “to fly,” the latter might be ready to admit that elephants can fly). Given that the first philosopher (or biologist) is essentially rejecting the theory on the grounds that it’s false, it would be clearly perverse (or fallacious) to construe the theory as containing no falsehood and then argue that the philosopher rejects it on grounds different from falsehood. But the situation is different in the case of the second philosopher: she rejects the theory on the grounds of vagueness, so construing the theory as containing no falsehood doesn’t affect those grounds; what is more, for purposes of illuminating the reasons why the second philosopher rejects the theory (vagueness in this case) it’s even better to assume that, as far as she is concerned, the theory is true (i.e., that elephants can fly): in this way, issues of falsehood won’t distract our attention from issues of (in this case) vagueness, which in this case is our central concern. A similar strategy, I hold, might be useful in the case of philosophers and the grounds on which they reject philosophical theories. In particular, a similar strategy would be useful in the case of Sartre, Heidegger, and Hegel on the best past theories of consciousness, human being, and the Absolute. The only difference is that now we heuristically construe the theories rejected as containing no falsehood, in order to find out Sartre’s, Heidegger’s, and Hegel’s grounds of rejection (we presumably don’t know them yet). It turns out, I will argue, that while there definitely are claims in the theories Sartre, Heidegger, and Hegel reject that they take to be false, those claims do not alter the substance of what Sartre, Heidegger, and Hegel see as philosophically inadequate in the theories they reject; what is more, for purposes of illuminating the reasons why the Sartre, Heidegger, and Hegel reject the theory it’s even better to assume that, as far as they are concerned, the theories are true.

Let’s first consider Sartre on consciousness. For my present purposes, I will discuss only one assertion (thesis) that, according to Sartre is false, but whose falsehood can be seen as not affecting the grounds on which Sartre rejects it. One can follow a similar strategy for the rest of
assertions in the theory. According to both Descartes and Husserl, there is a self in consciousness as the subject of our conscious acts. As I explained at length in Chapter 2, Sartre believes that this claim is false: if there is a self at all, Sartre believes, it is a self for consciousness, not in consciousness, an object for our conscious acts, not a subject of them. Still, as we saw in Chapter 2, and with due qualifications, Sartre admits that there is a self. Thus, against the view that there is no self at all (for instance, Hume’s or Nietzsche’s\textsuperscript{347}), Sartre can be seen as agreeing with Descartes and Husserl after all. Of course, this is just one step towards the present case, not all of it: Sartre agrees that there is a self as opposed to no self, but that doesn’t mean that he agrees that there is a self in consciousness as opposed to for consciousness. Now what are the grounds on which Sartre argues, against Descartes and Husserl, that there is no self in consciousness? As I explained in Chapter 2, Sartre argues that there is no self because consciousness unifies itself by being conscious of something other than itself: it is the object consciousness is conscious of, not a self in consciousness, that plays the unifying role. According to Sartre, furthermore, consciousness does so at the same time that it is non-positionally conscious of itself. In other words, consciousness does not need reflection to be conscious of itself: consciousness is conscious of itself, in the first instance, by being conscious of an object; subsequently, consciousness can always (and optionally) take itself as an object (which is what happens in the case of reflection). In other words, and here comes what I take to be Sartre’s fundamental insight against Descartes and Husserl: unreflective self-consciousness precedes the reflective one, both phenomenologically and ontologically. Given that, as I showed in Chapter 2, Descartes’ and Husserl’s theoretical insights about consciousness are based on a reflective standpoint toward it, the truth or falsehood of these insights (in this case, that there is a self in consciousness) doesn’t alter the fact that, according to Sartre, both Descartes and Husserl adopt a standpoint toward consciousness, i.e., the reflective one, which is secondary with respect to the basic one, i.e., the unreflective one. Thus, allowing that the self is in consciousness (as Descartes and Husserl would want it) would undoubtedly do violence to Sartre’s views about the self, but it would have a limited impact on his view that the unreflective standpoint toward consciousness is the basic and the reflective one the secondary. Now this view is, if my conclusions in Chapter 2 are correct, what is really crucial in Sartre’s criticisms of Descartes and Husserl. Therefore, I conclude, as far

\textsuperscript{347} These two examples need qualification, especially Nietzsche, in which one might find alternative notions of self (for instance, successful integration of different drives into one single project). I mean the view there is no self understood in the way Descartes and Husserl understand it.
as the claim that there is a self in consciousness is concerned, Descartes’ and Husserl’s theories about consciousness can be construed as containing no falsehood without altering the essence of what Sartre sees as being philosophically inadequate with them.

Something roughly analogous holds for Heidegger on human being. According to both Descartes and Kant, human being is an entity that might conceivably lack a world: it’s always up for grabs whether there is an external reality to which we (human being) relate. As we saw in Chapter 3, Heidegger believes that this claim is false: human being cannot conceivably lack a world; wondering whether there is an external reality is a relation towards entities (that of global skeptical doubt) that already assumes that a world has been disclosed in advance. Still, and again with some qualifications, Heidegger would be happy, at least to some extent, to allow that claim to be true. Of course, that would violence to Heidegger’s view of the relation between human being and world, but Heidegger’s fundamental insight about the nature of human being doesn’t concern this relation (although it’s tightly connected to it). Rather, as explained in chapter 3, Heidegger’s two fundamental insights about human being are that (i) to be for human being means a radically different thing than to be for the rest of entities, and that (ii) there is a standpoint toward things generally and over human being in particular, the pre-theoretical one, that is more basic than another standpoint, the theoretical one. It’s only when philosophers fail to see (i) that they can claim that human being might not relate to the rest of entities in the first place, that is, that it might lack a world. But this claim, false as it is according to Heidegger, might be seen as being true without altering his points (i) and (ii) above against Descartes and Kant. Thus, I conclude, Descartes’ and Kant’s views about human being can be construed as containing no falsehood, without altering the essence of what Heidegger sees as being philosophically inadequate with them.

Something roughly analogous holds, finally, for Hegel on the Absolute. According to Kant, the Absolute is the sort of entity about which we can’t get to acquire knowledge; according to Fichte, the Absolute is a sort of entity about which all knowledge rests on one single fundamental

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348 Again, this needs qualification: for Kant it makes sense to claim that human being might conceivably lack a world, but in his “Refutation of Idealism” section of Critique of Pure Reason (B274) he famously offers a proof meant to show that this is not in fact the case. It still holds for Kant that, on principle, human being might lack a world (which is what Heidegger wants to contest).
proposition, A=A. Both Kant’s and Fichte’s claims, Hegel believes, are false simpliciter. But once again, Hegel would, at least problematically, be happy to allow the two claims to be true, as long as his fundamental insight against Kant and Fichte is respected: that there is a standpoint toward things generally, and over the Absolute in particular, the speculative standpoint, which is more basic than the standpoint adopted by Kant and Fichte to make their respective claims, the reflective one. From their standpoint the claims can be seen as being true, and that doesn’t affect Hegel’s chief thrust that the reflective standpoint is made possible by the speculative one, and that the reflective standpoint isn’t so much wrong as secondary with respect to the speculative one. Thus, once again, Kant’s and Fichte’s views about the Absolute can be construed as containing no falsehood without altering the essence of what Hegel sees as being philosophically inadequate with them.

What I conclude from these three brief discussions is the following: while there are assertions (theses) in the theories of their predecessors that Sartre, Heidegger, and Hegel take to be false simpliciter, what is essential in their criticisms can be seen as remaining unaltered if, for purposes of clarifying what these criticisms really say, we assume that those claims are true. What is more, it’s better to assume for methodological purposes that these claims are true, as the thrust of these criticisms, namely, that what is inadequate in the best past accounts is the adoption of a standpoint that isn’t as much wrong as secondary, can be made more salient. But this means, I want to conclude now, that the theories in question can be construed to be true and only true (with no falsehood), while they are still being rejected.

If the reader isn’t satisfied with the results of this ambitious route, perhaps it can help to stress that its bottom line is not that Sartre, Heidegger, and Hegel would be happy to take to be true such and such theories (or, in my discussions above, claims); rather, it is that if Sartre, Heidegger, and Hegel were happy to take to be true those theories (claims), they would still reject them (on the grounds indicated in my discussions). What is being stressed here is the fact that Sartre, Heidegger, and Hegel would reject those theories, not that they would be happy to consider them true. The claim, in other words, is not a modal one about possibility (i.e., “Perhaps Sartre, Heidegger, and Hegel might take to be true such and such theories”), but a counterfactual (or subjunctive) conditional: if, per impossibile (imagine an odd parallel world inhabited by a Sartre,
a Heidegger, and a Hegel admitting views they wouldn’t dream of even conceiving in reality)
Sartre, Heidegger, and Hegel were happy to take to be true and only true such and such theories, it would still hold that that they’d reject them.

5.1.3 Moderate Route: Past Theories Are False

As an alternative to the ambitious route we have the moderate route, skeptical of the idea of philosophical theories construed (even counterfactually) as containing truth and only truth; at any rate, not as far as Sartre, Heidegger, and Hegel is concerned. This, it will be objected, flies in the face of the fact that Sartre, Heidegger, and Hegel suggest in abundant and various ways that the theories they are rejecting are false or wrong (and fundamentally so at that). At most, it will be conceded, Sartre, Heidegger, and Hegel grant the theories they reject contain some truth; but it can’t be the case that they take the theories to be true and only true, as defended in the previous section.

There are a number of alternative ways one can express the central point of the moderate route (more accurately, of the position that is going to motivate a moderate route in this chapter). One can say that the ambitious route makes the mistake of pulling apart the truth or falsehood of past philosophical theories, on the one hand and issues of priority of standpoints, on the other. Both things, it will be urged, go hand in hand: even if Sartre, Heidegger, and Hegel take their predecessors to have adopted a secondary, not wrong, standpoint toward consciousness, human being, and the Absolute, it still holds that the theories and claims are really false, not partially true or misleading. What is more, to get to see the falsehood of those theories and claims is essential to understanding the importance of a shift of perspective to a more basic standpoint. Another way to phrase the position adopted by the proponents of the moderate route is to say that Sartre, Heidegger, and Hegel are not only fighting to switch standpoints toward consciousness, human being, and the Absolute: they want us to see the actual falsehood (not partial truth) of the claims and theories they reject.

If the proponents of the moderate route are right, the chief thesis of this study seems to be in danger, for, remember, the thesis says that Sartre, Heidegger, and Hegel don’t believe the
theories they are rejecting are false, but rather partially true. In fact, however, I think the thesis can be made to be consistent with the position motivating the moderate route, provided we elucidate the thesis further and, in particular, we elucidate how believing that theory $\theta$ is partially true can be made consistent with believing that theory $\theta$ is false or wrong. I prefer to leave this task for later (see section 5.3.1.) and pursue by now the option of the ambitious route to make the strongest possible case for the usefulness of the notion of partial truth. So let’s pursue the ambitious route a bit further and come back to the moderate one at the end of the chapter (section 5.3.1.)

5. 1. 4 Truth and Falsehood as Grounds for Rejection

If the argumentation on which the ambitious route is accepted, it results that, at least in some instances (in this case, Sartre, Heidegger, and Hegel on the best past theories of consciousness, human being, and the Absolute), some theories can be construed as containing no falsehood, while they are still rejected. This puts the puzzle introduced at the beginning of 5. 1. in a stronger form: how can a philosopher (rationally) reject a theory that, she acknowledges, contains philosophically interesting truth, and only truth? The answer I want to defend is the following: Sartre, Heidegger, and Hegel, reject theories that, they acknowledge, contains philosophically interesting truth, and (counterfactually) only truth, because they believe the theories are partially true in the sense developed in this study. But to draw this conclusion I need to assume that it’s on the grounds of truth and falsehood alone that philosophical theories are evaluated and, thus, accepted or rejected. This assumption is needed to rule out the possibility that theories be rejected on non-epistemic, or, more precisely, non-alethic, grounds, which would prevent me from concluding that partial truth is the only plausible alternative to falsehood.

Philosophers can of course reject philosophical theories on many different grounds, both rational and non-rational (see Chapter 1, section 1.2.1. for a preliminary discussion). An exhaustive survey of all these possible grounds is impossible here, so what I am going to do is to simplify things a bit for the purposes of the dialectic of this final chapter (I am aware that there will be

349 Or, more weakly, on the grounds of truth and falsehood for the most part (or chiefly).
350 I.e., grounds not based on issues of truth and falsehood (“alethic,” adjective form from Ancient Greek word for “truth,” “aletheia”).
significant holes remaining in my argumentation; to fill them out would be a task worth completing). On the non-rational side of the spectrum, one can think of cultural, social, political, historical, ideological, and even racial and sexual grounds for “rejecting” philosophical theories. At the limit, and to put the point in a provocative and humorous form, a philosopher might “reject” a theory on the grounds that, say, he doesn’t like the ties that the philosopher proposing the theory wears. (Of course, to “reject” has here somewhat of a bogus meaning, hence the scare quotes). On the rational side of the spectrum, philosophical theories can be rejected for a variety of grounds: implausibility, obscurity, vagueness, lack of economy, evidence, elegance, simplicity, and so on. My contention now is that, as far as rational grounds is concerned, we can conveniently subsume all of them under the umbrella terms of “truth” and “falsehood” broadly construed. What I want to capture with this claim is the (a) theoretical and the (b) normative aspect of philosophical theories. The goal of philosophical theories, I contend, is to get to know the truth about things; some theories get to do so, and some don’t. Whether truth is construed realistically (as correspondence with an independently existing reality), idealistically (as coherence of our beliefs with one another), pragmatically (as successful coping with things), deflationarily (as passing from talk about language to talk about the world), and so on, doesn’t alter the fact that, crudely put, we distinguish between “good” and “bad” theories, and we do so by appealing to how things are. I simply assume that philosophy, in other words, is a theoretical enterprise that, as any theoretical enterprise, has truth as its goal (however truth is subsequently understood). Crudely, when we consider a philosophical theory (or claim), we ask ourselves whether the theory (or claim) is true, not whether it’s pleasant, useful, moving, funny, and so on. In addition, if we believe the theory to be true, we accept it; if we believe it to be false, we reject it.

Some people, of course, may take all of this to be far from uncontroversial. What I’ll briefly respond now, however, is that this is because the terms “theoretical” and “truth” are loaded with unnecessary baggage. Once this baggage is removed, my contention that philosophical theories are evaluated (and thus accepted or rejected) in terms of truth and falsehood becomes relatively harmless but still good enough for my purposes.
Philosophers who object to the theoretical character of philosophy are likely to do so on the basis of (a) a practical or (b) a therapeutic view of philosophy. Both “practical” and “therapeutic” oppose themselves to “theoretical,” but in different ways. A practical view of philosophy rejects the primacy of knowledge and puts the stress on action broadly understood: the goal of philosophy, it is held, isn’t to get to know the nature of reality but, rather, to act (in a variety of ways: for instance, pursuing happiness or excellence, developing moral virtues, living a meaningful life, engaging in historic or political action, etc.) A therapeutic view of philosophy rejects the primacy of knowledge, but in a different sense: the goal of philosophy isn’t to expand our knowledge but to protect it against unnecessary theoretical confusions; philosophy, in other words, doesn’t solve theoretical problems, but shows how what looks like legitimate theoretical problems are in fact pseudo-problems.

My response to both a practical and a therapeutic view of philosophy is simple: even if philosophy is in nature a practical or a therapeutic enterprise, it still remains theoretical at least in the broad sense that, at some point or other, assertions are made (for instance, about the best action to be pursued, about the origin of such and such theoretical confusion, and so on) that, as any assertion, are (or ought to be) evaluated in terms of truth or falsehood. More polemically, just to contend that philosophy is a practical (or a therapeutic) discipline is itself an assertion that, as any assertion, needs to be evaluated in terms of truth and falsehood. To claim that philosophy is a theoretical enterprise, I conclude, doesn’t need to commit us to any substantial view neither about the nature of philosophy nor of theoretical enterprises.

Philosophers who object to the view that philosophy has truth as its goal are likely to do so because they’re skeptical of the idea of an objective reality out there that our philosophical theories are supposed to capture. Perhaps, these people object, there isn’t any such reality, and what we call “truth” is simply the coherence of our beliefs with one another, or the explanatory capacity of our theories, or their allowing us to cope with things in a more successful way, and so on. (This second complaint goes hand in hand with the first one: assuming a sufficiently robust notion of theory, it’s contradictory to engage in a theoretical enterprise that doesn’t have truth as its goal, and the other way round). My response to this worry is roughly analogous to the one just seen: surely there might not be a reality out there that our philosophical theories are supposed to
capture; perhaps what we call “truth” doesn’t consist in a correspondence between our theories and this reality, but in the coherence of the different claims of the theory among themselves, in pragmatic success, and so on. But even in this case, I hold, we discriminate between “good” and “bad” philosophical theories. This is enough for philosophical theories to acquire the normative aspect I am interested in eliciting. It is this discrimination what I call evaluation (and thus acceptance or rejection) in terms of truth and falsehood. How truth and falsehood are subsequently construed (whether in terms of correspondence, of coherence, of pragmatic success, of semantic descent, etc.) is a separate issue that doesn’t affect our discrimination of philosophical theories between “good” and “bad” ones.

5.1.5 Summary

Before proceeding to consider a second problem concerning the rejection of theories acknowledged to contain philosophically interesting truth, let me summarize what we’ve got so far. Philosophers reject in many instances past accounts of x (reality, knowledge, morality, etc.), even when they acknowledge that these accounts contain philosophically interesting truth about x. The problem is how to square these two facts, rejection and acknowledgement of philosophically interesting truth. The obvious candidate answer, that philosophical accounts can combine truth with falsehood, doesn’t really help: without further philosophical elucidation, nothing in the idea of combination of truth and falsehood rules out the possibility of partial truth with no falsehood. Assuming an ambitious route for a defense of the notion of partial truth, it can be argued that some theories can be construed as containing no falsehood, while they’re still rejected. If that’s the case, our puzzle acquires a stronger form: how can philosophers reject theories that contain philosophically interesting truth and (by hypothesis) only truth? I’ve argued that philosophical theories are (or ought to be) evaluated in terms of truth and falsehood; philosophy is, in other words, a theoretical enterprise that has truth as its goal. Neither the term “theoretical” nor the term “truth” needs to include substantial commitments. Even if philosophy is seen as a practical or therapeutic enterprise, it still remains theoretical in the broad sense that it makes use of assertions that are evaluated (and thus accepted or rejected) in terms of truth or falsehood. If, on the other hand, one is suspicious of the idea of truth as something that makes philosophical theories capture an independently existing reality, it still holds that we discriminate between
“good” and “bad” theories. This discrimination, normative in nature, doesn’t need to rely on the notion of truth as correspondence, nor on any philosophically committed notion of truth. Ultimately speaking, then, philosophical theories are accepted or rejected on the grounds of truth and falsehood (however truth and falsehood are philosophically construed). Having into account that the puzzle we are facing is: how can philosophers reject theories that, they acknowledge, contain truth and only truth?, the only possible answer I see is: because they believe the theory is only partially true. The overall conclusion so far, therefore, is the following: partial truth is the only possible reason why philosophers reject theories that, they acknowledge, contain truth and only truth.

5.2 REJECT VERSUS COMPLETE

With this conclusion so far, we are confronted with a new problem: why is a partially true theory rejected at all? Of course, partial truth has something bad to it: it’s incomplete. A true theory (or description) of Ancient Rome that only covers its Kingdom period is a bad theory, because this period is only a part of Ancient Rome’s history. But doesn’t it suffice to complete a partially true theory to render it adequate? Why not add to the Kingdom period the Roman Republic and the Roman Empire and thus render it true simpliciter? If that is possible (and it does seem possible), a partially true theory (or description) would of course be insufficient, but not necessarily problematic. If a theory strikes us as insufficient we will likely reject it as adequately describing its object, but “to reject,” I contend now, has here what can be called a neutral sense: while we believe the theory is insufficient in so far as it lacks further information, we presumably don’t believe the theory is problematic as it stands. I want to contrast “to reject”

351 And by hypothesis only true, from now onwards.
352 From now on I’ll be using “true simpliciter” and derivatives as contrast pair to “partially true.” Alternative options like “wholly true” or “completely true” involve the idea that there is such a thing as the whole or complete truth about something, an idea which is of course problematic. Even Sartre, Heidegger, and Hegel, for instance, don’t mean to capture everything of philosophical interest about consciousness, human being, and the Absolute, but only what is essential to understand their nature. (Using logical terms, their respective accounts would be outlines rather than full proofs).
353 Someone might protest that, once the Roman Republic and the Roman Empire are added, surely there’re still further periods or historical facts about the Roman Empire that aren’t still covered (since it’s arguably impossible to include every claim of historical importance about Roman History); but once these periods or facts are included, further periods or facts can still be absent (for the same reason), and so on, ad infinitum. Therefore, the protester would conclude, truth will keep on being partial on and on; as a result, the very idea of a completely true account is bogus. My response is simply to concede the point, as I take it not to make any difference for my present purposes: the successive accounts will still be partial in the neutral sense I am now trying to characterize.
in this neutral sense with “to reject” in what can be called a *robust* sense. We reject a theory in a robust sense when, in addition to our believing that the theory is insufficient in so far as it lacks further information, we believe the theory is problematic in so far its assertions (theses) are (or can be) *misleading*, i.e., *true* but conducive to make someone believe something *false.*\(^{354}\) In what follows, I investigate (i) whether and, if so, in what sense a partially true theory can be seen as problematic, which is another way to ask (ii) whether, and if so, in what sense it’s possible to (rationally) reject a partially true theory in a *robust*, not just neutral sense.\(^{355}\) I will argue that there is a relatively obvious sense in which partially true theories can be seen as problematic and thus rejected in a robust sense; but, in addition, there is a stronger one, which is apt to make sense of Sartre’s, Heidegger’s, and Hegel’s positions on the best past theories of consciousness, human being, and the Absolute. As to the question in what sense these theories can be as seen as problematic, I will provide two answers: a methodological and a substantial one. The latter will prove instrumental in giving a robust content to the notion of partial truth and thus make it more philosophically interesting than it has been so far in this study.

First of all, there is a relatively innocuous sense in which partially true accounts can be seen as problematic, simply deriving from the quasi-truism that partial truth is, to some extent, always misleading.\(^{356}\) In everyday life we sometimes speak of half-truths instead of partial truth, and think of them as virtual lies. Examples are easy to come up with. Suppose I am stopped by drunk driving, and I truthfully declare that I’ve drunk one beer. This claim is obviously misleading if, in addition, I’ve also drunk three whiskies and don’t say so. What we have here is clearly a case of a problematic, not simply insufficient, partially true assertion. My declaration is obviously misleading, not simply uninformative: what I claim is *true* (i.e., I have drunk only one beer), but it’s clearly conducive to make someone believe something *false* (i.e., that that’s *all* the alcohol I’ve consumed). If the official who has stopped me knew all the relevant information about my alcohol consumption, he would of course reject my declaration as adequately describing that consumption, and indeed not just in a *neutral* sense, but in a *robust* one: crudely, he wouldn’t

\(^{354}\) In a way that would require spelling out.

\(^{355}\) From now on I assume that whenever a partially true account is seen as problematic, it is rational to reject it in a robust sense.

\(^{356}\) Which is not the same as the claim that partial truth is misleading by the very fact that *is* partial; in that case it’d be analytically true that partial truth is misleading. But because I want to contrast misleading and non-misleading partial truth, I’m obviously not interested in partial truth being misleading to be analytically true.
think something like “His declaration is incomplete, but that’s fine; let’s wait and see if he can provide further information later on” but, rather, something like “What he says is literally true, but downright deceiving. This guy is pretty much lying to me.”

It’s clear that something similar can happen with a set of interconnected assertions constituting a theory (or description of an object). Imagine a biography of William Shakespeare consisting of exclusively true assertions about his life, but failing to mention that he wrote dramatic masterpieces such as *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *King Lear*, and *Othello*. Of course, there is a sense in which, as it stands, the biography is simply insufficient; we might reject it in the neutral sense that we believe it’s incomplete, but not misleading. However, there is another sense in which the biography is problematic, as it can mislead us into believing that William Shakespeare was, say, a dramatic impresario or an actor, but not a dramatic author (and a major one in the history of Western literature), which is what we essentially take Shakespeare to be. Of course, the misleading character of the declaration for drunk driving in the example above is much more salient than in the case of the biography of Shakespeare; but that is, I contend, because in the example above what counts as relevant information is much more clearly defined, not to mention the fact that an official making a question quite explicitly sets the expectation that this relevant information be reported. By contrast, it’s less clear what is expected to be reported in a biography, or whether it should be reported in the first place. The two examples, I thus claim, don’t present differences of essence, but only of degree, at least concerning my present point, which I summarize thus: a partially true account can be seen as problematic and (rationally) rejected in a robust sense, but only in the relatively uninteresting sense that partial truth can always be misleading because relevant information is not reported.

A side complication, which I won’t pursue here in all its ramifications, concerns the question where exactly the line lies between a problematic partially true account and a non-problematic one. Coming back to the example of drunk driving, imagine the same scenario as above, but suppose that my declaration now is “I’ve drunk three whiskies” instead of “I’ve drunk one beer.” In this case my declaration is also partially true, because I’ve drunk one beer besides the three

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357 Of course, a biography is expected to report facts (and an interpretation thereof) about someone’s life; but which facts to include in this report is, on a variety of grounds, quite an open question (this merits further discussion).
whiskies; but I’m not reporting that. Intuitively, however, failing to report that I’ve drunk one beer in addition to three whiskies is less misleading than the other way round. What’s the difference? Prima facie it’s the fact that what I am reporting now has a stronger informative content than before or, correlative, that what I’m failing to report has a weaker one.\footnote{Of course, the notion of informative content is casual and needs spelling out. On the other hand, informative content is always relative to some specific expectation. In the example, the informative content of, say, what I ate for dinner is weak, because what matters is what I drunk; but it might become strong if, for instance, I went to the hospital for alimentary indisposition and the doctor asked me about the food I consumed.} So how problematic a partially true account is seems to depend on how strong is the informative content of what one fails to report. One might complicate the example imagining a continuum in the drink consumption (say, a bottle of tequila, three whiskies, two glasses of wine, a beer, a shot of soda, a glass of water, etc.), and a corresponding continuum in the declaration, from most problematic to least problematic, depending on how strong is the informative content of what fails to be reported: it would be very misleading to declare that I’ve drunk a shot of soda, if I’ve also drunk a bottle of tequila, three whiskies, two glasses of wine, and a beer, and don’t say so; it would be little misleading to declare that I’ve drunk a full bottle of tequila, three whiskies, two glasses of wine, and a beer, if what I fail to report is that I’ve also drunk a shot of soda too. In between, we have various degrees along the continuum. The bottom line here, which is a relatively side point in my overall argumentative line, is that “problematic” and “misleading” admit of degrees, depending on how strong or weak is the informative content of what one reports or fails to report.

Analogous considerations hold for the example of the biography of Shakespeare, thus for theoretical accounts (broadly construed). Compare, for instance, two biographies of William Shakespeare consisting of exclusively true claims about his life, one mentioning that one of his daughter’s name was Susanna but failing to mention that he wrote dramatic masterpieces such as \textit{Hamlet}, \textit{Macbeth}, \textit{King Lear}, and \textit{Othello}; and the other mentioning that he wrote dramatic masterpieces such as \textit{Hamlet}, \textit{Macbeth}, \textit{King Lear}, and \textit{Othello}, but failing to mention that one of his daughter’s name was Susanna. Arguably, the former is more problematic (i.e., more misleading) that the latter, as the fact that Shakespeare wrote \textit{Hamlet}, \textit{Macbeth}, \textit{King Lear}, and \textit{Othello}, \textit{Othello} has more informative content than the fact that one of his daughter’s name was Susanna. In between these two extremes, we can think of degrees along the continuum making up a
biography more or less problematic (misleading) depending on how significant the information failing to be reported is.

Let’s come back to my chief argumentative line. What I conclude from my last considerations is that partially true accounts (theories) can of course be seen as problematic and thus rejected in a robust sense, not simply as insufficient and thus rejected in a neutral one. However, to repeat, this happens in the relatively uninteresting sense that whenever we fail to report relevant information we can mislead people into believing something false (on a variety of grounds that would merit further spelling out).359

What I want to contend now is that a partially true account can be seen as being problematic in a stronger way than so far considered. The idea here is that there can be a connection between what is and what fails to be reported which is tighter than the one seen in previous examples. More precisely, sometimes what fails to be reported doesn’t concern specifics about what is being reported on, but about its nature. In the former case we fail to know facts about what is being reported on; in the latter case, we fail to know what it is. Suppose I describe a robbery by means of exclusively true assertions about it, for instance that it happened on march 1st 2012 at 8 in the evening in Michigan Avenue in Chicago, that a gun was used by the robber, that 10.000 dollars were stolen, that the victim was Bill Gates, and so on. All of these are facts about an event, about which, of course, further specifics might fail to be reported, some of them perhaps truly surprising. Suppose, for instance, that I was the robber, but don’t say so. Obviously my description of the robbery would then be a partially true account, and indeed of the problematic type: by default, I am clearly misleading my interlocutor into believing that it wasn’t me who committed the robbery. Suppose, however, that I add the true assertion “I committed the robbery.” In that case, even though a surprising piece of information is added, the nature of the event, a robbery, isn’t altered by it; the event is still a robbery. Contrast this with failure to report something which doesn’t affect specifics about what is being reported, but its nature. Suppose for instance that the new piece of information is, say, that the “robbery” was staged in a movie set by two actors. In this case, it’s no longer specifics about the event that are being reported, but

359 But which, on the other hand, are well known by philosophers of language (see, classically, for instance, Paul Grice on conversational implicatures).
information that affects something more substantial: if the “robbery” was staged in a movie set by two actors, what we are talking about is no longer a real robbery, but a fictional (staged) one, that is, in some sense, not a robbery at all.

The lesson I extract from this example is the following. What fails to be reported in a partially true account (theory) of the problematic type can be of two sorts. On the one hand, we may fail to report something that affects the specifics of what is being reported on, no matter how surprising; for instance, that I committed the robbery in the example above. On the other hand, we may fail to report something that affects the nature of what is being reported on; for instance, that a “robbery” was staged at a movie set by two actors, which is as much as reporting that the event in question wasn’t really a robbery. My contention now is that what Sartre, Heidegger, and Hegel see as failing to be captured in the theories of consciousness, human being, and the Absolute that they reject is of the latter type (of course, in a more complex way that in the case of my example; I’ll get to this in a minute).

Before elaborating on my last contention, let me make a step back and consider again my distinction between to reject in a neutral sense and to reject in a robust sense. What I’ll contend in what follows is that there are two reasons, not just one, why Sartre, Heidegger, and Hegel reject the best past accounts of consciousness, human being, and the Absolute in a robust sense: one methodological and one substantial. Together, I will suggest, they explain why Sartre, Heidegger, and Hegel, despite acknowledging that the accounts contain significant truth and only truth, still see something problematic in these accounts, and reject them as being misleading, not merely insufficient.

5. 2. 1 Methodological Reason

Let’s first consider my methodological reason. Basically it consists in raising a distinction between a description (theory) and the passing of judgment of a description. With the help of this distinction, it is possible to make sense of the fact that someone can (rationally) reject, in a robust way, an account (description) that, she acknowledges, is true, and only true, of that object. The distinction results from observing the following fact: a description can be partially true, with
no falsehood, if one doesn’t describe an object but only part of it; yet falsehood might slip into the picture as soon as we judge the description to (completely) describe its object. Of course, a description and a passing of judgment on the description are two quite separate things, but I will contend in a minute that, in many instances, and especially in theoretical descriptions, the passing of judgment is implicit in the description itself or, to put it in different words, the description is its own passing of judgment. What results from this contention is what I take to be a methodologically interesting explanation of why a partially true description can be seen as problematic (misleading). This explanation could be exploited to make sense of the fact that, on the one hand, Sartre, Heidegger, and Hegel credit the best past accounts about consciousness, human being, and the Absolute with containing philosophically interesting truth; yet, on the other hand, they see those accounts as misleading and thus reject them in a robust sense.

To have a better sense of how exactly the distinction between description and passing of judgment works, let’s come back to the first example I used in this study, back in Chapter 1. Suppose I ask you to describe the Statue of Liberty and you answer something like: “It’s a tabula ansata, that is, a tablet evoking the law; on it is inscribed the date of the American Declaration of Independence, July 4, 1776,” and you proceed to describe this tablet with minute detail. We agreed that this description is not false, in so far as the right object is being described, but it still is inadequate, in so far as only a part of it is being described; the description, in other words, is partially true in the sense developed in this study. So far, I then establish, we don’t have falsehood in the description. (We would have falsehood if your description went like this: “It’s a man wearing jeans and a T-shirt, bearing a baseball bat in his right hand and a newspaper in his left one,” and so on.) Now suppose I pass judgment on my description, saying that it does describe the Statue (this judgment can take a variety of forms and can antecede or follow the description). It is here, on my passing judgment, that falsehood comes into the picture. While my description isn’t false but partially true, my saying (judging) that the description (completely) describes the object being described is false (simpliciter).

Something analogous, I contend, can be seen as happening in philosophy. In particular,

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According to Wikipedia, the definition of a tabula ansata is: a tablet with an inscription or writing on both sides, especially a tablet inscribed in the center of a ruled square, used in ancient times to represent a range of legal and religious concepts to the illiterate. Therefore, the description of the Statue of Liberty as a tabula ansata fits the criteria for a partially true description.

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As it turns out, my opinion is that it happens a lot in philosophy; but demonstrating this would require much more work than I do here.
something analogous can be seen as happening in the three cases presented in this study. What I claim is that Sartre believes that Descartes and Husserl provide us with partially true descriptions of consciousness, not with false ones; that Heidegger believes that Descartes and Kant provide us with partially true description of human being, not with false ones; and that Hegel believes that Kant and Fichte provide us with partially true descriptions of the Absolute, not false ones. However, because Descartes, Husserl, Kant, and Fichte pass judgment on their descriptions to the effect that they *completely* describe their objects, they combine their partially true descriptions with a *false* claim. I contend that this explains why, on the one hand, Sartre, Heidegger, and Hegel reject those accounts in a robust sense, while, on the other, they see those accounts as being partially true (not false).

What emerges from the last paragraph is that the central thesis I’ve defended in this study (i.e., according to Sartre, Heidegger, and Hegel, previous accounts of consciousness, human being, and the Absolute aren’t really false but, rather, partially true) goes hand in hand with the distinction between a *description* and the *passing of judgment* on a description. While according to Sartre, Heidegger, and Hegel the descriptions aren’t false simpliciter but, rather, partially true, the passing of judgments (i.e., the claim that the descriptions adequately describe their objects) are false simpliciter. From the fact that the latter are false we should not jump to the conclusion that the former are false too.

Someone can object that a description and the passing of judgment on a description are two quite different things. My response is that, in many instances, the passing of judgment on a description isn’t explicit but, rather, implicit, built *into the description* itself. This happens when a description is *both* a description simpliciter and an (implicit) passing of judgment that a) the description describes the *object* it’s supposed to describe; b) *completely* does so.

Let’s consider an example. Suppose I’m asked to describe the Statue of Liberty and I antecede (or complete) my description with the following claim: “This is how the Statue of Liberty looks like.” In this case, I am passing *explicit* judgment on my description: essentially, I am *claiming* (not just leaving it as self-understood) that my description describes the *Statue of Liberty*, not one of its parts. Now suppose I don’t claim anything at all, but just start describing: “It’s a tablet
evoking the law....” and so on. In this case, even though I don’t pass explicit judgment on my description, the very fact that I start with the words “It’s....” contains an implicit judgment that my description is describing the Statue of Liberty, not one of its parts (a judgment which, as we said, is false, since the statue represents a woman wearing robes and holding a torch, etc.). In this case two things can be seen as happening: on the one hand, we have a description which is not false, but rather partially true (in so far as what I describe is part of the Statue; compare to a description saying that the Statue is a man wearing jeans and a T-shirt, and so on, which is false); on the other, we have a description which (at least in some sense) is false, in so far as tacitly, by the mere fact that I am making a description of a tablet evoking the law, I am implicitly claiming that the Statue is a tablet evoking the law.

It would be nice if, whenever something is being described, we had a neat separation of the description on the one hand and the passing of judgment on the description on the other. If this were the case, it would be easy, in cases in which there is a description which is partially true in my sense, to pull apart the two inadequacies from one another, partial truth on the one hand and falsehood (simply) on the other. We would be able to say: the description isn’t false, but partially true; the passing of judgment (namely, that the description (completely) describes the object being described) is false. My contention now is that in philosophy (as in theoretical disciplines generally), it is usually the case that descriptions are simultaneously their own passing of judgment: a philosophical description (theory) both says that (for instance) reality is composed of physical stuff, numbers, and God, and that this description (completely) describes reality.

The fact that descriptions (theories) can be their own passing of judgments adds a complication to philosophical descriptions, i.e., descriptions of (theories about) philosophical objects. But this explains that, on the one hand, Sartre, Heidegger, and Hegel reject the best past accounts in a robust sense while, on the other, they acknowledge that these theories contain philosophically interesting truth. I hope one of the contributions of this study is to at least call attention to this tight connection between the distinction, on the one hand, between partial truth and falsehood simpliciter and, on the other, between a description (of reality, consciousness, human being, the Absolute, etc.) and the passing of judgment on this description.
Let’s stop for a minute and summarize what we’ve got so far before proceeding to my final point of this chapter and of this study. In this chapter, I started calling attention to what I take to be a common pattern in the philosophical praxis and in the history of philosophy, namely that philosophers reject theories that, they acknowledge, contain philosophically interesting truth. The question is: how can a philosopher (rationally) both reject a theory and acknowledge that it contains interesting truth? The prima facie obvious response, namely, that theories can well combine truth with falsehood, doesn’t help until it is spelled out what this “combination” exactly consists in: without spelling this out, nothing in the expression “combination of truth of falsehood” rules out the possibility of partial truth with no falsehood. Second, furthermore, some theories can be construed as containing no falsehood, while they’re still rejected. Under the plausible assumption that philosophical theories are accepted or rejected on the grounds that they are true or false, I conclude that the only possible explanation is partial truth: true and only true philosophical theories are rejected because they are partially true. This gives raise to a second question: how can a philosopher (rationally) reject a theory that, she acknowledges, is partially true but by hypothesis only true? Why not complete (or supplement) it instead? My preliminary response is: some partially true theories can be seen as problematic, not simply insufficient, in so far as their assertions (theses) are (or can be) misleading: while they are true, they can induce someone to believe what is false. That accounts for the fact that at least some partially true theories are rejected in a robust, not just neutral sense. But how exactly can failing to report relevant information mislead someone into believing what is false? I have contended that this can happen in two ways: first, failing to report something can mislead someone to believe something false about the specifics of what is being reported (for instance, of a robbery, if I fail to report that I committed it); second, it can mislead someone to believe something false about the nature of what is being reported (for instance, of a robbery, if I fail to report that the “robbery” was staged at a movie set). In the first case, we get to know new facts about what is being reported (ranging from uninteresting to surprising ones); in the second case, we change our perspective about what is being reported: we understand it to be something else than we thought it was. There is a methodological reason why philosophers can (rationally) reject in a robust sense a theory that, they acknowledge, contains philosophically interesting truth and only truth: partially true (and only true) theories can be robustly rejected because the philosopher proposing the
theory judges (falsely) that the theory (completely) describes (accounts for) its object. Of course, one thing is a description and another a passing of judgment on the description, but descriptions can be seen as their own passing of judgment: to describe the Statue of Liberty as being a tablet evoking the law (partial truth) can be seen to, at the same time and eo ipso, be implicitly saying that that description (completely) does describe the Statue of Liberty (falsehood). It is based on these methodological considerations that partial truth can be seen to be problematic (misleading), not simply insufficient (incomplete).

5.2.2 Substantial Reason

Let’s consider now my substantial reason why a partially true (and only true) account can be (rationally) rejected in a robust sense (i.e., be seen as problematic, not simply insufficient). The guiding insight here is that, in some instances, partial truth can be seen as problematic (misleading), not simply insufficient (incomplete), on ontological grounds. The idea is that for some entities, on account of its peculiar nature (of course, we need to spell this out; see below), any description (theory) that fails to capture the whole is bound to misrepresent their nature, instead of simply failing to capture it. Consciousness, human being, and the Absolute, in the way Sartre, Heidegger, and Hegel see them, are precisely entities of this sort. But why should a partially true theory misrepresent, instead of simply failing to capture, their nature?

This is the time to pick up my idea that some philosophical objects can be seen to have three properties that make them philosophically special (Chapter 1, section 1.2.2.). Remember, in Chapter 1 I claimed that philosophical objects aren’t philosophical in virtue of possessing special properties making them philosophical, but rather in virtue of the special approach we adopt towards them. However, I added, while philosophical objects in general are not philosophical by possessing special properties, at least some philosophical objects do possess special properties that makes them philosophically interesting. My suggestion in what follows is going to be that

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361 And, remember, by hypothesis only truth (no falsehood).
362 By “whole” here I don’t mean descriptions (theories) that capture everything about an entity (the idea that a theory can capture everything about an entity is of course problematic; see footnote 342), but that capture the entity at its ground, most basic level.
these objects are good candidates of philosophical objects a theory of which that fails to capture the whole is bound to misrepresent their nature, instead of simply failing to capture it.

This leads us to consider the notion of uniqueness and elusiveness concerning entities studied by philosophers. From a philosophical point of view, there are many entities\(^\text{363}\) that, for various reasons, can be said to possess a unique and elusive nature. (Someone might object that, from a philosophical point of view, any entity, including ordinary objects, can be seen to do so). Examples of entities of this sort include numbers, moral values, time, meaning, language, and so on. Among these entities, however, some of them have been singled out by some philosophers, at various moments in history, as having a foundational role in philosophy. I take an entity to have a foundational role in philosophy if, crudely, the entity is seen as being central in a philosophical understanding of reality as a whole. As I suggested in Chapter 1, this doesn’t need to mean that reality as a whole is reducible to or explainable in terms of that entity. It might simply mean that an adequate understanding of the entity in question makes understanding of reality as a whole philosophically manageable. Philosophy as a theoretical discipline, I contend, has historically had a strong tendency to have some entity or another play this foundational role. Examples include: Ideas in Plato, God in Medieval philosophy, the mind in Descartes, God in Spinoza, the Monads in Leibniz, Reason in Kant, the Absolute (Spirit) in Hegel, History in Marx, consciousness in Husserl, language in analytic philosophy, and so on.

Assume now a commitment to ontological holism in virtue of which the following principle holds: for a whole \(x\), any account that fails to completely describe \(x\) misrepresents, not simply fails to capture, its nature. I contend that such principle, although it doesn’t necessarily apply to reality as a whole, can be seen to apply to entities that are central in a philosophical understanding of reality as a whole. My contention, more qualifiedly put, is the following: according to Sartre, Heidegger, and Hegel, this principle applies to, respectively, consciousness, human being, and the Absolute. The reason why an account that fails to completely describe consciousness, human being, and the Absolute misrepresents their nature draws on the distinction I drew before (see section 5.2.1.) between partial truth in virtue of which we fail to

\(^{363}\) From now on I use “entity” in a maximally broad sense, including many things that many philosophers won’t perhaps consider to be entities at all. I’ll come back in a minute to this preliminary terminological choice.
know facts about what is being reported on and partial truth in virtue of which we fail to know what it is that it’s being reported on, its nature. For this insight to be convincing, however, we need to see what is unique about consciousness, human being, and the Absolute as seen, respectively, by Sartre, Heidegger, and Sartre.

What is unique about the nature of consciousness, human being, and the Absolute, what fails to be reported in the best past accounts, is the fact that they aren’t things that can somehow be observed, but things that do the observing. In other words, consciousness, human being, and the Absolute aren’t so much entities as themselves standpoints toward entities. All of those things say roughly the same, namely, that consciousness, human being, and the Absolute aren’t entities, no matter how elusive, but what makes entities available for us in the first place, elusiveness itself at its most basic. Having into account that consciousness, human being, and the Absolute, are central in a philosophical understanding of reality, they are, what can be called “global” standpoints: not standpoints toward such and such types of entities or region of the world (for instance, mental, cultural, or religious phenomena), but over entities generally, over the whole of what there is.

The concept of circular structure can help to further characterize an entity-standpoint, so let’s pause for a while here. For convenience’s purposes, I am going to define entities having a circular structure as a whole made of parts (although other definitions are possible). What makes them circular is that, first, the whole makes up the parts and, conversely, the parts make up the whole; second, the parts constitute each other. One might be tempted to identify an entity-standpoint with an entity having a circular structure, for, as we said, the entity constitutes the standpoint and conversely, and these two “parts” constitute the whole (the entity-standpoint) and conversely. But this temptation should be resisted, for at least two reasons. First, there are entities having a circular structure that aren’t entities-standpoint. Second, there are entities having a circular structure, one of whose components is a standpoint toward reality, which still

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364 Speaking in traditional terms, consciousness, human being, and the Absolute aren’t something object-like but something subject-like; or, rather, they just are what Modern philosophy calls the subject, subjectivity.
365 For instance, the Solar system can be seen as having parts (the Sun and the planets) interacting with one another (by means of gravitation) and making up the whole; conversely, the whole makes up the parts. A biological cell (for instance, the eukaryotic cell) has parts (cell nucleus, organelles, cell membrane, and cytoskeleton) interacting with one another and, in turn continuing to maintain the organized bounded structure that gives rises to these parts.
aren’t entities-standpoint either. So what distinguishes an entity-standpoint from other entities having a circular structure? As suggested, what is distinctive about an entity-standpoint is the fact that it is, rather than “has,” a circular structure. But what does this mean?

Crudely, it means the following. In an entity having a circular structure, first, the whole makes up the parts and, conversely, the parts make up the whole; second, the parts constitute each other. But, to start with, we have a reasonably well-defined whole, and well-defined parts. This isn’t the case, I contend, for an entity-standpoint. An entity-standpoint isn’t a “whole” of which the entity and the standpoint are “parts.” In some sense, strictly speaking, there is no “whole.” The fact that the standpoint is a standpoint toward the entity (because the entity itself is part of reality, and the standpoint (by hypothesis) is a standpoint toward reality) means that the entity changes depending on what the standpoint toward the entity is. Conversely, the standpoint being a component of the entity, the standpoint changes depending on the nature of the entity. Thus, different from, say, a Solar System or a cell, in which we can “go up” from the parts and see the total whole (the whole plus the parts), in the case of the entity-standpoint we can’t do that. There isn’t any total whole.

The fact that an entity-standpoint has, indeed is a circular structure means that it isn’t clear in advance just what the entity really is. The entity changes depending on the standpoint we take over it. Indeed, the entity being part of reality, we take a standpoint toward it too. (And conversely, as I said earlier, the standpoint is largely determined by what the entity is in the first instance.) Of course, this doesn’t mean we don’t have any idea about what the entity is either,

For instance, society can be seen as a whole making up the parts and conversely, whereas the parts make up each other; additionally, one of these “parts” is a standpoint. For instance, the standpoints we take over both the parts (other members of society, social institutions, etc.) and the whole itself (society) largely makes up what society is in the first instance. Another example would be history (I guess all the examples, and not by chance, should come from the human sciences).

This basically means that, at least by abstraction, the whole can be thought apart from the parts and conversely. We come back to the examples of the apple and the cat. For instance, the Solar System is still the Solar System (at least conceptually), apart from the planets and their motions.

See Niklas Luhmann (1997, vol. 1: 15). Luhmann uses the notion of circular structure in reference to society. For this sociologist, society is a global entities-standpoint. But there is reason to believe that Luhmann draws this notion from Heidegger (see, for instance, Jahraus 2004: 237)

We can think of examples illustrating this sort of “evanescent” entities, determined by the standpoint we take over them. An apple remains an apple independently of our standpoint towards it. Consider an artifact or an artistic object, by contrast. Whereas materially speaking an artifact or artistic object is independent of our standpoint, it is our standpoint towards it that largely (or, more strongly, completely) makes it up qua artifact or qua artistic object.
because we have a pre-theoretical comprehension of it. Somehow, we already “know” the entity. This is precisely what it means to say that this object has a circular structure.\textsuperscript{370} Being knowledge about an entity-standpoint, the knowledge involved in this “knowing” is, at the same time, both observation and constitution of the entity.

Let me stop at this point for a minute. So far I’ve simply presented the notion of entity-standpoint. Admittedly, this characterization is quite crude as it stands.\textsuperscript{371} However, nothing I’ve said so far attempts to demonstrate that there are entities-standpoint, or even that the notion of entity-standpoint is legitimate to start with.\textsuperscript{372} What I want my two claims to be for this section, rather, are: (i) according to Sartre, Heidegger, and Hegel, respectively, consciousness, human being, and the Absolute are global standpoints toward reality;\textsuperscript{373} (ii) according to Sartre, Heidegger, and Hegel, any partially true account of consciousness, human being, and the Absolute doesn’t simply fail to capture their essence: it positively misrepresents it.

Partial truth so construed, that is, concerning entities whose status is fundamental in a philosophical account of reality (like consciousness, human being, and the Absolute, according to Sartre, Heidegger, and Hegel), and whose nature is bound to become misrepresented (not just incomplete) if a philosophical account of it falls short of capturing the whole (i.e., fails to place itself in the basic standpoint toward it), stands behind a significant amount of cases in which philosophers reject philosophical theories by their predecessors while crediting the latter with having discovered important philosophical truth. The reason why partial truth in the way I construe it can be seen as a helpful tool to make sense of this pattern which I take to be relatively common in the history of philosophy and the philosophical praxis is that philosophy, in many instances, tends to concentrate on various entities (or concepts) the foundational role mentioned above, that is, a role in understanding reality as a whole.

\textsuperscript{370} For instance, Hegel says that in order to do philosophy, we need to presuppose the Absolute (otherwise we won’t even get started). The Absolute “is the goal that is being sought.” Now Hegel adds that the Absolute is “already present, or how otherwise could it be sought?” (Preface-Difference: 93, my emphasis.) Heidegger says essentially the same thing about human being: “In determining itself as an entity, Dasein [human being] always does so in the light of a possibility which it is itself and which, in its very Being, it somehow understands.” (BT: 69)

\textsuperscript{371} This is one of the points in which this study needs further work.

\textsuperscript{372} Perhaps the notion is contradictory: ontologically, there couldn’t be entities-standpoints; perhaps it’s vague; ambiguous; confused; and so on.

\textsuperscript{373} In other words, according to Sartre, Heidegger, and Hegel, consciousness, human being, and the Absolute have, indeed are, a circular structure in a global sense.
5.3 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

There are three worries one might want to see addressed before concluding. First, despite the evidence provided in Chapters 2, 3, and 4 and in section 5.1.2. of this final chapter, it can still be questioned, as the proponents of the moderate route do (see Section 5. 1. 3), whether Sartre, Heidegger, and Hegel really see significant truth in the accounts they reject: more often than not, these philosophers seem to suggest that the accounts they reject are false simpliciter. Second, Sartre, Heidegger and Hegel are fond of making priority claims to the effect that some perspectives, points of view, stances, etc. are, philosophically speaking, more basic than others, not just depending on the phenomenon to be described or the philosophical issue at hand but, so to say, absolutely so. These priority claims take a variety of forms depending on the author considered and it’d be unwise to expect the same exact formulation in each of the three, but still they are common to the three. While I don’t think any of the chief theses in this study depends on accepting these priority claims (because, remember, my theses concern what philosophers believe about x, not whether those beliefs are in fact true or false), one might want to hear more about them anyway: how justified are Sartre, Heidegger, and Hegel in making them, and how bad would my theses suffer if these priority claims were questioned or rejected? Third, finally, one might want to hear more about the notion of standpoint. The significance of this notion has been already big when making my individual cases in the central chapters; but it just became bigger, as I contended that, according to Sartre, Heidegger, and Hegel, consciousness, human being and the Absolute, aren’t as much entities as themselves standpoints toward entities. This case will require clarification of what is meant by standpoint in this more fundamental sense, but also qualification of the terms “object,” “thing,” and “entity,” which can be seen, on a variety of grounds, to be quite misleading to characterize what consciousness, human being, and the Absolute are, according to Sartre, Heidegger, and Hegel.

5.3.1 Moderate Route Revisited

Remember that so far I have been pursuing the most ambitious route to defend the usefulness of the notion of partial truth, by arguing that sometimes philosophers reject theories that, they
acknowledge, are true and only true; not necessarily because they in fact believe those theories are true and only true, but because the theories can counterfactually be so construed without this circumstance altering the grounds on which the philosophers rejecting those theories reject them. At this point, someone might grant that construing theories as being true and only true might perhaps make sense in a number of cases; but protest that, at least in the case of Sartre, Heidegger, and Hegel on the best past theories of, respectively, consciousness, human being, and the Absolute this is wildly implausible, as these philosophers seem to make clear in various ways that the theories they reject really are false or wrong (and fundamentally so at that), not partially true (and, much less, only true).

How can we accommodate this protest? What we have here is essentially the same contention I introduced in section 5.1.3. above, which I ascribed to proponents of what can be called moderate route for defending the usefulness of the notion of partial truth. According to the proponents of the moderate route (or, more accurately, to the proponents of that position that, as a response, motivates a moderate route), it is completely misguided to construe the best past theories of consciousness, human being, and the Absolute to be, according to Sartre, Heidegger, and Hegel, true and only true. Doing that, they will insist, flies in the face of the fact that Sartre, Heidegger, and Hegel suggest in various ways that the theories they reject are false or wrong (and fundamentally so at that). At most, it will perhaps be conceded, Sartre, Heidegger, and Hegel acknowledge some philosophically interesting truth in the theories they reject (and then the burden is on me to spell out exactly how much, and in what sense); but, on the whole, Sartre, Heidegger, and Hegel take these theories to be false, not true (even partially). For instance, it will be argued, Sartre believes it’s really false, not partially true, to say there is a self in consciousness; Heidegger believes it’s really false, not partially true, to say that human being is an object or, more in general, to say that entities are pure presences instead of tools; Hegel, finally, believes any assertion about the Absolute made from a reflective standpoint is really false, not partially true.

374 There’s a number of ways in which this could be shown, and I grant from the start that there’s no lack of potential textual support.
If this is correct, partial truth can’t be construed any longer as truth and only truth of part of an object, perhaps not even as truth in the first place. What should we take partial truth to be, then? I believe I have two possible responses here. As opposed to the line pursued in the ambitious route, these two responses offer a modest defense of the usefulness of the notion of partial truth, but I believe they have the virtue that, while they grant my opponent what she wants, they preserve, at a minimum one or, more optimistically, two of the chief intuitions I want to defend in this essay.

First, partial truth can be construed as observation of the right object. The idea here is, first, that observing the right object, as opposed to the wrong one, involves interesting truth (at least potentially, for instance disposition of the observer to make true assertions about that object); and, second, that observing the right object is perfectly consistent with making false assertions about it, provided one offers an interesting reason why those false assertions are made.

I believe my claim that partial truth can be construed in this way is pretty straightforward, and in my opinion quite plausible: in many instances, it isn’t clear what object we are supposed to be observing in the first place, whereby to get to observe the right object, as opposed to the wrong one, involves interesting truth (more accurately, puts us in a position to get to know interesting truth) about that object. Suppose, for instance, that someone asks me to describe the Statue of Liberty, and I mistakenly represent myself the Eiffel Tower (say, because I have only second-hand knowledge about these monuments, or because I mistake Paris with New York, and so on). In this case, if I describe what I am observing (i.e., representing myself), my description will of course be false (of the Statue of Liberty) because, to start with, I am observing the wrong object. Suppose now, by contrast, that I correctly represent myself the Statue of Liberty but that, for some philosophically interesting reason, I describe it wrongly. In this case, even though my description (or some assertion included therein) is false too, it holds that, as opposed to representing myself the Eiffel Tower, I am observing the right object, something that (potentially at least) involves interesting truth (i.e., puts me in a position to get to know interesting truth) about the Statue of Liberty.
Where my response to the objection requires a bit more work is in offering an interesting explanation of why someone should describe wrongly (i.e., make false assertions of) the right object. Here we have at least two possible options. First, it might be the case that although one is observing the right object, only a part (or aspect) is being observed (but here we’d need a further philosophical reason why this happens\(^{375}\)). Second, it might be the case that although one is observing the right object, one makes assertions about that object to which one is not entitled to make on the basis of what she observes, because they go beyond the realm of direct observation.

Suppose, for instance, that I am observing the Statue of Liberty through a very dense fog, and I make two claims: one, “It is a human figure” (which is true) and, two, “It is a human figure made of metal” (which is false). Let’s suppose that the first one is based on what I (vaguely) see, whereas the second one is partly based on what I see, partly based on (rational) guess; that is, the second one goes (at least partially) beyond what I observe. Whereas it seems implausible for someone to observe the right object and describe it wrongly assuming that the description is limited to what one can observe, it is less plausible that this should happen when the description (at least partially) goes beyond what one can observe.

If partial truth is construed in this way, i.e., as observation of the right object, one can respond to the objection presented above by arguing that to claim that Sartre, Heidegger, and Hegel acknowledge philosophically interesting truth in the theories they reject (which is what I argue) is quite consistent with the fact that Sartre, Heidegger, and Hegel believe the theories they reject are really false or wrong, not partially true (which is what my opponent argues). What’s going on, I respond, is that Sartre, Heidegger, and Hegel concede that the philosophers they argue against are observing the right object (at least with due qualifications),\(^{376}\) something that, as opposed to the cases of other past philosophers who are observing the wrong object, involves philosophically interesting truth; but at the same time, Sartre, Heidegger, and Hegel believe that the philosophers they argue against make (fundamentally) false assertions about that object and, more generally, propose theories that are really false about that object.

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\(^{375}\) One can refer back to Chapter 1 (section 1.1.3.) for preliminary guidance.

\(^{376}\) For instance, one can argue that, as far as consciousness is concerned, Descartes and Husserl are according to Sartre observing the right object, i.e., consciousness as disclosed to consciousness itself, at least as opposed to philosophers who take consciousness to be something material or biological, and thus observe it from a third person perspective. Something analogous could be defended for the cases of Heidegger and Hegel.
To this response it can be counter-argued that Sartre, Heidegger, and Hegel don’t believe the philosophers they argue against are observing the right object at all, but precisely the wrong one (indeed, one might insist, this is precisely what bothers Sartre, Heidegger, and Hegel). Following the analogy of the example above, Sartre, Heidegger, and Hegel believe the philosophers they argue against are representing themselves the Eiffel Tower, not the Statue of Liberty (and, of course, what results from this fact is false claims and a false theory about the Statue of Liberty). If this is correct, partial truth can’t be construed as observation of the right object any more.

My response to this counter-argument is to propose a second, even more modest, way to construe partial truth. More modestly then, partial truth can be construed as adoption of a standpoint grounded on a more basic standpoint. The idea here is that even if I concede my opponent that, according to Sartre, Heidegger, and Hegel, the philosophers they argue against are observing the wrong (not right) object (and, of course, that their theories are really false or wrong, not partially true), it still holds that the reason why these philosophers are observing the wrong object is, according to Sartre, Heidegger, and Hegel, the fact that they are adopting a standpoint toward that object which, unbeknownst to these philosophers, is grounded on a more basic one, which makes the former possible in the first place. Remember furthermore, assuming I am right in section 1.1.2. of Chapter 1, that if we agree that a standpoint can be grounded on a more basic standpoint, the former can be metaphorically thought of as being “included in,” and thereby be a “part” of, the latter. If we grant my opponent that Sartre, Heidegger, and Hegel believe that the philosophers they argue against are observing the wrong object (not the right one), it still holds, I contend, that Sartre, Heidegger, and Hegel believe the standpoint adopted by these philosophers is, unbeknownst to them, “included in,” and thereby “part” of another. I believe this qualifies as partial truth as opposed to falsehood simpliciter; what happens now is that partial truth doesn’t apply to the theories being rejected nor the object being observed, but to the standpoint being adopted.

I believe these two responses concede what my opponent wants: either (a) that Sartre, Heidegger, and Hegel believe the theories they are rejecting are false or wrong, not partially true; (b) that Sartre, Heidegger, and Hegel believe the philosophers they argue against are observing the wrong, not the right, object, while at a minimum one the chief insights of this study still stands,
namely that there is a way of getting things wrong in philosophy that can be construed in terms of partial truth as opposed to falsehood simpliciter, where partial truth is either (a) observation of the right object (albeit perhaps only one of its parts); or (b) adoption of a standpoint which is grounded on (and thereby is a “part” of) a more basic standpoint.

5. 3. 2 Priority Claims

A second worry, intimately tied to my second attempt to accommodate the protest presented in the previous section, might concern the priority views adopted by Sartre, Heidegger, and Hegel. Despite their philosophical differences, the three authors considered share a commitment to the view that certain standpoints toward reality (or over some entities) are prior to, or more basic than, others. Prioritism has some affinity with foundationalism, but the two should be distinguished. Foundationalism holds that all of our knowledge is ultimately founded on a single source; if we have insight enough to find it and isolate it, we can methodically reconstruct our knowledge on a firm and secure basis. Against foundationalism, we have the view that our knowledge doesn’t rest on a single foundation, but that there are several, mutually irreducible sources that contribute, in different ways, to the epistemological validity of our beliefs, and none of them takes priority over the rest (or if it does, it’s only in a relative, not in an absolute sense). The classic example of foundationalism is Descartes’ view that, first, the cogito (i.e., consciousness of our consciousness) is the ultimate source of certainty and thus of knowledge and, second, that starting from the cogito the philosopher can methodically reconstruct our knowledge on a firm and secure basis, thus defeating skeptical worries, including Cartesian all-around skepticism.377 In contrast to foundationalism, prioritism isn’t an epistemological position: what prioritism privileges isn’t a source of knowledge, but a standpoint toward reality, which may or may not involve knowledge (for instance, one might hold, with Schopenhauer, that our basic standpoint toward reality is volitional rather than cognitive). Additionally, prioritism drops the idea that the standpoint being privileged allows a reconstruction of what the standpoint is prior to: through philosophical insight we can get to situate ourselves in the basic standpoint, but all the standpoint allows us is to see things correctly, not reconstruct our knowledge of them.

377 See Chapter 2, section 2.1. for a brief treatment of Descartes’ view.
It’s clear that these priority views have a tight connection with my thesis that, according to these philosophers, the best previous accounts of consciousness, human being, and the Absolute are partially true because they are based on a standpoint which is secondary with respect to a more basic one: the standpoints toward *things generally* that Sartre, Heidegger, and Hegel privilege as being philosophically more basic than the rest (the unreflective, the pre-theoretical, and the speculative, respectively) coincide with the standpoints toward *consciousness, human being, and the Absolute* that, according to Sartre, Heidegger, and Hegel, are more basic than the rest too. The question is whether this is a relation of entailment: in order to privilege a basic standpoint toward consciousness, human being, and the Absolute do Sartre, Heidegger, and Hegel need to privilege a basic standpoint toward things generally too?, and conversely: because Sartre, Heidegger, and Hegel privilege a basic standpoint toward things generally do they need to privilege a basic standpoint toward consciousness, human being, and the Absolute? These are two interesting questions whose response would merit further investigation but which, unfortunately, I must leave unanswered at this point.

What is really important to keep in mind concerning prioritism is that none of the theses of this study relies on prioritism being in fact true. Remember I established in Chapter 1 (section 1.2.1.) that this study concerns philosophers’ *beliefs* about theories, not theories themselves. What is at stake in this dissertation is whether Sartre, Heidegger, and Hegel *believe* that some standpoints toward certain objects are secondary with respect to some others that are more basic (i.e., prior), not whether this belief is in fact true; and I think that I have offered ample evidence in my central chapters that Sartre, Heidegger, and Hegel believe that this is, indeed, the case. If Sartre, Heidegger, and Hegel turn out to be wrong about their prioritist views, then of course it can’t be the case that previous philosophers have defended theories that are partially true *on account of* having adopted a standpoint which is secondary with respect to a more basic one (since by hypothesis this is not the case); these theories could still be partially true in a different sense (for instance, in the intensional one of “approximately true”378), but then the interest of my idea, namely that sometimes we are able to observe only part of an object because we are adopting a standpoint toward that object which, unbeknownst to us, is grounded on a more basic one, would

378 See chapter 1, section 1.1.3., last paragraph, for the distinction between partial truth in an intensional and in an extensional sense.
basically disappear. Yet, once again, my chief thesis in this study isn’t that this is the case, but that some philosophers in history have believed this to be the case, something that I take myself to have shown.

5.3.3 Standpoint and Entity

One of the chief insights that result from this final chapter is that consciousness, human being, and the Absolute, in the way Sartre, Heidegger, and Hegel see them, aren’t so much objects simpliciter as standpoints toward objects themselves (section 5.2.2). Back in Chapter 1, I discussed some differences between an object and a standpoint toward an object (section 1.1.1.), but we need to say more things here. My guiding insight requires a bit of elaboration on these two important notions, standpoint and object. What exactly is meant by standpoint toward an object rather than an object itself? There are two claims I want to make in this regard. According to Sartre, Heidegger, and Hegel (a) consciousness, human being, and the Absolute aren’t standpoints simpliciter, but what can be called global standpoints, i.e., standpoints toward all objects (possible as well as actual), i.e., over the whole of what there is; this is what makes them philosophically significant; (b) consciousness, human being, and the Absolute aren’t detached but, rather, what can be called situated standpoints. Let’s briefly examine each these two claims.

First, consciousness, human being, and the Absolute aren’t standpoints simpliciter, but what can be called global standpoints. What is meant by a global standpoint? This question brings us to the question: What is a standpoint at all?, which I introductorily answered in my Chapter 1 (section 1.1.1.) At its most general, a standpoint is a way to observe a thing rather than a thing itself. This means that standpoint is a relational notion, which already is saying that a perspective isn’t a thing, if by entity is meant something like an object or thing, like a table, a building, a person, an atom or a planet. I already admitted in Chapter 1 that standpoints can themselves be observed (broadly construed, not necessarily optically or physically); to that extent, they can be taken to be something entity-like. Standpoints can vary, but vary over the same thing; second, that something or someone is perceiving: without perceivers there wouldn’t be standpoints.
Let’s now examine the second point, namely, that consciousness, human being, and the Absolute aren’t detached but, rather, what can be called situated standpoints. A big presupposition of traditional philosophy is the idea that there can be a standpoint toward reality essentially detached from it. This view has long fallen into discredit in several ways, but it’s important to see how much sense this position makes in the first place. It is difficult to see, indeed, how one can adopt a standpoint toward reality while being part of this reality. If my standpoint is part of reality, I can have a standpoint toward part of reality, but not over all reality. For one thing, my specific location in reality is going to affect the perspective over what I can observe. On the other hand, if it’s impossible to have a standpoint detached from reality, as it seems natural to assume, a standpoint toward all reality seems to be impossible too: all we can hope to achieve is partial standpoints, but they will always be relative to our specific location. This raises a dilemma: either there is a standpoint toward reality as a whole, but it is detached from it; or there isn’t, but then all standpoints are partial and thus relative.

It’s important to see that this is prima facie a dilemma: we only have two options, and either one is unsatisfactory. If the first horn of the dilemma is accepted, we have the following problem: if the standpoint toward reality is detached from it, how can we be sure that the standpoint is about reality in the first place? A skeptical doubt that there is a gap between the standpoint and reality is always possible: for all we know, we might have a perfectly coherent view of reality… that doesn’t match reality at all. If, on the other hand, the second horn of the dilemma is accepted, we have the following problem: if our standpoint toward reality is partial and relative, doesn’t the idea of a single, objective reality become suspect? But that would be highly problematic, first, because the notion of a single, objective reality seems to make sense; and, second, because this is basically the notion of a reality seen independently from any partial standpoint. Crudely, then, the two problems that we are facing with the dilemma are skepticism and relativism.

379 For convenience’s sake, let’s say philosophy before Hegel (although, of course, this characterization is crude).
380 Or, strongly, reality as a whole, which is the sort of standpoint philosophers are interested in.
381 These are thus the two problems traditional philosophy faced until it started to dawn on philosophers that perhaps the notions of reality and standpoint define each other. So for example Kant, the last great philosopher before Hegel, insists that reality conforms to our standpoint and not the other way around; but he still appeals to (i.e., makes philosophical use of) the notion of a reality independent from our standpoint (the thing-in-itself). On the other hand, Kant still thinks of the notions of standpoint and reality as fixed; Hegel’s reaction against Kant consists essentially in challenging this presupposition: reality and standpoint, for Hegel, essentially constitute each other; reality is standpoint-like (in Hegel’s jargon, self-like).
One of the ideas I want to retain from my last two paragraphs is that the notion of a standpoint detached from reality has long become philosophically suspect. It’s important that the standpoint be anchored to reality in some way or another. This doesn’t mean that the standpoint is an epiphenomenon. The standpoint is still a standpoint, and indeed a standpoint toward reality. But it should be seen as being continuous with, not detached from it. This can be done in at least the following three ways (although others are possible). First, as said, the standpoint is a component of reality, not something free-floating. A crude example would be the following: even the most abstract and seemingly detached standpoints toward reality, for instance, philosophical or mystical ones, have a bodily basis (perhaps, say, neuronal). Second, the nature of the entities in reality affects, should any of them possess a standpoint toward reality as one of its components, the sort of standpoint it possesses. So for instance, again crudely, cats see reality differently than humans, artists see reality differently than politicians, philosophers, and so on. Third, the standpoint has come-to-be at some time; using modal categories, its existence is contingent. It isn’t “necessary” or “eternal.” For instance, crudely, humans developed the capacity to detachedly observe reality at some point in time; the same holds ontogenetically: the child starts observing reality detachedly at a specific time too.

5. 4 OVERALL SUMMARY

Let’s conclude with an overall summary of this chapter and of this study.

In this chapter, I’ve argued that the notions of object, standpoint, and partial truth, as I construe them, can be helpful to make sense of a sort of relationship between philosophers and their predecessors that constitutes a significant pattern in the philosophical praxis and the history of philosophy, to which more attention should be paid. This pattern is characterized by the fact that, in many instances, philosophers reject theories that, they acknowledge, contain significant truth. I have claimed that it doesn’t suffice to say that philosophical theories can combine truth with falsehood, as the expression “to combine truth with falsehood” doesn’t rule out, without further elucidation, the possibility of partial truth with no falsehood at all. What is more, I have claimed, some theories can be construed as containing no falsehood while they are still rejected. The only
solution to the puzzle, I have claimed, is the notion of partial truth: in at least some instances, philosophical theories are rejected, not because they contain falsehood about their objects, but because they are only partially true of them, where this is construed as: they are true of only part of them, which is construed in turn as: they are true of only an aspect of them, the one available to a secondary standpoint, as opposed to a basic one.

A second puzzle concerns the notion of rejection: why should a theory that contains no falsehood, even if it’s partially true, be rejected at all? For all we know, it would suffice to complete the theory with the relevant information to render it true simpliciter. I have argued, however, that partial truth can in many instances be seen as problematic and misleading, not simply insufficient. This circumstance accounts for the fact that a partially true account can be rejected in a robust sense, not simply in a neutral one. This is the case in the relatively uninteresting sense that partial truth is (or can be) always misleading, if the information failing to be reported is such that the partially true account induces someone to believe something false about the particulars of what is being reported on; for instance, after being stopped by drunk driving, I can truthfully declare I have drunk one beer, which is obviously misleading if, in addition, I have also drunk three whiskies and don’t say so. But partial truth can be misleading in a philosophically more interesting sense, if the information failing to be reported is such that the partially true account induces someone to believe something false about the very nature of what is being reported on; for instance, failing to report that a “robbery” was staged at a movie set doesn’t mislead someone into believing something false about particulars of the “robbery,” but about its very nature: the prima facie “robbery” wasn’t a robbery in the first place. What Sartre, Heidegger, and Hegel see as problematic and misleading in the partially true accounts they reject about, respectively, consciousness, human being, and the Absolute, is of the latter type. Similar to the example of the “robbery,” what past accounts fail to report about consciousness, human being, and the Absolute, is of the latter type. Similar to the example of the “robbery,” what past accounts fail to report about consciousness, human being, and the Absolute, according to Sartre, Heidegger, and Hegel, are objects that possess a unique nature. Other objects of interest to philosophers, like numbers, time, moral values, meaning, language, etc. possess, of course, a unique nature too. But the nature of consciousness, human being, and the Absolute, as seen by Sartre, Heidegger, and Hegel is
unique in a still more fundamental sense. What is more, I have defended, in virtue of this nature any account that fails to capture the whole (where this is construed as: that fails to situate itself in the basic standpoint toward these entities) is bound to misrepresent their nature, not simply to fail to capture it.

This unique, elusive, foundational nature of consciousness, human being, and the Absolute as seen by Sartre, Heidegger, and Hegel helps to explain why it’s important to take the best past accounts about them to be partially true rather than false. The best past accounts are precisely the best in so far as they display a sense of the fact that consciousness, human being, and the Absolute are standpoints toward entities rather than entities, i.e., According to Sartre, both Descartes and Husserl (among others) understood that consciousness isn’t an entity along others, but the “entity” that allows all other entities to be encountered in the first place. According to Heidegger, both Descartes and Kant (among others) understood that human being isn’t an entity along others, but, similar to the case of Sartre, the “entity” that allows all other entities to be encountered in the first place. According to Hegel, both Kant and Fichte understood that the Absolute isn’t an object along others, but, once again, the “object” that allows all other objects to be encountered in the first place. What is bad about the best past theories is that they don’t succeed in achieving the basic standpoint required to study these perspectives. What is more, by mistakenly adopting a secondary standpoint, they still encounter consciousness, human being, and the Absolute as something entity-like rather than standpoint-like. In other words, because these past philosophers fail to realize that the theoretical insights they achieve are made possible by a standpoint toward consciousness, human being, and the Absolute which is more basic than the one they use, what they achieve is only partial truth about these entities, i.e., they achieve insights that are true of only a part of consciousness, human being, and the Absolute, i.e., they are true of only a secondary aspect of consciousness, human being, and the Absolute, not the basic one.
A. SOURCES

Primary


Secondary


B. SECONDARY LITERATURE


