As the second section of the preceding chapter indicated, fundamental ontology sets itself the task of restricting the sphere of validity of Greek ontology in showing that the ontology of *ousia* is valid only, and to a limited degree given the analysis of *Zuhandenheit*, for the beings that we are not, for innerworldly beings. One might say that if both the concepts of existence and essence derive from an interpretation of the finished product, then in distinguishing human *Existenz* from the sphere of the categorial, phenomenology must show that *Dasein* never is a finished product. Although we may describe someone who has attained a certain degree of excellence in this way, for Heidegger *Dasein* is always and already ahead of itself because its *Existenz* is what he terms a ‘being-possible (*Möglichsein*)’ or a ‘potentiality-for-being (*Seinkönnen*)’ [SZ 143].

In order to clarify these terms, and before relating them to the work of Aristotle, it should first be noted that with such a thinking of potentiality or possibility Heidegger moves beyond Kant’s determination of it as a category of modality, as a mere ‘empty logical possibility’, which ‘signifies what is not yet actual and what is not at any time necessary’ [SZ 143]. Of course, Kant makes a further distinction between the logical possibility of a concept – that which is not in itself contradictory – and the possibility of the thing of which the concept is a concept, a real possibility. The proof of the latter is the actual presence or presentation of the object corresponding to the concept. Yet possibility here means merely the ‘contingency’ of something that may or may not ‘come to pass’ [SZ 143], and, in fact, is tantamount to actuality. The second point to note is that possibility is, in quite different senses, at once a category and an existential in fundamental ontology. The being ready-to-hand of an item of equipment is a being-possible for something, but this occurs only by virtue of *Dasein’s* understanding of the world as a horizon of
finality. This understanding is a ‘projection (Entwurf)’ [SZ 145] of the possibilities of items of equipment. Given that such a projection rests ultimately on the ‘for-the-sake-of-which’ peculiar to Dasein, however, it is Dasein itself that is always thrown beyond itself in projecting possibilities for the sake of its own being. Dasein is a ‘being ahead-of-itself (Sich-vorweg-sein)’ [SZ 192]; it is always on the way to achieving a possibility of its own being. Such a being-underway is not to be merely ‘tacked on’ to a traditional or indeterminate conception of being, but it rather determines the very Existenz of Dasein itself. Hence when Heidegger writes that Dasein’s essence [Wesen] lies in its Existenz, the former term is as little to be understood as a what-being which may or may not be actual as the latter term is to be understood as denoting the that-it-is of something, the fact that something is. The Wesen of Dasein is to be understood in a verbal sense as, precisely, a being underway, a being-possible.

It is by thinking the Existenz of Dasein in this way that, according to the Basic Problems of Phenomenology, the analytic of Dasein aims to counteract the ‘naivety’ [G24 155/110] of Greek ontology. Even before the advent of the Christian doctrine according to which each and every being is created, Greek ontology would be naive insofar as it interprets human being in terms of the being of the things of the world, insofar as ousia is thought to determine beings as such, the human being included. This is a problematic that is essential to the project of Heidegger’s destruction in 1927. In addition to recovering the original sense of the three different moments of the ancient conception of being, namely being-produced, being as presence and being as truth, Heidegger seeks to delimit a form of naivety or inauthenticity that has infected philosophy from its inception. As we read in §6 of Being and Time:

Greek ontology and its history [...] prove that when Dasein understands either itself or being in general, it does so in terms of the ‘world’ [SZ 21–2].

Greek ontology would have to be delimited, to be shown to have only a restricted sphere of validity, for it does not ‘get beyond a common conception of Dasein and its comportments’ [G24 156/111], and the Existenz proper to the being that we are has ‘been forgotten in naive ancient ontology’. This forgetting at the inception of philosophy would determine the entirety of its history. Even Kant’s demonstration of the impossibility or paralogism of any application of the categories determinative of objects to the transcendental ego does not lead to a positive account of the Existenz of Dasein.