

The Structure of Meaning of Work: Existential Analysis of Care Through *Being and Time*

The question of the meaning of work, inseparable from the meaning of life, remains a persistent concern in human existence. Despite the centrality of work in modern life, many individuals experience their work as lacking meaning. This suggests that the meaning of work cannot be adequately understood as merely concrete achievements or psychological states, but must be approached as a structural horizon within which meaning becomes intelligible. This study begins with the question, “What is the meaning of work?”, and subsequently reformulates it as “What makes the meaning of work possible and necessary?” While empirical research provides valuable insights, it remains limited in addressing this deeper question. Drawing initially on Wilhelm Dilthey’s interpretation of life, the study highlights its limitation at the ontical level, as critically noted by Martin Heidegger. It then turns to *Being and Time* to explicate the ontological conditions of the working individual, understood as *Being-in-the-world*. Within this framework, care (*Sorge*) is articulated as the fundamental ontological structure that makes the meaning of work possible. Care is further analyzed through its interconnected modes—concern (*Besorgen*), solicitude (*Fürsorge*), and self-care (*Selbstsorge*)—through which the structure of meaning is disclosed. Finally, the study develops an ontological–ontical return by integrating Hans-Georg Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics, enabling the interpretation of work and life meaning in concrete situations. It is concluded that an ontological–ontical framework of life interpretation provides the necessary foundation for understanding and interpreting the meaning of work in concrete life experience.

Keywords: *Meaning of life, care, Being-in-the-world, hermeneutic, experience*

The Inquiry of Meaning of Work

In the existential analytic of *Dasein* presented in *Being and Time*, Martin Heidegger reveals that the human individual is a being for whom its own Being is always at issue. That is, *Dasein* is a being that is fundamentally concerned with its own existence and its possibilities (Heidegger, 1962, p. 67). If the individual is, in each case, concerned about its own existence, then the working individual must also be concerned with its Being as it is enacted in work. Following Heidegger’s fundamental question concerning the meaning of Being, this study begins by raising a parallel and guiding question: *What is the meaning of work?*

Before proceeding with this inquiry, however, it is necessary to step back and ask a more basic question: *Why does the meaning of work matter at all?* For most people, work occupies a substantial portion of life—often more than half of one’s waking hours. Despite this centrality, contemporary evidence suggests a widespread crisis of meaning in the workplace. According to a 2025 global workplace survey conducted by Gallup, approximately 58% of the workforce report that they are struggling in their careers; among them, 40% experience frequent stress, while more

1 than 20% report feelings of anger, sadness, and loneliness (Gallup, 2025).¹

2 Regardless of differences in income levels, job types, or career stages,
3 individuals repeatedly express dissatisfaction and raise questions about the meaning
4 and value of their work. When individuals find themselves situated in conditions
5 marked by uncertainty, pressure, and a lack of fulfillment, their questioning does not
6 remain confined to work alone. Rather, it extends to a more fundamental inquiry
7 into the meaning of life itself. This suggests that the meaning of work and the
8 meaning of life are not separable domains but are deeply intertwined and mutually
9 constitutive.

10 To be sure, over the past century, human living standards and health conditions
11 have improved significantly through industrialization and the development of free-
12 market capitalism. Nevertheless, it is striking that the dominant organizational forms
13 of work under capitalism have often reduced or even eliminated opportunities for
14 non-material satisfaction and the pursuit of a genuinely good life (Schwartz, 2015,
15 p. 2). In more extreme cases, as John Burnett observes, “for most, work was taken
16 as given, like life itself, to be endured rather than enjoyed” (Burnett, 1974, p. 15).

17 The issues of work dissatisfaction and the search for work meaning have been
18 widely addressed in fields such as psychology, management, and organizational
19 behavior. Within these empirical disciplines, the meaning of work is typically
20 conceptualized in terms of need fulfillment or subjective psychological states, often
21 derived from achievements associated with discrete tasks or work-related events.
22 Consequently, scholars operationalize work meaning through constructs such as job
23 satisfaction, work engagement, or subjective well-being.

24 Despite the abundance of empirical findings and practical recommendations
25 aimed at improving work conditions, the persistence of dissatisfaction remains
26 evident. The same Gallup survey indicates that more than 80% of the global
27 workforce is not fully engaged, which strongly correlates with low levels of job
28 satisfaction. If we accept that empirical approaches have not effectively resolved the
29 problem of work meaning, then it is plausible that they have not adequately grasped
30 what the meaning of work fundamentally is. This raises a critical question: *Can*
31 *philosophy provide a more adequate framework for understanding the meaning of*
32 *work?*

33 Since ancient philosophy, the human quest for meaning has been a persistent
34 and recurring endeavor, in which “each generation seems to go through the same
35 process” (Classen, 2018). While it is generally acknowledged that meaning is
36 manifested within life, the meaning of life itself has been interpreted differently
37 across various philosophical traditions (Letsch, 2019). Importantly, the meaning of
38 life is always situated within the broader context of historical life.

39 In contrast to psychological and managerial approaches that tend to treat work
40 experience and life experience as separate domains, Wilhelm Dilthey conceives life
41 as the foundational basis of the human sciences, constituted as a meaningful and
42 unified whole (Dilthey, 1985, p. 223). More precisely, an individual’s lived
43 experience (*Erlebnis*) gains its meaning within the temporal course of life as a whole
44 (Dilthey, 1988, p. 150). This temporal and holistic structure provides the ground for
45 understanding specific experiences, including those related to work.

¹Gallup has conducted this global survey consecutively over 50 years, where the overall work satisfaction presents a downward trend. More detail, see: *State of the Global Workplace: 2025 Report*. Retrieved from <https://www.gallup.com/workplace/349484/state-of-the-global-workplace.aspx>

1 From this perspective, work experience is not an isolated event but a moment
 2 within the broader continuum of life. Individuals acquire work experiences through
 3 their engagement with tasks and interactions with others, and these experiences
 4 contribute to the constitution of their overall life experience. Dilthey further
 5 characterizes life as a dynamic and interconnected nexus—a rich and ongoing
 6 interplay among cognitive, emotional, and volitional processes (Dilthey, 2002, pp.
 7 87-88). In this sense, every individual is a living source of value, a creative force
 8 that contributes to history and imbues life with meaning (Dilthey, 2002, p. 275).

9 Accordingly, Dilthey's conception of life and his hermeneutics of life provide
 10 an important philosophical pathway for understanding both the meaning of life and
 11 the meaning of work. However, as will be shown, this approach remains limited in
 12 addressing the deeper ontological conditions that make such meaning possible.

13 In contrast to Dilthey, Martin Heidegger is not primarily concerned with
 14 defining the meaning of life. Instead, he asks a more fundamental question: *What*
 15 *makes life experience possible at all?* While Heidegger agrees that life is the starting
 16 point for understanding meaning, he shifts the focus toward the question of *how* life
 17 is lived and *who* lives it (Farin, 2012).

18 Heidegger argues that Dilthey's conception of life and lived experience
 19 remains at the ontical level, treating life as something present-at-hand rather than
 20 interrogating its ontological structure (Heidegger, 1962, p. 150). As a result,
 21 Dilthey's approach, while insightful, is limited in its capacity to address the question
 22 of the Being of life itself (Heidegger, 1962, p. 72). Moreover, Heidegger contends
 23 that Dilthey's emphasis on subjective lived experience cannot overcome the
 24 presuppositions that condition our intelligibility of experience in the first place
 25 (Heidegger, 2000, p. 61).

26 Departing from Dilthey's hermeneutics of life, Heidegger turns to the
 27 existential analytic of Dasein in order to uncover the ontological conditions of
 28 human existence. Accordingly, the guiding question of this study is reformulated:
 29 *What makes the meaning of work possible and necessary?* This study seeks to
 30 address this question by explicating the ontological conditions of the working
 31 individual grounded in *Being and Time*. Following Heidegger's emphasis on
 32 practical involvement, the concept of care (*Sorge*) is articulated as the fundamental
 33 ontological structure that makes the meaning of work both possible and necessary,
 34 while also allowing it to be experienced concretely at the ontical level.

35 36 37 **Ontological Conditions of Working Individual**

38
39 The question, "*What makes the meaning of work possible?*", entails an inquiry
 40 into both the *what* (work itself) and the *who* (the being who comprehends meaning).
 41 In pursuing this inquiry within *Being and Time*, Martin Heidegger adopts a
 42 phenomenological approach that interprets the Being of Dasein as the meaningful
 43 presence of entities to human existence (Sheehan, 2014). In this sense, the focus of
 44 the inquiry is not work as an abstract object, but the working individual as the being
 45 who is always already engaged in work.

46 Given that factual life is inherently dispersed, fragmented, and highly variable
 47 across individuals (Heidegger, 1984, p. 137), Heidegger develops an analytic that
 48 addresses how Dasein negotiates the tension between unity and disunity in its
 49 existence (Aggleton, 2016). At the same time, his project of fundamental ontology

1 seeks to dismantle entrenched metaphysical assumptions—such as the subject-
 2 object dichotomy and the primacy of theoretical knowledge over practical
 3 engagement—that block our understanding of human existence. In this regard,
 4 Hubert Dreyfus identifies five assumptions Heidegger aims to overcome:
 5 explicitness, mental representation, theoretical holism, detachment and objectivity,
 6 and methodological individualism (Dreyfus, 1991, pp. 3-9).²

7 Through the existential analytic of Dasein, Heidegger explicates the
 8 fundamental structures of human existence, the most basic of which is *Being-in-the-*
 9 *world*. From this perspective, the meaning of work does not originate from an
 10 external object (as if the individual were a detached subject), nor from internal
 11 mental states (as if meaning were purely subjective). Rather, it arises from the
 12 working individual's situated and practical engagement within the world.

13 As *Being-in-the-world*, Dasein's essential structures are grounded in
 14 *disclosedness*, which is articulated through existentialia such as *state-of-mind*
 15 (*Befindlichkeit*) and *understanding* (*Verstehen*) (Heidegger, 2000, pp. 188,263). The
 16 hyphenated expression “Being-in-the-world” signifies a unified phenomenon—a
 17 structural whole that cannot be reduced to separate components (Heidegger, 2000, p.
 18 78). Nevertheless, for analytic purposes, Heidegger allows us to examine its structure
 19 from three interconnected perspectives:

- 20
- 21 1. the *world* (here, the work world),
- 22 2. the *who* (the Being of the working individual who cares about its own Being),
- 23 and
- 24 3. *Being-in* (the relational constitution of Dasein, including its being-with
- 25 others).
- 26

27 We elaborate these structural dimensions in turn.

28 At the ontical level, the work world may be described as comprising jobs, tasks,
 29 tools, materials, organizational systems, and workers—namely, a totality of
 30 concrete entities. However, if Being-in-the-world is understood as the meaningful
 31 presence of entities to human existence, then the work world must be grasped
 32 ontologically as a structured whole with an a priori character that makes such
 33 disclosure possible (Heidegger, 2000, p. 93). In this sense, things in the work world
 34 do not primarily appear as detached, present-at-hand objects. Rather, they are
 35 encountered within a *referential totality* of significance (Heidegger, 2000, p. 99).
 36 To clarify this, we must examine Dasein's everyday dealings or engagements with
 37 things.

38 In factual work life, our engagements with things are dispersed across various
 39 modes of concern (Heidegger, 2000, p. 95). When we adopt a theoretical attitude—
 40 stepping back to observe or analyze—we implicitly assume a separation between
 41 subject and object. Heidegger rejects this as a derivative mode of engagement.
 42 Instead, Dasein primarily relates to entities through *practical involvement*,
 43 encountering them as *ready-to-hand* (*Zuhandenheit*) within circumspective concern
 44 (Heidegger, 2000, p. 99).

²We do not intend to offer Heidegger's detailed critiques on traditional assumptions pertaining to study of human in *Being and Time*. While Dreyfus provides a concise summary of those traditions as well as Heidegger's rejections referring to *Being-in-the-world: A commentary on Heidegger's being in time* (1991), 3-9.

1 Such practical engagement presupposes a prior familiarity with the world,
 2 grounded in a referential totality of involvement articulated through the structures
 3 of the “in-order-to” and the “towards-which” (Heidegger, 2000, p. 109). That is,
 4 entities are encountered in terms of their *serviceability* within a system of references.
 5 In this way, the work world can be understood as an all-encompassing referential
 6 system in which the working individual is always already situated (Gorner, 2007, p.
 7 44). Heidegger writes that the “wherein” of understanding—the context within
 8 which entities are encountered—is precisely the phenomenon of the world, and its
 9 structure constitutes the *worldhood* of the world (Heidegger, 2000, p. 114).
 10 Accordingly, every practical activity presupposes an implicit understanding of a
 11 pre-given totality of involvement.

12 Furthermore, in every act of engagement, Dasein assigns itself from a “for-the-
 13 sake-of-which” toward a “with-which” of involvement, thereby forming a network of
 14 references (Heidegger, 2000, p. 115). These interconnected assignments constitute
 15 what Heidegger calls *significance* (*Bedeutsamkeit*), which is the ontological condition
 16 for meaning (Heidegger, 2000, p. 120). Thus, the working individual, through its
 17 *familiarity* with this referential totality, discloses things as meaningful within the
 18 context of its practical involvement through understanding and interpretation
 19 (Heidegger, 2000, p. 121).

20 To explicate the ontological conditions in terms of the *who*, we must examine
 21 the Being of Dasein, its essential characteristics, and its possibilities. For Heidegger,
 22 the Being of Dasein is neither reducible to epistemological knowledge nor definable
 23 as a fixed essence. Rather, it is a mode of Being that is fundamentally concerned
 24 with its own Being—that is, it is characterized by *care*.

25 In contrast to philosophical traditions that prioritize scientific knowledge
 26 structured around subject–object relations, Heidegger argues that such approaches
 27 address only particular “regions” of beings while neglecting the broader context in
 28 which understanding occurs (Inwood, 1997, pp. 13,20). As he emphasizes, Being is
 29 not a genus or category of entities but pertains to every entity while transcending
 30 them (Heidegger, 2000, p. 62). Accordingly, uncovering the Being of the working
 31 individual becomes essential for understanding the ontical meaning of work.

32 When Heidegger claims that Dasein is a being for whom its Being is at issue, he
 33 refers to the individual in its *mineness* (*Jemeinigkeit*) (Heidegger, 2000, p. 68). This
 34 indicates that existence is always individually owned and cannot be generalized as a
 35 collective abstraction. Moreover, Dasein is characterized by an understanding of
 36 Being, which is intrinsic to its disclosedness (Heidegger, 2000, p. 32).

37 If the essence of Dasein lies in its existence, then Dasein is always its own
 38 possibility. It can exist authentically or inauthentically, depending on whether it
 39 takes ownership of its possibilities (Heidegger, 2000, p. 68). Applied to the working
 40 individual, this means that one’s engagement with work is not merely determined
 41 by external conditions but is also shaped by one’s understanding and appropriation
 42 of one’s possibilities. In this sense, the working individual possesses a fundamental
 43 freedom to choose and interpret its engagements within the work world.

44 Returning to the structure of referential totality, when an individual engages in
 45 practical activities or social interactions, each involvement is oriented toward a
 46 “towards-which,” grounded in a “for-the-sake-of-which.” While particular
 47 involvements may refer to further involvements, the ultimate “for-the-sake-of-
 48 which” points back to Dasein’s own possibilities (Heidegger, 2000, pp. 116-117).

1 Thus, the structure of meaning in the work world is ultimately grounded in the Being
2 of the working individual itself.

3 The ontological conditions articulated through the structure of *Being-in* reveal
4 both Dasein's thrownness into the world and its essential relation to others.
5 Heidegger characterizes Being-in as a fundamental state of Dasein's Being. It does
6 not denote a spatial containment but rather signifies existential modes such as
7 "residing alongside," "being familiar with," and "encountering other beings" within
8 the world (Heidegger, 2000, p. 80). These expressions indicate that Being-in is not
9 a relation between two separate entities but a structural feature of Dasein's existence,
10 describing how Dasein is always already involved in a meaningful world.

11 Such diverse meanings of Being-in can only be understood in terms of the
12 structural relationship between Dasein and the world in which it is situated. Dasein
13 finds itself thrown into this world without prior choice or consent; it is always
14 already delivered over to a set of conditions not of its own making. Heidegger refers
15 to this condition as *thrownness* (*Geworfenheit*), which constitutes the *facticity* of
16 Dasein (Heidegger, 2000, p. 174). Thrownness implies that Dasein does not first
17 exist and then enter the world; rather, it always already exists in a world. Applied to
18 work, the facility indicates the work world has already existed before the working
19 individual enters it. Through its state-of-mind, Dasein becomes attuned to this
20 condition and is brought face to face with its facticity—its situatedness in a world,
21 its Being-there, and its coexistence with others.

22 In the context of the working individual, encounters with entities in the work
23 world must be understood through the structure of worldhood. That is, the
24 relationship between the individual and things in the work world is not external or
25 detached but is grounded in the meaningful totality of involvements that constitute
26 the world (Heidegger, 2000, p. 94). At the same time, the relationship between the
27 working individual and others introduces a further dimension of Being-in, namely
28 *Being-with* (*Mitsein*), which requires more detailed clarification.

29 Dasein always exists in relation to others in its everydayness. Because Dasein
30 is essentially Being-in-the-world, others are encountered not as isolated objects but
31 within the context of practical dealings. The Other, understood as *Dasein-with*
32 (*Mitdasein*), shares the same ontological structure as Dasein itself; it is not a
33 corporeal object but a being that also exists in the mode of Being-in-the-world.
34 Consequently, the world is always already a shared world. The very concept of
35 Dasein implies Being-with, and thus the world is fundamentally a *with-world*
36 (*Mitwelt*). In this sense, Being-in is always already Being-with others (Heidegger,
37 2000, p. 155). Importantly, Being-with does not depend on the physical presence of
38 others. Even when no concrete other is present, Dasein remains in the mode of
39 Being-with, since *Being-alone* is itself a deficient mode of Being-with (Heidegger,
40 2000, p. 156). This indicates that sociality is not an optional or secondary feature of
41 human existence but an essential ontological condition.

42 Dasein's everydayness refers to the way in which it exists for the most part and
43 most of the time. Within this everyday mode of Being, the question arises: who is
44 the subject of Dasein's existence? Heidegger's answer is striking. The "who" of
45 everyday Dasein is not a particular individual, not oneself as a distinct subject, nor
46 a collection of individuals. Rather, it is the anonymous and neutral "they" (*das Man*)
47 (Heidegger, 2000, p. 164). The "they" does not refer to specific others but to the
48 impersonal social norms and conventions that shape everyday life. In this sense,
49 anyone can stand in for the "they."

1 The “they” operates as a pervasive and often unnoticed influence that is
 2 internalized within personal existence. It represents the average, socially shared
 3 understanding that governs behavior, expectations, and interpretations. Although it
 4 constitutes the everyday mode of Dasein’s Being, it does not represent Dasein’s
 5 authentic self. Instead, it corresponds to an inauthentic (*uneigentlich*) mode of
 6 existence, in which Dasein is absorbed into the norms and practices of the social
 7 world (Heidegger, 2000, p. 164).

8 More specifically, the “they” exerts an inconspicuous form of domination,
 9 shaping Dasein’s possibilities in subtle and often unrecognized ways. Under its
 10 influence, Dasein may relinquish its ownmost possibilities and conform to socially
 11 prescribed modes of being. As a result, Being-with-one-another in everydayness can
 12 lead to a leveling effect, in which individual distinctiveness is diminished and one’s
 13 own Dasein is dissolved into the anonymous Being of “the Others” (Heidegger,
 14 2000, p. 164). In this condition, the working individual may lose sight of its own
 15 authentic possibilities and instead operate within the unexamined norms of the work
 16 world.

19 Care as the Structure of Work Meaning

21 If we agree that Dasein is the being that is always concerned with the meaning
 22 and unity of its own Being, we may then ask: which structure of Dasein’s Being
 23 accounts for this condition? In terms of the meaning of Being, we have explicated
 24 several structures of Dasein that condition the meaningful presence of things to the
 25 human individual. In addition to Being-in-the-world, worldhood, disclosedness,
 26 Being-with, and the “they,” temporality is another fundamental structure that
 27 renders Dasein possible and intelligible (Heidegger, 2000, p. 370). Temporality is
 28 formally defined as “the phenomenon which has the unity of a future which makes
 29 present in the process of having been” (Heidegger, 2000, p. 374). In this sense,
 30 temporality signifies the ontological unity of future, past, and present.

31 With regard to the unity of Being, Heidegger shows that apparent
 32 dichotomies—such as the opposition between theory and practice—can be
 33 understood as derivative modes grounded in a more primordial unity. For example,
 34 Dasein’s primary mode of engagement with entities is not theoretical observation
 35 but practical, concerned involvement. Circumspective concern operates in an
 36 inconspicuous and familiar manner; however, when equipment breaks down or
 37 becomes unavailable, entities are thematized as present-at-hand and become objects
 38 of theoretical examination. Thus, grounded in temporality, the theoretical attitude
 39 emerges from practical involvement, and the unity of the practical and theoretical is
 40 preserved (Heidegger, 2000, pp. 406-408). These prior analyses prepare the way for
 41 Heidegger to grasp the structural whole of Dasein—namely, care (*Sorge*), which
 42 constitutes the primordial Being of Dasein itself (Heidegger, 2000, p. 167).

43 To account for the “meaningful presence of things,” Heidegger argues that
 44 Being-in-the-world always expresses itself as Being-alongside entities encountered
 45 within the world, addressing and engaging them in concern (Heidegger, 2000, p.
 46 458). In this regard, the phenomenon of care not only unifies the total structure of
 47 Dasein ontologically but also provides an ontical indication that renders this
 48 structure intelligible. Heidegger formulates care as “ahead-of-itself—Being-
 49 already-in (a world) as Being-alongside (entities encountered within-the-world),”

1 whose constitutive elements are existentiality, facticity, and fallenness (Heidegger,
2 2000, p. 364). Care signifies that Dasein exists in a world, encounters entities and
3 others, and projects itself toward its own possibilities. Furthermore, temporality
4 makes possible the unity of these elements and thus constitutes the totality of care
5 (Heidegger, 2000, p. 376). Accordingly, “temporality reveals itself as the meaning
6 of authentic care” (Heidegger, 2000, p. 374).

7 If care signifies that the working individual encounters both things and others,
8 then it becomes necessary to explicate the ontological relations between individual–
9 things and individual–others. In other words, the working individual encounters
10 things, others, and itself within the work world. If Being-in-the-world is essentially
11 care, then a deeper analysis of care allows us to understand these relations
12 ontologically. Following Heidegger, care can be articulated in terms of *concern*
13 (*Besorgen*), *solicitude* (*Fürsorge*), and *self-care* (*Selbstsorge*) (Heidegger, 2000, p.
14 237), corresponding respectively to Being-alongside, Being-with, and Being-one’s-
15 Self (Heidegger, 2000, p. 167). It is important, however, to maintain the unity of
16 care throughout this analysis.

17 Since Being-in-the-world is essentially care, Being-alongside entities that are
18 ready-to-hand takes the form of concern as a mode of Being-in (Heidegger, 2000, p.
19 237). That is, Dasein engages with things through caring involvement. Its facticity
20 disperses into multiple concrete modes of Being-in, such as producing,
21 accomplishing, or using. All such activities share concern as their fundamental
22 mode of Being (Heidegger, 2000, p. 83). Because concernful dealings are primarily
23 practical, two modes of concern can be distinguished: the everyday practical mode
24 of readiness-to-hand and the derivative theoretical mode that arises when
25 disruptions occur (Heidegger, 2000, p. 201). Moreover, every act of concern
26 presupposes a “towards-which” and a “for-the-sake-of-which,” which structure the
27 purposiveness of action (Heidegger, 2000, p. 112). These purposes form a totality
28 of involvement that ultimately points back to Dasein’s own possibilities (Heidegger,
29 2000, p. 116).

30 The working individual not only encounters things through concernful dealings
31 but also interacts with others through mode of solicitude. Dasein typically
32 understands itself in terms of its world, and the Dasein-with of others is encountered
33 within the context of practical engagement. If the world of Dasein is a with-world,
34 then Dasein’s relation to others is likewise constituted as Dasein-with (Heidegger,
35 2000, p. 155). Heidegger contends that Being-with is an essential structure of
36 Dasein’s Being, within which the disclosedness of others already belongs
37 (Heidegger, 2000, p. 160). More precisely, Dasein’s understanding of its own Being
38 always already implies an understanding of others (Heidegger, 2000, p. 161).
39 Accordingly, solicitude, as a fundamental mode of Dasein’s Being, signifies care
40 for the existential possibilities of others. Being-with operates within environmental
41 circumspection and is guided by understanding; thus, solicitous concern is always
42 shaped by what we are concerned with and how we understand it. Only insofar as
43 Dasein has the essential structure of Being-with can it encounter others as Dasein-
44 with (Heidegger, 2000, p. 157).

45 There are multiple ways in which individuals relate to others. According to
46 Heidegger, solicitude manifests in two primary forms: deficient modes and positive
47 modes. For the most part, Dasein exists in deficient modes of solicitude, which are
48 characterized by indifference, distance, or even negativity. Being against one
49 another, passing one another by, or not mattering to one another are all possible

1 expressions of such modes (Heidegger, 2000, p. 158). These are not absences of
 2 Being-with but rather diminished or weakened forms of it. Heidegger emphasizes
 3 that these deficient modes dominate everyday Being-with and contribute to
 4 Dasein's inauthenticity.

5 In contrast, the positive modes of solicitude are divided into *leaping-in* and
 6 *leaping-ahead*. Leaping-in represents an extreme form in which one takes over the
 7 other's concern, thereby depriving the other of autonomy and responsibility. In such
 8 cases, one's care becomes absorbed into concern with things, effectively displacing
 9 the other's capacity for autonomy and taking responsibility (Heidegger, 2000, p.
 10 158). By contrast, leaping-ahead constitutes authentic solicitude: it helps the other
 11 become transparent to themselves in their care and frees them for their own
 12 possibilities (Heidegger, 2000, p. 159). This mode of solicitude offers support and
 13 understanding while preserving the other's capacity for choice. Accordingly, the
 14 modes of solicitude can be understood as a spectrum ranging from deficient forms,
 15 through leaping-in, to leaping-ahead.

16 Dasein always cares for itself; its Being is, in each case, at issue for it. This
 17 means that Dasein is not a fixed entity but an ongoing concern—a being whose
 18 existence is characterized by questioning, projection, and possibility. Self-care is
 19 not an inwardly isolated activity but is always directed outward toward the world,
 20 manifesting itself in both concern and solicitude. For this reason, these modes are
 21 constitutive of care, and Heidegger's concept of care is best understood as
 22 "*concernful-solicitous care*" (*besorgend-fürsorgende Sorge*) (Inwood, 1999, p. 36).
 23 Self-care signifies that Dasein exists in a world, encounters entities and others, and
 24 projects itself toward its own possibilities.

25 However, in its everydayness, Dasein is for the most part not itself but is lost in
 26 the *they-self*, an existentiell modification of the authentic self. To retrieve its
 27 authenticity, Dasein must be individualized through anxiety, which disrupts its
 28 immersion in the everyday world and calls it back from its fallen condition
 29 (Heidegger, 2000, p. 233). In this process, Dasein no longer dwells in the tranquil
 30 familiarity of publicness nor escapes into the "at-home" of the "they" (Heidegger,
 31 2000, p. 234). Instead, it is brought face to face with its ownmost possibilities. This
 32 individualization makes manifest that both authenticity and inauthenticity are
 33 possibilities of Dasein's Being (Heidegger, 2000, p. 235).

34 Thus far, concern, solicitude, and self-care have been explicated separately.
 35 However, these are not independent components but are structurally unified within
 36 the totality of care (Heidegger, 2000, p. 235). Moreover, the primordial unity of care
 37 is grounded in temporality, and "temporality reveals itself as the meaning of
 38 authentic care" (Heidegger, 2000, pp. 374-375). In this sense, the ontological
 39 structure of care constitutes the necessary condition for the temporal working
 40 individual to experience the meaning of work.

41 42 43 **Interpretation of Work Meaning** 44

45 We begin with the guiding question, "*What is the meaning of work?*" Drawing
 46 on empirical research and evidence, we recognize that the meaning of work is a
 47 significant concern for most working individuals. To be sure, empirical fields have
 48 provided extensive explanations regarding work meaning. However, the persistent
 49 reality is that many individuals remain in conditions of dissatisfaction at work. We

1 therefore turn to Dilthey's interpretation of life as a way to understand the meaning
 2 of work experience. From the perspective of Heidegger, however, Dilthey's account
 3 remains confined to the ontical level and thus lacks an explicit ontological
 4 grounding. Accordingly, we reformulate the original question as: "*What makes the*
 5 *meaning of work possible and necessary?*"

6 Through *Being and Time*, we explicate the ontological conditions of the
 7 working individual as the ground for ontical meaning. In particular, we argue that
 8 the holistic structure of care—articulated in terms of concern, solicitude, and self-
 9 care—constitutes the ontological structure underlying the meaning of work. In this
 10 sense, the preceding analysis has addressed the question of the *structure* of work
 11 meaning. Nevertheless, we may take a further step by returning to the initial
 12 question and asking what the meaning of work is at the ontical level. If the
 13 ontological conditions of the working individual disclose the meaningful presence
 14 of entities in relation to its concerns, then such meaningfulness must also be
 15 experientially accessible in factual life. More precisely, if we accept that the human
 16 individual is primordially and intentionally involved in a meaningful work-world
 17 (Blok, 2015), then all practical activity is grounded in a prior structure of
 18 meaningfulness (*Bedeutsamkeit*) (Heidegger, 1992, p. 167). In this regard,
 19 Heidegger makes a decisive claim: if Being-in-the-world is a fundamental state of
 20 Dasein, especially in its everyday mode, then it must also be something that has
 21 always already been experienced ontically (Heidegger, 1962, p. 86).

22 However, the movement from ontological conditions back to ontical
 23 experience remains underdeveloped in *Being and Time*. This gap opens a space for
 24 further articulation in the present study. The question then becomes: how can this
 25 ontological–ontical return be accomplished in interpreting the meaning of work?
 26 We propose to approach this task by integrating Heidegger's method of formal
 27 indication with Dilthey's interpretation of life, while taking Hans-Georg Gadamer's
 28 philosophical hermeneutics as an intermediate framework. It is important to note
 29 that Gadamer's hermeneutics operates across both ontological and ontical
 30 dimensions and has been widely developed in both theory and practice (Wilson,
 31 2022). Grounded in the idea that understanding is a mode of Being, Gadamer
 32 extends Heidegger's ontology into a historical and dialogical hermeneutics
 33 mediated by language. Moreover, Gadamer emphasizes that understanding always
 34 involves application; the interpretation of any concrete situation is an integral
 35 moment of understanding itself (Gadamer, 1975, p. 319).

36 Drawing on Dilthey's conception of the continuity and structural coherence of
 37 life, Gadamer maintains that life presupposes a unity of meaning expressed through
 38 its parts (Gadamer, 1975, pp. 227-228). At the same time, he affirms that life
 39 possesses a hermeneutical structure in which "life interprets itself" (Gadamer, 1975,
 40 p. 229). Taken together, these insights provide both the conceptual orientation and
 41 the possibility for carrying out an ontological–ontical interpretive movement.

42 The methodology of formal indication, implicitly operative in *Being and Time*
 43 (Streeter, 1997), offers a hermeneutic approach that accompanies life experience
 44 without distorting it through excessive theoretical abstraction (Kisiel 1993, p. 376).
 45 Rather than fully capturing primordial phenomena in conceptual language, it
 46 provides directional guidance toward the pre-theoretical horizon of existence. For
 47 example, the modes of solicitude—deficient modes, leaping-in, and leaping-
 48 ahead—may be understood as formal indications of I–Thou relations. In a parallel
 49 manner, Gadamer's distinction between objectifying, reflective, and dialogical

1 relations can be interpreted as a hermeneutic concretization of these ontological
 2 structures within the domain of understanding (Gadamer, 1975, pp. 366-370).
 3 Although these two frameworks are not strictly identical, they display a clear
 4 structural affinity: objectifying relations correspond to deficient modes, reflective
 5 relations resemble aspects of leaping-in insofar as they subordinate the other to the
 6 self, and dialogical relations parallel leaping-ahead in their openness and enabling
 7 of the other's self-understanding. In this way, Heidegger's concept of solicitude can
 8 be seen as providing the ontological ground that guides Gadamer's account of
 9 hermeneutic experience.

10 Once Gadamer's historical and dialogical hermeneutics is adopted, the
 11 ontological–ontical interpretive project can be completed by transforming Dilthey's
 12 notion of lived experience through a hermeneutic framework at the ontical level.
 13 For instance, grounded in the ontological structure of solicitude and hermeneutic
 14 experience, Dilthey's method of life interpretation can be appropriated to
 15 understand the meaning of life and work in concrete situations. The hermeneutic
 16 circle of part and whole allows particular work experiences to be interpreted in
 17 relation to the broader context of a person's life. At the same time, Dilthey's account
 18 of life as constituted by cognitive, emotional, and volitional dimensions provides
 19 further guidance for interpreting the specific meaning of work experiences.

20 Moreover, the hermeneutic circle need not be limited to the traditional part–
 21 whole relation but can be extended to the relation between ontical and ontological
 22 levels, as well as between pre-structure of understanding and interpretive
 23 articulation. In this way, the proposed ontological–ontical return enables a concrete
 24 interpretation of work meaning without reducing ontology to psychology or
 25 anthropology.

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