

Being by Proxy

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Author: Alessio Montaruli (ORCID 0009-0008-5435-3692) · Institute for Ethical Ontology **Persistent identifier:** DOI 10.5281/zenodo.21749203 **Seat of the thesis:** the four-part specification at *Across the Categorical Difference*, §3 (Preprint V1.1, DOI 10.5281/zenodo.21684041); deployed at *Begleiten können: Ownness and the Warrant Structure of the Critical Architecture*, §2.3 (this site). **Suggested citation:** Montaruli, Alessio. “Being by Proxy.” Ethical Ontology doctrine pages, 1 August 2026. DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.21749203.

The thesis

Focality becomes ontological substitution when the primary case holds the derivative’s title to count as a being on the derivative’s behalf, so that the derivative appears in the ontological inventory on a warrant it does not itself hold.

In short: **focality is being by proxy** — and *Being by Proxy* is the thesis’s name. “Ontological substitution” names the operation inside its defining sentence, is defined there and nowhere else, and carries a disclosed homonym (see the closing section); the numbered forms (“a fourth reading of focality”) describe the thesis’s place among the readings and are not its name.

What this says

The tradition’s most elegant answer to the plurality of being is the focal structure: being is said in many ways, but all of them point back to one primary case — substance, and then whatever stands behind substance — the way “healthy” is said of the animal first, and of diet, complexion, and urine only by reference to it. For twenty-four centuries that structure has been read as a fact about *meaning* (the derivative senses defined through the primary), or about *explanation* (the primary accounting for the derivatives), or about *causation* (the primary producing them).

This thesis names a fourth relation the received readings do not reach, and claims it is the one that matters. Some things stand in the inventory of beings not on their own warrant but on a warrant *held for them* — the way a deed can be held by someone who is not the owner. Where the focal structure works this way, the primary case is not merely the derivative’s definition-anchor or cause: it is the *holder of the derivative’s title to count as a being at all*. The derivative is — by proxy. Its standing is administered elsewhere.

That is a claim about *standing*, not about meaning. It is checkable in the classical texts wherever the derivative's right to appear among beings is exercised, defended, or revoked from the primary's seat — and it is deniable: a focal order in which each member holds its own title, and the primary only organizes, would not be substitution. The thesis says *becomes*, and means it.

The genealogy, credited

The structure this thesis names is not a modern discovery about the tradition. It is the tradition's own practice, in three stages that must be distinguished.

Practiced and avowed. The metaphysical tradition performed ontological substitution in its relation to the first principle, and said so in its own technical vocabulary: *ens per essentiam* against *ens per participationem* — only the first principle holds its title to be in its own right; everything else counts by participation, its being received, continuously conserved, and, as the annihilation doctrine states outright, revocable from elsewhere. That is standing held on a warrant not one's own, avowed for a millennium as piety. The analogy doctrine carried the same structure at the level of the word: *denominatio extrinseca*, the derivative bearing the *name* on the primary's warrant.

Half-seen. Heidegger possessed every component of this reading and never joined them. He read metaphysics as the grounding of beings in a ground-figure (the onto-theological constitution); he owned the failure-case in explicit proxy-vocabulary (*Unvertretbarkeit*: representable in every concern, substitutable in none of dying); and in the principle of reason he touched the accounting grammar itself — *ratio reddenda*, grounds as something owed and rendered. Three components, three registers, no wire between them: the structure stayed in ground-and-presence, the failure-case stayed existential, the accounting stayed epistemic. The join requires a register he did not have — standing and answerability as an ontological grammar, with warrant and answer distinguished.

Named. What this thesis adds is the join, and the instrument the devotional register structurally could not supply: the sorting question. Gift-dependence (the conferred being genuinely the creature's own), substitution proper (title held at the primary's seat), and the occasionalist limit are three different structures, and the tradition oscillates among them without a tool to tell them apart. *Who holds the title; where is it defended; can it be revoked* — that is the tool, and asking it is what turns a millennium of avowed practice into a diagnosis with costs: who pays, what stands at the periphery, what the revocability of standing does to the beings whose standing it is.

The mirror

This corpus's central category was defined by the opposite discovery. The who is the way of being whose differentia is *non-vicariousness*: no substitute, however perfect, can stand in the place where this one is at issue — the position does not transfer. Set

the two findings side by side and they are one discovery seen from its two ends: **the tradition's focal structure made being itself vicarious; the who is where vicariousness fails.** An ontology of substitution at the foundation, and a category defined by the impossibility of substitution — the second could only be found by someone no longer inside the first.

What is not claimed

That all focality is substitution: the thesis is conditional, and the condition — the title actually held and exercised from the primary's seat — must be shown case by case, in texts. Not a verdict on Aristotle or on any historical system: those trials belong to the historical volume, are governed by its own rules, and can be lost. Not a general theory of what makes discourse ontological: that larger question has its own open apparatus and is not spent here. And not a dismissal of the focal structure's power: an answer that organized two millennia is not a mistake; it is a structure with a cost, and the cost is what this page names.

How this could be false

Stated per this site's standing discipline. **First:** since the genealogy above concedes that the *parts* of this reading are everywhere — avowed in the participation doctrine, assembled but unjoined in Heidegger — the precedent that would end this thesis's originality is a text performing the *join*: reading the focal or participatory structure as warrant-transfer *as a diagnosis*, with the sorting question asked — who holds the title, where defended, whether revocable — rather than avowing the dependence devotionally or analyzing it semantically. Such a text would give the thesis a co-discoverer, and this page would say so. None has been found; the search is disclosed as conducted and continuing, and its nearest neighbours (core-dependent homonymy; the analogy and participation literatures; extrinsic denomination; Heidegger's onto-theology, *Unvertretbarkeit*, and *ratio reddenda*; the theology of imputed standing) are named precisely so the reader can check behind us. A terminological note belongs in the same disclosure: the phrase "ontological substitution" has an unrelated recent use as a formal *replacement* operator — one element substituted by another within a domain (Ferrari, PhilArchive, 2026). Replacement is not this relation; it is closer to its exact negative, since title-holding concerns a derivative that *remains* in the inventory, counting on another's warrant — not one that exits its place to a successor. The homonymy is noted so the reader need not discover it for us. **Second:** show that the title-holding relation reduces without remainder to definitional dependence — that there is no daylight between "defined through the primary" and "counting on the primary's warrant" — and the fourth relation collapses into the first, taking the thesis with it. The seat article argues the daylight; the argument is where to aim.

Seat and apparatus. The four readings of focality are separated, and the fourth established, at Across the Categorical Difference, §3 (DOI 10.5281/zenodo.21684041) — the sentence above is quoted from there, and what prints first binds. The definition is

deployed self-standing in the Kantian study Begleiten können: Ownness and the Warrant Structure of the Critical Architecture, §2.3, on this site, where the demarcation question is argued at §2.6. The mirror is stated at The Who as a Modal Category, §6, on this site. This page follows the doctrine section's rule: it states what is claimed, what is inherited, what is not claimed, and how it could be false.