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Realism, Idealism, and the Commitments of Common Sense

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ABSTRACT

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As Wilfrid Sellars put it, one of the principal aims of philosophy "is to understand how things in the broadest possible sense of the term hang together in the broadest possible sense of the term." In this I think Sellars is right: the discipline is charged with taking a "synoptic view," with accounting for our diverse pre-philosophical commitments concerning, for example, what things there are, who we are, how we know, what we ought to do, etc. Crucially, explaining these commitments means explaining how they are possible together. There is good reason to believe, however, that these commonsense commitments are inconsistent, so that providing a view of the whole requires denying or revising some in order to vindicate others. Realism and idealism, I believe, can usefully be understood as different ways of negotiating these commitments. In the dissertation, I build on this idea to question the plausibility of metaphysical realist (reductive) approaches to ontology, on the one hand, and to articulate some of the motivations for an idealist (understanding dependent) approach, on the other. To focus the discussion, I use Martin Heidegger's work from the period of *Being and Time* as an extended case study. In my view, much of the recent Anglophone literature on Heidegger misunderstands his position, arguing that he is a metaphysical realist or deflationist about ontology. Those are inadequate interpretations of Heidegger's work, collapsing the distinction he draws between being and beings, in the first case, and suggesting that he somehow 'overcame' ontology, in the second. More importantly, such interpretations neglect his insight into our commitment to ontological pluralism—the idea

that there are many irreducible ways of correctly accounting for what there is—as essential for a defense of a commonsensical understanding of ourselves and the lifeworld in the face of the fundamental distortions that reductive ontological strategies would impose. The idealist reading of Heidegger preserves and explains this pluralism. The idealist defense of pluralism, however, also brings with it an incommensurability thesis and so relativism. I do not take a position on whether or not it is possible to modify Heidegger's view to preserve his defense of pluralism without also committing to relativism. Instead, I limit my discussion to describing the importance of ontological pluralism in accounting for the way things 'hang together' and to the challenge that Heidegger's work presents both to those who wish to reject pluralism (perhaps in favor of some form of metaphysical realism) or get it for free by avoiding all revisionary claims, and so the entire problematic of realism and idealism.

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

> The aim of philosophy, abstractly formulated, is to understand how things in the broadest possible sense of the term hang together in the broadest possible sense of the term.[1]

In philosophy, considering the way things 'hang together' means considering what kinds of things can really 'hang' and what kinds of things only seem to. Such reflections are ontological, inquiring into the conditions of possibility of something being what it is and what that means. These issues may be pursued in realist or idealist directions, or in a way that purports to avoid both, suggesting that the pair present a false choice. My project considers these three ways of taking a "synoptic view"[2] of our ontological commitments, focusing first on forms of metaphysical realism—the idea that reality is a self-structuring collection of entities whose truth must be articulated in a uniquely privileged discourse, the one that manages to correspond directly to that mind independent reality—to see why that view is both harder to reject but also more problematic than many would like to admit. I will do this, at least in part, by considering Martin Heidegger's compelling, if ultimately problematic, idealist rejection of realist approaches to ontology. To do this, I'll need to discuss in what follows, among other things, what I intend by the designations 'realism' and 'idealism,' the challenges to any ontological strategy that attempts to repudiate both, why Heidegger is an idealist (something that is certainly not taken for granted by most Heideggerians), and why we should care.

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[1] Wilfrid Sellars, "Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man," in *Science, Perception*, and *Reality*, New York: Humanities Press, 1963, p. 1.

[2] Ibid., p. 2.

To avoid unnecessary confusion, I want to note that the line from Sellars' famous article, "Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man," gets pride of place in this introduction only because of the way he sets up a similar problematic, not because I agree with or even draw upon his particular conclusions. His talk of 'manifest' and 'scientific images' provides a useful shorthand for considering two different but more or less comprehensive ways of looking at the world. For Sellars, each image has a fairly specific sense, the scientific image being contrasted with the manifest image by its postulation of imperceptible entities to explain the behavior of perceptible ones.[3] For the record, I do not follow his way of drawing this distinction. In repeating Sellars' language of two images, I am interested in the idea of the manifest image as a sophisticated commonsense understanding of the world, an understanding that includes our personal perspective, as contrasted with the scientific image, as an understanding that attempts to be as 'objective' as possible, abstracting from our personal perspectives, attempting to look at the way things are anyway, untouched by the subjective taint of the lifeworld. These are two fundamental but seemingly incompatible ways of imagining the world, and it is among the basic aims of philosophy to determine (or take steps toward determining) why or whether we might decide that one, both, or parts of these images could be true, to give precedence to one or the other (or aspects thereof), and what that would mean.

Sticking with these broad themes, I also agree with Sellars' suggestion that philosophy is about being able to find our way about with "no intellectual holds barred," which I take to mean that philosophy helps us understand how to interpret the various types of 'manifest' and 'scientific' claims we make in relation to one another, both within their own 'general type,' if we can speak that way for a moment, and between types, and what these relations entail, i.e., what

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[3] Ibid., p. 4.

they suggest when it comes time to explain what kinds of things there really are and why. I

think it is safe to suggest that most are inclined to be rather liberal or inclusive here: we don't

want to be asked to give up our personal perspectives to explain the force of, say, the truths of

physical science. Given this key commonsense desideratum, the challenge is to balance the

intuitions and arguments supporting forms of pluralism with those that suggest that the world and

the truth about it must really be one way irrespective of what we happen to believe, and that

ontological pluralism is therefore, at best, a mere 'manner of speaking.'[4]

Reflecting on this issue, I argue in the first chapter that metaphysical realism and related

positions are unable to make good on claims that their reductive forms of realism are compatible

with pluralism. I do not purport to refute such positions, but only highlight how their claims to

defend pluralism are hollow. More specifically, in the first chapter I consider three ways that one

of our principal ontological intuitions—that there is one world and hence one real truth about

it—is developed philosophically by the so-called 'absolute conception of the world,'

metaphysical realism, and physicalism. Each supports a version of (reductive) ontological

monism while attempting to protect at least a semblance of pluralism—the idea that both the

'scientific' and 'manifest images of man in the world' are in many respects true images, or, in

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[4] If the importance of these issues is not already evident, it may be worth reminding the reader that questions about ontological status and the tensions between manifest and scientific images are also (ultimately) questions about what it is to be a person. If the genuine ontological standing of the manifest image of man-in-the-world (of our sophisticated but ordinary self-understanding) cannot be vindicated, if our familiar ways of understanding the world does not do justice to the way things really are, then our self-image would be in need of drastic revision. Quite simply, in a rather profound way, we would not be who we thought we were and the world would not be the way we thought it was. To paraphrase Sellars one more time, if the manifest image of the world does not survive, if we cannot sustain its claims in the face of the pressures of the scientific image, then neither do we, that is, we would not survive *as persons* (Sellars, p. 10). Of course, our being persons is also bound up with our scientific understanding of the world. Ultimately, it seems we are not in a position to give up either.

more general terms, that there are many irreducible ways of correctly accounting for what there is. Pluralism is something defenders of each of these views acknowledge to be essential to their ability to say *what* there is without being compelled to provide fundamentally distorted accounts of *who* we are. Their defenses of pluralism center around attempts to draw a distinction within truth between what we could call, in the spirit of the absolute conception, 'absoluteness' and 'ordinary truth' or correctness. The idea of this distinction is clear enough: the former kind of truth is supposed to match the way things are *anyway*, while the latter type of truth supposedly pertains only to our disciplined discourses, and is only indirectly related to the way things really are. For example, for such a metaphysical realist it is not 'absolutely true' that Northwestern is in Evanston because, according to them, institutions are not included among the furniture of the universe—switching Northwestern for St. Andrews University, this example comes directly from Terry Horgan.[5] I'd like to provide an example of an absolute truth, but those are only described by way of promissory notes—the absolute truth is what the physics of the future will eventually describe—or in general, almost Parmenidean terms, an absolute truth might be something like the following: "there is really only one concrete particular, viz., the entire cosmos."[6] I argue, however, that such distinctions between absoluteness and 'ordinary' truth don't establish what their defenders would like them to: if truth really is correspondence with a self-structuring reality, then that which fails to correspond to that reality isn't true in another way (true in an 'ordinary' sense), but is simply false. Their claims to the contrary notwithstanding, these ontological monisms leave no room for pluralism, and so, quite generally, rule out the possible

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[5] Terry Horgan and Matijaz Portrc, "Abundant Truth in an Austere World," in *Truth and Realism*, eds. P. Greenough and M. Lynch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 137-8.

[6] Ibid.

truth aptitude of discourses rooted in what I follow Sellars in calling 'the manifest image.' They are reduced to mere 'manners of speaking.'

The second chapter analyzes some of our most important pre-philosophical ontological commitments, what I refer to as our 'commonsense commitments,' in order to consider how *both* realist and idealist approaches to ontology inevitably challenge them in advancing their respective programs. Because of its reputation for making reality a figment of our imaginations, it is generally assumed that idealism will make wildly revisionary claims vis-à-vis common sense. More often than not, however, there is a failure to reflect on the ways realism frustrates our pre-philosophical commitments, which is something I attempt to show in the first chapter by explaining how these important forms of realism leave no room for a decent account of 'the manifest image.' Ultimately I argue that *all* philosophical programs of a certain (significant) scope will necessarily be revisionary in relation to common sense because common sense itself is not internally consistent. Or, more precisely, common sense cannot simply be 'deepened' into a consistent ontology. I need to emphasize here that I am not suggesting that we are ordinarily in a great state of confusion because of our conflicting commonsense commitments. We are not. Philosophy does not need to rescue us from some deep state of confusion. That said, when a philosopher attempts to *extend* and *unify* these intuitions in a *consistent* way, they come into conflict: they must be prioritized and reconciled. Different philosophers will take different pre-philosophical commitments to be fixed points, striving above all to vindicate the ones they favor while doing their best to tell a good story about the others, if they attend to them at all. In short, in this process, *all* philosophical programs must challenge our presuppositions at some points while supporting them at others. The particular way in which a philosopher chooses to approach the challenges that originate in our pre-philosophical commitments constitutes their particular

variety of realism or idealism. The suggestion that all 'synoptic views' (general approaches to

articulating and organizing our ontological commitments) must be revisionary should not itself

be a surprising idea considering how hard it is to get any collection of philosophical claims to

float: in some respects, all such views are bound to be at odds with common sense. I argue,

therefore, that the simple fact that a philosopher makes revisionary claims is not a good reason to

presume they have made some kind of deep mistake, although this is indeed the common

presumption when contemporary philosophers are presented with any kind of idealism.

Obviously, the issue is not whether a view is revisionary, but how, to what end, and at what cost.

In short, then, I believe that realism and idealism are *unavoidable* for philosophers interested in

questions of a certain scope[7] and that it is difficult to understand such ontologists adequately

without reflecting on how they attempt to negotiate the challenges presented by common sense,

that is, without reflecting on their basic realist or idealist tendencies.

And this finally brings me to Heidegger. As I already noted, I use Heidegger's work as an

extended case study in rebellion from metaphysical realism. The third chapter brings his work

into the discussion, introducing some of his basic claims from *Being and Time*. If there is one

thing that most interpreters of Heidegger's work can agree upon, it is its incompatibility with

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[7] When I say that realism and idealism are unavoidable for philosophers interested in questions
of 'a certain scope,' you'll certainly want to know just what that scope is. The basic idea is just
this: I have to allow that there are philosophers working in many areas that do not take and are
not obliged to take anything like what I describe as a synoptic view. To avoid making an
absurdly strong claim, I have to allow that these philosophers can focus on the regional questions
they happen to be interested in without taking a realist or idealist view. Moreover, I don't
presume that I can draw a precise line between those philosophers that are necessarily making
claims of 'a certain scope' and those who are not. The boundary is vague, but that doesn't make
it less clear that some things are obviously in and some out. For example, I don't presume that
someone working on applied questions in bioethics need engage the ontological questions
involved in realism and idealism, while, by contrast, it is hard to imagine someone working on
the philosophy of color avoiding those same issues.

metaphysical realism.[8] In this chapter, therefore, I focus on Heidegger's reasons for rejecting metaphysical realism, a rejection I take to be rooted in his insistence that there is only being in an understanding of being.

The fourth chapter engages some important Anglophone literature on Heidegger in order to consider several different readings of his rejection of metaphysical realism, and so several different approaches to his basic ontological claims. I consider and criticize 'therapeutic' (or deflationary), pragmatist, and realist interpretations. As I see it, they are unsuccessful because they either attempt to explain his challenge to metaphysical realism as part of a larger 'overcoming' of realism and idealism, or because they only pay lip service to his challenge to metaphysical realism while committing him to that view in more subtle ways. Those advancing this second type of interpretation seem to believe (incorrectly, I think) that a commitment to metaphysical realism is something like a condition of adequacy for any (general, synoptic) ontology and that Heidegger's apparent rejection of metaphysical realism is really only a rejection of its cruder forms. Since *all* the authors I consider in this chapter maintain that Heidegger is not a metaphysical realist, their claims are undermined by showing how they do, in fact, reduce his view to a kind of metaphysical realism.

The fifth and final chapter describes Heidegger's commitment to idealism. At least in part, I take this commitment to be rooted in his own two-level idea of truth—truth as 'correctness' and truth as 'unconcealment.' I argue that this idealism allows him to defend a kind of pluralism that I believe will need to be a part of any adequate account of our ontological

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[8] In fact, 'most interpreters' includes all those I mention in this dissertation, from William Blattner to Ernst Tugendhat. Even realist interpreters of Heidegger, of which there are many, explain why they believe Heidegger is a realist but *not* a metaphysical realist. On Heidegger's rejection of metaphysical realism, see chapter three, sections three and four. On realist but (supposedly) not metaphysical realist readings of Heidegger's claims, see chapter four, section 4.

commitments. That is, he is not forced to deny that there are such things as, say, 'persons' or

to doubt the ontological status of what are sometimes referred to as the 'special sciences'—that

is, those sciences that are not physics. I certainly do not, however, think that Heidegger provides

a completely adequate (non-revisionary) account of our pre-philosophical commitments, for his

idealism forces him to defend not only what I call *synchronic pluralism* (the idea that there can

be irreducible but true discourses about the same thing at a given time) but also *diachronic*

pluralism (the idea that there can be incommensurable but true discourses about the same

phenomenon over time). The latter type of pluralism implies a kind of relativism, and although

this may be an undesirable consequence, at least in relation to common sense, Heidegger's case

shows us why it is at the very least not easily avoided by those who wish to defend (the very

common sense friendly) synchronic pluralism. Ultimately, the desired result is a defense of

synchronic pluralism because it supports the idea that, generally speaking, both 'manifest' and

'scientific images of man in the world' are true images along with a rejection of diachronic

pluralism because of its key consequence, relativism. Heidegger, however, is pessimistic about

our ability to reach that goal (of course, he also denies that it is a goal). In his view, and I'm

obviously at least sympathetic here, to even move towards reaching that anti-relativist

conclusion, we would need to both reject metaphysical realism and engage the ontological issues

at the right level. This second constraint requires a rejection of deflationary approaches to

ontology that pretend a 'synoptic' view is impossible. In Heidegger's jargon, the deflationary

philosophers would like to restrict philosophy to the ontic level, to issues related to entities,

rejecting any possible ontological talk that purports to pertain to the being of entities, to their

'ontological status.' However, rejecting metaphysical realism and deflationism about ontology, it

is hard to find the principle that distinguishes synchronic from diachronic pluralism, the one that

enables us to accept the former and reject the latter. As I see it, it is difficult to find a principle that allows us to split these types of pluralism because *both* are rooted in an anti-absolutism about truth, something that seems to be a necessary presupposition of synchronic pluralism (the good kind of pluralism, the kind most philosophers would like to hold on to). Thus, Heidegger's work from the period of *Being and Time*, at least as I read it, rebukes those that think they can have pluralism for free (that is, while either holding on to metaphysical realism or refusing to engage the ontological issues at the proper level) and challenges those pursuing a legitimate defense of ontological pluralism to do so without falling into the relativism of ontological frameworks that Heidegger himself understands to be a principal feature of our being-in-the-world.

To review, the first chapter describes challenges metaphysical realists have accounting for pluralism, i.e., it considers the problems they have providing an adequate account of both the scientific and manifest images of man in the world. As I suggest in the second chapter, that strong form of realism is highly revisionary in relation to common sense. Now, according to my story, that alone does not single it out for abuse since I take all philosophical programs of a certain scope to be revisionary. I believe that even deflationary approaches to ontology (those claiming the problems of ontology are best dealt with by uprooting the questions themselves) are revisionary, insofar as they fail to appreciate the intuitive origin of questions about the way things really are. The third and fourth chapters bring Heidegger into the discussion, introducing his view and criticizing some important 'therapeutic' (deflationary), pragmatist, and realist readings. Finally, in the fifth chapter, I sketch my idealist interpretation of Heidegger's position, explaining how his idealism supports pluralism. His defense of pluralism, however, also supports relativism. As I read it, then, Heidegger's work challenges us to find a way to distinguish

synchronic and diachronic pluralism that allows a principled defense of pluralism without

relativism.

In sum, all philosophical programs of a certain scope are revisionary in relation to our

pre-philosophical commonsense commitments. It is in relation to these commitments that we

ought understand realism and idealism. This should not be understood to suggest, rather

hysterically, that as necessarily revisionary philosophy is somehow impossible (however difficult

it may be). I am only asserting that all philosophical programs will confound our intuitions at

some points and that, therefore, the question will always be whether such departures are worth it:

what do they explain? I take it, then, that Putnam is wrong to describe philosophy as "a journey

from the familiar to the familiar."[9] It may start from the familiar, but if it is to do its explanatory

work, it can't come all the way back.

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[9] Hilary Putnam quoting John Wisdom in *The Threefold Cord: Mind, Body, and World* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), p. 41.

CHAPTER 1

ON WHAT THERE IS ANYWAY… AND EVERYTHING ELSE

§1 – Introduction: Science and Privileged Explanation

Scientific explanations of phenomena are supposed to be more than just intersubjectively acceptable, more than just objective. For better or worse, the expectation is that science tells us about the way things are irrespective of what anybody happens to believe.[1] In philosophy, this more or less explicit presupposition about science may be transformed into the metaphysical thesis that scientific truth is foundational truth, that our basic scientific knowledge expresses our best understanding of what there is *anyway*. The philosophical intuition seems to be that selected sciences, usually the physical sciences, are able to tell us about the substance of the world, while all other properties are thought to (somehow) emerge from or supervene upon this world-

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[1] I am well aware that, among others, those sympathetic to Arthur Fine's idea of a Natural Ontological Attitude will want to stop me right there, challenging my suggestion that any pre-philosophical notion we might have about belief independence could have metaphysical pull (Arthur Fine, "Natural Ontological Attitude," in *Scientific Realism,* ed. Jarrett Leplin, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984, pp. 21-44). 'NOAers,' as Fine likes to call those that side with him, contend that 'naturally' there are no *metaphysical* presuppositions, but that such 'presuppositions' are taught, among other ways, through the peculiar practice of reflection called philosophy. I disagree. There is a difference between not making presuppositions explicit and not having them at all. Just because reflection is required to bring out an idea doesn't mean that an idea is well characterized as nothing more than an artifact of that process. In my opinion, the presumption that we are naturally metaphysics-free, free of ontological commitments, is implausible. As I will discuss in the next chapter, we may not make these beliefs explicit and we may not attempt to reconcile our various existential commitments, but that is not to say that we don't have them, make at least some of them explicit, orient ourselves in the world by our emphasis on some rather than others, etc. Other than Fine, the best known skeptic about the 'naturalness' of metaphysics is certainly Richard Rorty. For a recent example, see his contribution to *Truth and Realism*, "Remarks at St Andrews" (New York: Oxford, 2006), pp. 239-247.

substance. Considering the importance of this intuition about the ontological priority of the objects required for physical accounts of the world, claims from the physical and life sciences should not simply be ignored (i.e., blithely roped off in a separate explanatory 'level' or marked as an 'indirect' discourse[2]) when we go on to tell stories about ourselves and the world from experiential or participant perspectives. However, when an attempt is made to be responsible, to account for both scientific and experiential presuppositions, many, and certainly many 'scientifically minded' philosophers, conclude that where there is overdetermination, scientific explanations (but only particular kinds) trump the alternatives. But this is just to say that scientific explanations are the ones that are actually true, rather than merely appearing to be so. Is this presumption tenable? If not, how do we explain our denial of it without a precipitous slide into ontological relativism and the rather woolly suggestion that ontologies are only valid relative to themselves?

Here, then, is the dilemma: we must either deny or accept the ontologically privileged status of our most basic scientific discourse. Taking the first alternative means rejecting the priority of physical-scientific discourse in light of our inability to reconcile differences among scientific discourses as well as conflicts between scientific and experiential perspectives. After all, if scientific truth were ontologically authoritative, how would we make sense of (i.e., interpret the ontological status of) the ordinary phenomena that have no place in a scientific discourse? How could we simultaneously maintain that physics delivers the truth about the way the world is *and* that we actually know the truth about our lives and all that concerns us, not to mention truths that we readily accept from the social and historical sciences? Unacceptably, there seems to be no place for me as a person (and all the discourses that flow through this

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[2] See below, sections 4 and 5.

perspective) in a strictly physical account of the world. But, be that as it may, while still fully believing in my actual existence as a person (is there an alternative?), I find it difficult to deny the absolute authority of a physical description of the world. And this thought leads to the second horn of the dilemma, the recoil from ontological pluralism: there is one world, so there must be a single consistent story to tell about it. That is, despite the hash that granting a privileged status to an absolute scientific discourse makes out of my self-understanding, I find it nearly impossible to deny its special status as an articulation of the truth concerning the way things are independently of how I happen to think about them. Despite the sanguine attitude many philosophers take toward this conflict of explanations, the purported compatibility of scientific and experiential explanations is little more than cold comfort, because, as I'll discuss below, compatibilisms that reject relativism explain only how it can *seem* as though the experiential perspective puts us in touch with phenomena as they actually are.

Because these explanations reflect ontological commitments, this conflict drives us to ask again: what kinds of things are there really? As much as we might like to be broadly accepting of disciplined discourses as ways of 'telling it like it is' about the world, it is hard to do so without falling into a hazy ontological pluralism, 'explaining' these various ontologies as valid relative to themselves, relative to their own standards. Unless we are willing to accept a rather implausible relativism or 'irrealism,' unless we care to give up on the idea that there is some way things actually are, there must be a way of adjudicating these various standards, these various ontological frameworks. Pursuing a different strategy, we might just bite the bullet and try to restrict what we are prepared to claim as real and which discourses are able to 'tell it like it is.' But can we really do that? In such a case, our pursuit of a privileged explanation and a fundamental ontology seems to have the unintended effect of eliminating the person pursuing

knowledge, or by making all talk about persons, all talk about the 'manifest image,' a mere manner of speaking. The philosopher is undone by an absurd double-effect: setting out to determine what there *really* is, the theorist ends up denying the reality of much of what is known to be real. The world we know falls as collateral damage in the pursuit of a coherent framework for its explanation.

If pluralism leads to a belief in seemingly incommensurable ontologies, then the pluralist has only avoided one offense against common sense (reductionism) to cause another (the idea that *conflicting* claims could be *true* of the same object). If, however, the pluralist claims that the explanations *are* commensurable, the reductive challenge returns, and we become suspicious that this pluralism is merely 'a manner of speaking.' The general idea that I want to focus on is just this: if scientific explanation is given priority, our ordinary understanding of our understanding of the world seems to unravel—I am, after all, talking about a philosophical problem, not a mental disorder. However, because we have an unshakeable commitment to the legitimacy of knowledge from the participant-perspective, it is impossible to seriously consider giving up our ethical or personal knowledge, and all the other ways of knowing that flow through this perspective, as ways of revealing the truth about the world. While we may not have a problem talking about some discourses as mere manners of speaking, as convenient myths, we can only push this so far. The suggestion that we question the ontological standing of our most familiar discourses would be particularly laughable if our new 'scientific view' were based on a *philosophical* revelation about the incompatibility of experiential, normative, physical, etc. levels or types of explanation.

Thus, the broad question is this: how do we explain the relationship between what we know about our world of concern and what we believe about the physical world apart from any

such perspective? An absolute commitment to the correctness of one side appears to be a non-starter, while pluralisms struggle for traction in the face of the deceptively simple idea that there is one way that things really are. Advocates of ontological monism use this powerful idea to make it seem as though any divergence from it means giving in to the crudest relativism.

Ultimately, I will approach this antinomy from the perspective of Heidegger's hermeneutic idealism, the position that I take him to be defending in *Being and Time*. Since my formulation of this issue bears some relation to Kant's third antinomy concerning the impossibility of characterizing the universe as both a completely determined sequence of events and as a place where causal chains are freely initiated, it seems reasonable to give an heir to Kant's idealism a chance to influence the discussion. Perhaps Heidegger's detranscendentalized Kantianism can shed some light on this antinomy, accepting it as a legitimate philosophical question without either siding completely with the determinism of the thesis or the anti-naturalism of the antithesis, but also without attempting resuscitate Kant's distinction between noumenal and phenomenal reality, an option that is by now, I hope, off the table. However discredited certain aspects of the Kantian project may be, we still want to show how both claims may be true, but also that doing so without any relativizing qualifications is impossible. I take philosophy to be seeking, therefore, on the one hand, an account of *what* there is that does not force us to provide an error-theoretic account of *who* we are. On the other hand, we want an account of the relativizing conditions needed to overcome this 'conflict of images' that does not entail a commitment to relativism, which in this case would amount to a glib compartmentalization of incommensurable ontological commitments, suggesting that each ontological framework is only valid relative to itself.

Before explaining how I think Heidegger's approach to ontology in *Being and Time* can shed light on these issues and how I think it must be interpreted in order for it to do so, it will be helpful to discuss some philosophical views that cover much of the same terrain in a different way, facilitating our understanding of Heidegger's view by setting up a clear and important contrast with views that represent a dominant tendency in contemporary philosophy. The positions that I have selected for this purpose attempt to resolve the apparent conflict between "manifest" and "scientific" ontologies by endorsing the latter, granting its conclusions special authority. For the many partisans of this approach, if we want to know what there *really* is we are instructed to look to our most fundamental scientific theories—and nowhere else. Of course, every ontological absolutism has a story about how its challenge to the reality of the lifeworld isn't an attempt to deny it genuine ontological standing, but, as I will highlight in what follows, the priority claimed for their preferred discourses leaves little logical space for such generosity.

This chapter will therefore focus on three related positions: 1) the absolute conception of the world, 2) metaphysical realism, and 3) physicalism. Generally speaking, the absolute conception argues for the philosophical importance of 'a view from nowhere' and takes some steps to explain what such a view would be a view of.[3] Metaphysical realism shares the basic intuitions of the absolute conception, but provides a more concrete philosophical program for their defense. It assumes the world consists of a fixed number of objects with a fixed number of properties, and that true knowledge is therefore only possible when we produce representations

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[3] Under this heading, for example, I'll consider claims made by Adrian Moore in *Points of View* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); Bernard Williams in *Descartes: The Project of Pure Enquiry* (London: The Penguin Group, 1978); Thomas Nagel in *The View From Nowhere* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986); Barry Stroud in *The Quest for Reality: Subjectivism and the Metaphysics of Colour* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); and John Searle in *The Construction of Social Reality* (New York: The Free Press, 1995).

matching that reality. Importantly, this requires separating those properties that belong to the world from those that we project, something that allows the metaphysical realist to make wholesale determinations about what types of claims can potentially be true.[4] Physicalism is a variety of metaphysical realism that identifies reality with physical reality. For the physicalist, a full account of the physical world would leave nothing out. Their particular challenge is to explain how the great diversity of things we are concerned with can be described in physical terms or denied ontological standing.[5]

In addition to simply setting up a contrast with Heidegger's view, these realist positions are relevant to the broader project because they share my intuition that a kind of pluralism is essential to providing an adequate account of our ontological commitments. I want to consider how they believe they can do this given their ontological absolutism, for that basic commitment seems to be in direct conflict with any type of pluralism. Considering the successes and failures of each approach will prepare us to examine Heidegger's attempt to cut a different path through similar philosophical territory. In addition, I hope that providing these three concrete examples will help combat the suspicion that debates between absolutism and relativism only survive by counterpoising straw-men. After this chapter, when I discuss Heidegger's critique of metaphysical realism, we will understand just what type of philosopher Heidegger is challenging.

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[4] In this group, for example, I'll consider work by Hilary Putnam in *Meaning and the Moral Sciences* (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978); Michael Devitt in *Reality and Truth* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); Terry Horgan and Mark Timmons in "Conceptual Relativity and Metaphysical Realism," *Philosophical Issues* 12, 2002; and Terry Horgan and Matijaz Portrc, "Abundant Truth in an Austere World," in *Truth and Realism*, eds. P. Greenough and M. Lynch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

[5] Here, for example, I'll consider arguments from Frank Jackson in *From Metaphysics to Ethics: A Defense of Conceptual Analysis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); Jaegwon Kim in *Mind in a Physical World: An Essay on the Mind-Body Problem and Mental Causation* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998); as well as proposals from Moore and Searle, cited above.

I am happy to acknowledge that it is a bit of a stretch to call the absolute conception of the world, metaphysical realism, or physicalism 'positions,' since each represents, at best, a cluster of views, with the common themes characterized differently by the many philosophers that have advanced arguments under those banners. For now, however, this diversity does not pose a problem. As I mentioned, I will consider these positions only insofar as they take a stand on the ontological priority of one particular account of the way things are and how that privileged explanation is supposed to relate to the non-privileged explanations that they also believe they can hold on to. If we can discern the basic aims of these views, what they each believe they are particularly well-suited to explain, and how they believe they are able to accept explanations outside their favored discourses, that will be enough.

§2 – The Absolute Conception of The World

A defender of the absolute conception of the world wants us to believe that knowledge cannot be genuine unless it is knowledge of what there is *anyway*, where what there is anyway is conceived as a single mind-independent, ontologically determinate world. Knowledge can only be knowledge if we are able to join it with any other knowledge. Knowledge, like the world itself, must be strictly coherent. If our 'knowledge' isn't broadly and strictly coherent, it suggests that we don't really understand how such claims constitute knowledge about the world. Assembling knowledge into ever larger bodies encourages the defender of this view that that their knowledge is legitimate, i.e., that it is tracking the truth, tracking the world as it is anyway. The absolute conception of the world therefore has two parts: first, the world in itself has a particular character, and, second, knowledge is real knowledge when it accounts for the world in its own terms, that is, without any subjective additions. In other words, the world is some way,

knowledge is just a reflection of how it really is. Everything else that we try to pass off as knowledge is nothing more than an expedient falsehood, presenting only how things happen to appear to us.

Defenders of the absolute conception openly argue from epistemological premises to metaphysical conclusions. Why do they believe they can do this? After all, aren't we are talking about the absolute *conception* of the world, a view occupied with questions of knowledge? Yes, but since the knowledge the absolute conception is concerned with is *absolute* knowledge, knowledge that has special priority, it must explained why such knowledge deserves that priority. Now, the justification for its priority is not that such knowledge is necessary for all other knowledge, but that it has priority because it carves nature at its joints. So, in order to justify the claim that an absolute conception is coherent (or even necessary for real knowledge), the idea of a mind-independent ontologically (pre)determined world has to be defended. Simply put, the world has to actually have joints for it to be reasonable to even hope that we can reveal them.

As noted, one way of trying to make this proposal more compelling is through the idea of knowledge integration: as the world is unified, so is knowledge; there is only one fundamental story to tell and anything that cannot be joined by simple addition to that story isn't real knowledge.[6] The idea of knowledge integration is most commonly illustrated by explaining how the knowledge claims of physically or temporally distant individuals can be combined. For example, standing in front of my apartment building in Chicago, I may claim that it is well below freezing, while my friend in Palo Alto, sitting in his backyard, boasts that it is a very comfortable sixty degrees. There is nothing contradictory about the claims 'it is well below freezing' and 'it is a comfortable sixty degrees' when made from different places. Taking a wider perspective

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[6] Cf. Moore's story about integration by addition.

allows us to easily integrate the apparently conflicting claims into a coherent whole. Plainly, the coherence of 2, 10 or 100 claims is not a guide to truth. Nevertheless, the coherence of *all* knowledge is supposed to persuade us that our knowledge is knowledge of the world as it is anyway. The absolute conception's metaphysical claim concerning a self-standing, ontologically articulated world supposedly *explains* why integration is possible, since the denial of an absolute reality transforms this agreement into either a remarkable coincidence or an indication of extraordinarily widespread collusion (or illusion).

If the absolute conception is correct, knowledge integration must be a standing possibility, but it is not yet sufficient for the identification of a conception as the absolute conception since the integration may take place from a point of view or perspective, however wide. To reach the absolute conception, we need a point of view on all other points of view—a point of view that is not from a point of view. The target is the complete absence of any trace of subjective 'contamination,' which requires the elimination of all such relative elements from a representation of the world. As the aim is to shed all traces of 'subjectivity,' it is fair to say that what is sought is precisely a 'view from nowhere'—an unmediated conception of the world. And why shouldn't there be such a conception? After all, the world must have been some way before human beings arrived on the scene, and if all human life ceased to exist, the world would still be some way. Respecting this and similar intuitions, it seems that it must be possible to represent the world in a completely objective manner, as it is in this pristine state uncorrupted by our subjective distortions and imaginary posits. At the very least, there doesn't seem to be anything prima facie incoherent about trying to do so.

An absolute conception of the world is one that is radically de-humanized, de-anthropomorphized.[7] According to Thomas Nagel, we fail to grasp the realist spirit of the idea of a 'view from nowhere' so long as we entertain the fantasy that reality is somehow cut to fit our conceptual capacities.[8] Cultivating a 'view from nowhere' requires recognizing that the world is independent of us in at least two senses. 1) Ontologically, the being of the world does not depend on what we think about it. 2) Epistemologically, the being of the world extends beyond our possible ways of knowing it. In other words, our thoughts do not (for the most part) change the being of the world, and our limited ways of knowing are no match for the real being of the world. Just to be clear, this second idea is not just the idea that we cannot possibly know everything that has ever happened anywhere—in that sense, a complete understanding of the world is obviously impossible—but is rather that our concepts are no match, or are at best a partial match, for the things themselves. Perhaps we can understand this suggestion as a distant cousin of the traditional empiricist idea that our possible knowledge is limited by our particular perceptual capacities. As humans, we can only know what comes through our five senses, and while a being with seven or nine senses might have a richer experience of the world, it is not one that we can access without actually having those senses. Relative to such sensitive aliens, our perception of the world, and hence our understanding of the world, however developed, is necessarily limited. Nagle does not talk about our limitations with reference to sensory abilities,

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[7] De-anthropomorphizing our view is not done with the aim of producing a conception that all investigators can agree upon; some investigators may lack the relevant tools, they might not be able to count, for example, but that would not lead us to say that there aren't really (say) two apples on the table (cf. Stroud, p.38). As it turns out, if we understand the absolute conception as a de-anthropomorphized view of the world, it may lead to the conclusion that such a conception would be humanly unintelligible, despite the fact that it may be a regulative epistemological principle.

[8] See, for example, Nagel, p. 90.

but in terms of our conceptual capacities: babies are unable to comprehend many things that adults are, and so it isn't hard to imagine beings that stand to us in cognitive ability as we stand to babies. For such super-intelligences, there may be ways of seeing the world that are out of reach for us. In general, then, for a defense of these metaphysical and epistemological presuppositions, an appeal is made to common sense primed by the discussion of imagined scenarios like the ones mentioned above about a world devoid of thinkers or the possible abilities of cognitive aliens.

Defenders of an absolute conception obviously believe their project is resilient enough to avoid being derailed by the simple observation that, as Putnam puts it, "you can't describe the world without describing it."[9] We do not want to say that just because any account we give of the way things are will be an account, i.e., something we provide, that it cannot be fully objective. Of course, our descriptions will be in some language, using concepts, addressing needs, answering questions, but that doesn't impugn the objectivity of the story.[10] Such an argument against the possibility of an absolute conception makes a genetic fallacy, claiming that just because these are 'our' concepts that they can't be absolutely true, describing the world just as it is independently of us. Adrian Moore puts the this quick argument against an absolute conception this way:

> Any representation must involve its own distinctive battery of conceptual apparatus, with its own distinctive systems of classification and organization. To operate these is already to see things in one way rather than an other. It is already to see things from a point of view.[11]

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[9] Hilary Putnam, "Irrealism and Deconstruction," in *Renewing Philosophy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 1992, p. 123.

[10] Cf. Stroud, chapter 2.

[11] Moore, p. 18.

The quick argument can be dressed up a bit by putting it in terms of the context-sensitivity of concepts. We use concepts to differentiate, compare, combine, and identify things. To do this we must have an outlook from which such distinctions are meaningful. We are, for example, able to compare ants and alligators as living beings and contrast them based on their relative size. Because we can see the point of comparing, grouping, distinguishing, identifying, agreeing, denying, and so forth, we can use these concepts properly. We cannot, after all, give necessary and sufficient conditions for something being an animal or for something being big, yet we can make such distinctions easily because we can see the point of doing so. Since 'seeing the point' appears to require having an outlook on the world, and since having an outlook on the world entails having a perspective, concepts must always contain a perspectival element. Concepts cannot be entirely detached from the context in which they are used and still retain their meaningfulness. Since any conception of the world must utilize concepts, all conceptions of the world must be from some point of view.[12]

Moore rejects this argument by distinguishing between representations that may be from a point of view and representations that betray a point of view. He agrees that if all conceptions of the world were necessarily from some point of view an absolute representation would be impossible. He does not think this is the case, however. Just because a representation betrays a point of view does not mean that it is from some point of view, at least not in any philosophically interesting sense. A claim is *from* a point of view when its truth cannot be determined without occupying the point of view from which it was made. By contrast, a claim *betrays* a point of

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[12] Moore, p. 79ff. This is clearly only a gesture at a huge discussion, one of the most basic in the philosophy of language, concerning where and whether to draw a line between semantics and pragmatics. Suffice it to say, Moore doesn't take the contextualist's objections to be decisive.

view when that claim could not have been produced without that point of view.[13] So, for

example, a statement of $e=mc^2$ is always made at some time and, therefore, always betrays at

least a temporal point of view, but that does not mean that it is from a point of view.[14] That is, the

veracity of the claim can be accepted without assuming any particular outlook.

In these terms, an absolute conception of the world aims to be from no point of view at

all. As Barry Stroud puts it:

> Whatever is due only to us and our own ways of responding to and interacting with the
> world does not reflect or correspond to anything present in the world as it is
> independently of us. The aim of an 'absolute' conception, then, is to form a description of
> the way the world is, not just independently of its being believed to be that way, but
> independently, too, of all the ways in which it happens to present itself to us human
> beings from our particular standpoint within it. An 'absolute' conception would be a
> conception from which all such traces of our selves have been removed. Nothing would
> remain that would indicate whose conception it is, how those who form or possess that
> conception experience the world, or when or where they find themselves in it. It would be
> as impersonal, impartial, and objective a picture of the world we can achieve.[15]

Although Stroud does not draw the distinction that Moore emphasizes between being from a

point of view and betraying a point of view, the basic idea is clear enough. Stroud, Williams,

Nagel, and Moore agree that an absolute conception of the world is a purified conception of the

world, one that has eliminated all essential traces of human subjectivity, one which leaves us

with a representation of what there is *anyway*.

It is safe to grant that we each have at least a minimal (i.e., regulative) idea of what the

world is like anyway. The absolute conception of the world gets a grip on our imagination when

its defenders attempt to parlay this regulative notion into metaphysical and epistemological

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[13] Moore p. 84.

[14] Moore, p. 85 and p. 64.

[15] Stroud, p. 30.

theses. The regulative idea of the world existing independently of what we think of it allows

us to make sense of our ability to draw distinctions between thinking that something is so and

believing that it actually is.[16] Without this ability to draw distinctions between appearance and

reality we could hardly say that we were thinking at all. We all recognize that we can find out

that things are not how we thought they were, and this is possible only because we imagine the

world to be *some way* independently of what we happen to think of it. Much of the time our

beliefs appear to track the way the world is, and we call this non-accidental tracking knowledge,

but sometimes, despite our best efforts, things do not work out so well, and our beliefs are, as it

were, rebuffed by the world. To make sense of these fundamental, if simplistic, ideas about

knowledge and misunderstanding, we supposedly need to have an idea of the world existing in

some way independently of our thoughts, beliefs, desires etc., and it is difficult to reasonably

object to calling this background an absolute conception of the world.

But this rudimentary 'absolute conception' that we all have as a practical-epistemological

presupposition has little in common with the absolute conception that Nagel, Moore, Williams,

and Stroud are after. Furthermore, we do not need their philosophically ambitious absolute

conception in order to make sense of the difference between things seeming to be so and actually

being so. The regulative idea is extremely weak and formal: we must believe that the world has

integrity, that it doesn't pop out of existence when we turn our backs, that we have to adjust our

thoughts and actions to the way it really is etc. In thinking of this independently existing world

we are not obliged to decide whether 'in itself' the world is colorless or odorless, whether there

really are beautiful or ugly things or kind or vicious actions. In my estimation, there is a

philosophical question about the ontological independence of the world just because our ordinary

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[16] Cf. Stroud beginning of chapter two.

idea of its independence is little more than a broad epistemological presupposition, and not a

proven metaphysical claim. That weak epistemological presupposition can only be ridden so far.

After all, the 'surface grammar' of our understanding may encourage a belief in metaphysical

absurdities. Defenders of the absolute conception of the world must first show that the idea of the

ontological independence of the world is coherent. Why should we believe such a thing? And if

we should, what is the content of this belief? *What* is there anyway? If the response remains

totally general and abstract, we may suspect that the impressive sounding metaphysical claims

have been extracted from nothing more than the definition of 'knowledge' or 'reality.' Without

any significant content, the absolute conception begins to look like a God of philosophers, a

presupposition required to make sense of our (now metaphysically inflated) way of

understanding the world; it begins to look like a posit based on a combination of transcendental

argumentation and wishful thinking.

Defenders of an absolute conception counter with a simple argument. The most intuitive

version of this argument comes from Nagel, who uses the metaphor of repeatedly 'stepping

back' from our particular limited perspectives in order to reach an absolute conception. As he

puts it:

> To acquire a more objective understanding of some aspect of life or the world, we step
> back from our initial view of it and form a new conception which has that view and its
> relation to the world as an object. In other words, we place ourselves in the world that is
> to be understood. The old view then comes to be regarded as an appearance, more
> subjective than the new view, and correctable or confirmable by reference to it. The
> process can be repeated, yielding a still more objective conception.[17]

By taking a 'wider' view, we are able to see our old perspective as an appearance, in the sense

that it is a representation that must be understood in relation to some point of view. In 'stepping

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[17] Nagel, *The View From Nowhere,* p. 4.

back' we expose and make explicit the perspective of the prior conception by grasping how it can be integrated with other views. As noted above, integration requires a sense of the broader scene, and it must be possible to produce a 'map' of that broader scene if we are to be convinced that some purported knowledge is genuine knowledge, that is, it must be possible to integrate that perspective into the story about the way things are anyway. In this way, we have no trouble understanding how superficially contradictory claims like 'it is snowing' and 'the sun is shining' can be combined into one representation of the way things are by understanding that the weather may be different in different places and at different times, and that if both claims are to be true, different locations are implied by the two claims.

This 'relativity' inherent in our claims usually remains inexplicit. Our representations are not tagged as relative to a particular place and time, to a particular person, with particular interests and conceptual resources. By 'stepping back' we focus on the perspectives from which the claims are made, explaining representations as the perspectival appearances that they are. A 'view from nowhere' is supposedly achieved through a repetition of this process. Eventually it is impossible to 'step back' any further, having characterized the appearance-character of all conceptions, including our own. Of course, it is this last move that is most difficult to understand. How could we possibly produce a completely objective representation of our own point of view? How is it even coherent to suggest that we can step all the way back, that we can step out of the picture while acknowledging that we must remain in it?

Bernard Williams tries to clarify this idea using a version of the 'stepping back' argument that I already mentioned above. He asks us to suppose that *A* and *B* have some knowledge. Each knows the world from their own particular place, using the concepts with which they are familiar, each having had their own experiences, and so forth. Williams calls the perspective that

each has their "representation of the world (or part of the world)." Since *A* and *B* are different people, their representations are bound to differ at least slightly, and the more distant they are from one another (conceptually or experientially) the more their representations will vary. If what *A* and *B* have is to be called 'knowledge' then there must be a way to explain how the representation of one is related to the representation of the other. To do this we must explain their respective perspectives. For example, *A* might represent their environment as mountainous while *B* can see nothing but cornfields. This, of course, isn't a problem once we remember that *A* lives in the Rockies and *B* has never left Iowa. Combining their 'representations,' we can produce another representation of the world that contains the first two. And this process can be continued. For any representation, we can form another explaining how that representation is a representation of the world as it is anyway. Since we can do this for any representation, an absolute conception of the world must be possible.[18]

According to Williams, the important thing to notice is this: if we cannot form such an absolute conception, we don't have an adequate idea of the world that is there *anyway*.[19] But without that idea, we become unsure as to whether knowledge is possible at all, since all *genuine* knowledge just is non-accidental tracking of the way things are *anyway*. For Williams, the requirement that we think of knowledge this way forces us to think of genuine knowledge as *certain* knowledge. Thinking along these lines, *any conceivable doubt* shakes our knowledge to its foundations, since without an absolute conception we are not in a position to say what is a *reasonable* doubt and what isn't. Determining the reasonableness of a doubt already depends on the idea of a unified, independent reality, which is precisely what is at issue. For Williams,

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[18] Bernard Williams, *Descartes,* pp. 64-5.

[19] Ibid. p. 68

therefore, an absolute conception isn't just a lofty goal, something that we may or may not achieve at some point in our intellectual pursuits. Rather, it is the point of departure—the foundation—of all knowledge. And he is in good company when he posits that this foundation must be secure, that the root of all genuine knowledge must be known with certainty.

Moore does not go along with this overtly Cartesian account of the absolute conception. Although he defends the possibility of an absolute conception, and associates his view with Williams', he denies that absoluteness should be linked with indubitable knowledge, observing that many of the things that are the most certain are also the most subjective. For example, the claim that "grass is green" may not be absolute, but it is fairly certain, and if I claim that I feel warm right now, my claim is certain, but not absolute. Moore points out that absolute representations may be such that "only highly abstruse scientific formulae fit the bill. In that case, true absolute representations will far more readily admit of dispute than most true perspectival representations."[20] We may desire certainty regarding the absolute, but as finite creatures we may never have it, and that's okay.

Nevertheless, Moore grants that Williams' emphasis on certainty isn't entirely misplaced. Certainty is necessary, but not certainty about particular bits of knowledge—since even the global coherence requirement that Williams would impose could be no guarantee of that. On Moore's view, the certainty that we need is just certainty about the meaningfulness or coherence of the idea that genuine knowledge pertains only to what there is anyway. If we were to find that an absolute conception of the world is for some reason an absurdity, the link between genuine knowledge and absoluteness would be undone. In that case, the interpretation of knowledge as 'of what there is *anyway*' would have to be modified. From the perspective of those that defend

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[20] Moore, p. 63.

the possibility of an absolute conception, the implication is that it is the prospect of a modification of how knowledge is understood, and not the very notion of an absolute conception, that is properly described as philosophically revisionary. For Moore, therefore, vindicating the possibility of an absolute conception is the key to making sense of our current metaphysical and epistemological self-understanding.

We should not be fooled, however, into accepting this deflated, apparently analytical interpretation of the absolute conception. It is not just an account of how we think about knowledge, for it is not only an analysis of knowledge: the very idea of an absolute conception is ontologically loaded, encouraging the idea is that knowledge must mirror the way things are in themselves. True knowledge is supposedly absolute knowledge, not just in the sense of being adequate within certain parameters, but in the sense of being identical (in some unspecified sense) to the things themselves. Positing identity here supports the questionable metaphysical commitments that sustain the conflict between the manifest and scientific images or, if you prefer, the antinomy between a world of causal determinism and world of freedom.

In general, there is nothing wrong with thinking of knowledge as 'of what there is anyway.' Problems arise, however, when we begin to invest too much in what is meant by 'anyway.' If by 'anyway' we mean only that knowledge must be objective, that we do not just decide or dictate what counts as knowledge, but that it depends on the way things are, then talk of knowledge as knowledge of what there is anyway seems entirely harmless, being little more than a cheer for some vague but acceptable notion of objectivity. However, when metaphysical weight is piled on to the idea of this 'world as it is anyway,' when the suggestion is that not only does knowledge track the truth, but that genuine knowledge must be absolute (in the sense of being something beyond mere correctness) we lose a grip on what we are talking about. The

absolutists' idea is that our truths, to be genuine, must not depend on our subjectivity at all. That is, unlike more familiar accounts of truth and knowledge, the fact that the concepts in use are our concepts is a problem; the categories that we impose on the world through our conceptual choices must match the categories of being *out there*, not just in the sense of being empirically adequate, but in the sense of being metaphysically right. But what kinds of truths are those? What in the world is this metaphysical idea of rightness or 'absoluteness'? How can we distinguish merely correct truths from those that are genuine truths (absolute truths)?[21]

We may not have an answer, but that doesn't diminish the allure of the distinction, which is just another way of celebrating the link between knowledge and detachment. Nietzsche colorfully but accurately described the relevant ideal as one of "contemplation without interest" by a "pure, will-less, painless, timeless, subject of knowledge," with "an eye turned in no direction at all, an eye where the active and interpretive powers are to be suppressed, absent, but through which seeing still becomes a seeing-something."[22] Or, in Nagel's rendering: "We are in a sense trying to climb outside of our own minds, an effort that some would regard as insane and that I regard as philosophically fundamental."[23]

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[21] All truth is absolute in the sense of being 'universally valid,' but that is not what is meant by absoluteness here, for a truth could be universally valid insofar as it is related to us, without producing a view from nowhere, and without the entities that it posits finding a place in the first-class ontology of the absolute conception. This kind of truth—'mere correctness'—has its own kind of absoluteness, stability, etc., but not in the way that these God's Eye Truths have, which are absolute in the sense that they reflect the world as God would see it. Of course, if this idea sounds funny, there's a good reason for it. As far as I can tell, these realists have no room to make a legitimate distinction between correctness and absoluteness. This will be discussed in greater detail below.

[22] Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality* (1887), Trans. C. Diethe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), essay III, section 10.

[23] Nagel, p. 11.

Why is detachment so important? If we know which discourses are answerable to the world (which we would supposedly learn if we were to climb outside our own minds to have a look around) and which are not, we would have a basis for segregating properties into those that are in the world and those that are projected by us. That understanding would allow us to explain which disagreements are resolvable by cognitive means (discovering the truth of the matter) and which can only be resolved by compromise or force (when there is no fact of the matter to be discovered). The fantasy seems to be that a sufficiently developed absolute conception would lend support to those who believe that one particular type of inquiry, scientific or otherwise, may have priority over all others, and while there may be other discourses that function within certain parameters, they are not ultimately revelatory of the way things are. For instance, confidence in the absoluteness of his 'scientific' conception leads Williams to defend ethical relativism. As he sees it, ethical representations do not figure in an absolute conception because they are legitimate only against a cultural horizon. It follows that if cultures do not share that horizon it is not possible for them to have genuine ethical disagreements. Williams, for example, believes it is absurd for us to pretend to have an ethical disagreement with a bronze age chief or medieval samurai.[24] The gulf separating our cultures makes it impossible for our ethical claims to get any traction with the other group. "Stepping back" from the ethical discourse, we see its limits, we see that ethical disagreements aren't what they appear to be—there is nothing 'out there' to vindicate any particular claim. Ethical discourses supposedly therefore yield to an error-theoretic interpretation that would explain how such questions may seem to answer to an independent standard but actually do not.

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[24] Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), pp. 160-1.

The example from metaethics, however, may not be a good one because of the widely contested status of ethical discourse. Pointing out that defenders of an absolute conception believe that ethical and aesthetic claims should be handled with theories of error—whichever particular hermeneutic of suspicion they happen to prefer—fails to distinguish them from philosophers with far more modest views. It is therefore important to point out that their calls for theories of error push into discourses that have a much more secure claim to genuine truth-aptitude. For example, asking about an absolute conception of the world means asking whether the world is colored, whether it is odorless, whether it feels a certain way to be in it, and, in general, whether the personal point of view has a place in it at all. If all this feels like a rehearsal of questions about primary and secondary qualities, there is good reason for that, since the question is really the same one that Early Moderns asked: what depends on us, and what is independent of us? Unlike the early defenders of the primary-secondary quality distinction, those that still feel compelled to do this go much further in acknowledging how deep the cut between primary and secondary properties must go. Nevertheless, they do not give up on the distinction entirely. The result, however, is that they take the entire world of our concern, all that with which we ordinarily concern ourselves, to be absent from our first class ontology. After all, where could our world, shot through with normativity as it is, find a spot in the swirl of causes and effects imagined by these 'scientifically minded' philosophers? What began with an error theory about ethics, continues with an error theory of persons, and ends with a debate among the sciences as to how they rank ontologically, about which mirror the way things are anyway and which are just false, whatever euphemisms of supervenience may be used in the latter case.

The constant references to 'science' notwithstanding, the relation between science and an absolute conception is unclear. At first it is hard to imagine how the absolute conception could

be anything other than an idealized scientific outlook. Defenders of an absolute conception are careful not to contradict what they take to be established scientific discourses, particularly physics. However, rather than defining his position in relation to science, Nagel defines his 'view from nowhere' in terms of its opposition to all forms of idealism, which he takes to be the archenemy of any true science because of its epistemological test of reality. For that reason, Nagel believes that scientism and physicalism are unable to produce an absolute conception because they cut reality to fit their particular biases.[25] As he puts it:

> The world is not my world, or our world—not even the mental world is. This is a particularly unequivocal rejection of idealism because it affirms the reality of aspects of the world that cannot be grasped by any conception that I can possess—not even an objective conception of the kind with which we transcend the domain of initial appearances. Here it can be seen that physicalism is based ultimately on a form of idealism: an idealism of restricted objectivity. Objectivity of whatever kind is not the test of reality. It is just one way of understanding reality.[26]

So, how does the view from nowhere fit with a scientific view of the world? Ultimately it is 'scientific' (as opposed to scientistic) to be broad minded enough to realize that our science may not be able to comprehend reality, not even in principle. Our science may be good in its own sphere, but what is ultimately required for truly scientific outlook is a transcendental insight informing us that "how things are in themselves transcends all possible appearances or human conceptions."[27] Drawing a sharp line between the form and content of all thought, Nagel claims that content may be independent of any particular vehicle, but that accessibility requires thought and may have only certain forms. His "Kantian" claim is not that there is an inaccessible

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[25] "Scientism is actually a special form of idealism, for it puts one type of human understanding in charge of the universe and what can be said about it" (Nagel, *The View From Nowhere*, p. 9).

[26] Ibid. p. 26.

[27] Ibid., p. 101.

noumenal reality that exists as a different aspect or as the mysterious cause of what appears to us, but that some (potential) content transcends every possible form that thought can take in the human mind.[28] He has not followed Kant in dividing reality into appearances and things-in-themselves, but has instead imagined what can possibly be known (i.e., reality) on a kind of continuum, where, because of our limited capacities, what we can know only falls within a small range. There are points at which our ability to know simply runs out. We aren't up to the task.[29] The moral of the story: it is good science (philosophy) to recognize that science is limited.

Adrian Moore's defense of an absolute conception of reality is also linked to science, but this link, like Nagel's, is established by definition: whatever discipline enables us to produce absolute representations of reality will be *ipso facto* the fundamental science. Now, since Moore insists that we cannot ever know whether we are actually in possession of absolute representations, he does not judge our science. His claim is only that such representations are possible given some finite extension of our powers, i.e., that they are possible for us. We cannot know whether we are on the way to producing absolute representations, whether we already have, whether our science will have to be radically reconceived before such representations are possible, or whether we will never produce an absolute representation before the species goes extinct. His idea of an absolute conception is tied to physics, and he is a physicalist, he claims, only because this seems like the best bet at the moment, but he does not think he is obliged to

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[28] Ibid., p. 102.

[29] For comparison, it's interesting to note that Pascal had a similar view, believing that we are caught between two infinities, of greatness and minuteness (i.e., that the at universe is broader than we can possibly comprehend and is comprised of elements so minute that their functioning will forever remain mysterious), and that we are stuck in the middle, unable to have absolute knowledge, but unable to claim complete ignorance. In this situation the intellectually honest thing to do is to confess our impotence, do the best we can to understand the messy middle in which we reside, and to turn to god for solace.

place a bet at all. His claim is only that such representations are possible, not that the

convergence of our sciences show us we are on the way, or that the apparent comprehensiveness

of physics shows us its absolute status.

Bernard Williams associates the absolute conception with science most directly. For

Williams the absolute conception is a scientific conception. Absoluteness is *the* standard for

science, but, as noted in my brief comments on cultural relativism and ethics above, the absolute

standard is certainly not appropriate to all kinds of knowing.

> It is centrally important that these ideas relate to science, not to all kinds of knowledge. We can *know* things whose content is perspectival: we can know that grass is green, for instance, though *green*, for certain, and probably *grass* are concepts that would not be available to every competent observer of the world and would not figure in the absolute conception.[30]

> The aim is to outline the possibility of a convergence characteristic of science, one that could meaningfully be said to be a convergence on how things (anyway) are.[31]

Williams is here relying on a distinction between perspectival truths and absolute truths, which is

nothing other than the idea that there is a difference between mere correctness (perspectival

truths) and absoluteness (truths that mirror the way things are anyway). He does not explain how

there is logical space for both correctness and truth, and he does not dwell on how merely

perspectival truths are really truths. One suspects that Williams' grip on non-'scientific' (non-

absolute) truth is so tenuous that reflecting on its place in our understanding of the world could

overturn the understanding of the world we thought we had, just as he believes that too much

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[30] Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy,* p. 139.

[31] Ibid.

reflection on ethical truth is liable to destroy it.[32] Perspectival truths can only bear so much weight.

How can there be *knowledge* of what doesn't fit into the absolute conception if knowledge must be of what there is anyway, which is by definition what finds a place in the absolute conception? Once a particular understanding of reality is given absolute status, it annihilates the truth aptitude of anything that doesn't have that status. For example, in Williams' case, if truths represent the way things are *anyway*, and there is no fact of the matter to which ethical representations can correspond (outside our belief in them, which isn't much considering that we, also, don't *really* exist), then we are forced to claim that although we take ourselves to be stating moral truths and correcting ethical errors, strictly speaking there are no moral truths and errors, for there is nothing for them to answer to (of course, other than the fact that some 'people' 'believe' certain 'claims' to be ethical truths). Williams owes us an explanation of how the truth predicates true (merely correct, relatively true) and true* (absolute) aren't mutually exclusive. It seems that either truth just is absolute truth, and then we will want to know what kinds of claims can be absolute truths, or that the idea of 'absolute' truth is incoherent, and all we have is truth. If truth *itself* is absolute (in the sense of being stable and not loseable), then it is hard to understand how we could make truth claims that are actually falsehoods best accounted for with a theory of error.

The split that Williams finds between correctness and absolute truth is mirrored in the two kinds of convergence he finds in scientific and dependent discourses. The convergence and

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[32] In chapter 9 of *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, Williams talks at length about the possibility of reflection destroying ethical knowledge. It is destroyed when we come to see that there is no ultimate ground upon which ethical disputes can be resolved. They are not, after all, truths about the way things are anyway.

compossibility of truth claims are important in establishing the discipline of a discourse. If we are actually talking about something, our claims about that thing should converge, and they should converge without any collusion between us. If our claims converge, it will be possible to integrate them. In short, if we are talking about the same thing, our knowledge about that thing should be of a piece, given that the object of our knowledge is of a piece and is part of an independently existing reality. Williams recognizes that there is a kind of convergence that belongs to ethical discourse, but denies that it is the same as the convergence characteristic of science. Convergence in the ethical case is only possible because of cultural or psychological factors, while scientific convergence is object-guided. In short, ethical discourse only works through collusion, either cultural or psychological (which is an awkward use of the term 'collusion,' but the idea is clear enough: it is non-object guided agreement in judgment). In the first case, sharing a culture or way of life, we learn to see things a particular way, learning that certain ethical judgments are expected. In the psychological case we are understood to be 'conspiring' at more basic level, by way of our shared biology, neurophysiology etc. Scientific convergence, by contrast, is supposedly very different: collusion is understood to be unnecessary because we are said to be dealing with the way things are *anyway*. Insofar as we take the things themselves as our guide, knowledge is guaranteed to converge and never conflict, whatever the (merely) technical difficulties involved in translating between conceptual vocabularies may be. If the convergence of our truth claims is of the scientific variety, then our knowledge will converge not only with that of other humans, but with that of any rational beings, no matter how different their form of life may be. The way things (anyway) are is not relative to any culture, any age, any species or life-form. Alien and human science, insofar as it is genuine, must be identical.

The many issues raised concerning the relation between absoluteness and (mere) truth, between absolute knowledge and ordinary knowledge, between the 'scientific image' and the 'manifest image,' will occupy a central place in the chapters that follow and in the discussion of Heidegger. I have chosen to discuss the absolute conception first because it collects some important but conflicting intuitions about reality and truth and holds them together rather cheerfully under one roof. Specifically, there are two important intuitions that the defenders of the absolute conception maintain. First, there is some way that reality is *anyway*. And, second, much of what we know (or 'know') has no place in that reality. Despite the fact that most of our supposed knowledge does not correspond to this ultimate reality, it still supposedly counts as knowledge, but in an attenuated sense. At first blush this may not seem too problematic. If we just take a relaxed attitude toward these ranked layers of knowledge, there is no problem. After all, we readily acknowledge, for example, that our aesthetic judgments are different from judgments in mathematics or biology. Nevertheless, it is one thing to say these judgments are different, it is another to say that when we make aesthetic judgments that we are in error insofar as there is nothing to know. It is something further to say that when we make biological judgments what we arrive at is not knowledge, since knowledge is only of what there is *anyway*, and what there is anyway isn't appropriately characterized by biological categories. It is something else to say that what we thought was colored only appears to be so. And it is still something else to say that what we take to be thoughts *about* the world only seem to be so, that our self-determination is only a feeling of control, or that our very personhood is epiphenomenal. Of course, none of the defenders of an absolute conception *want* to make such crude reductive claims. But my question is how they can *avoid* making such claims once they distinguish absolute truth from (mere) truth ('correctness')?

Concluding this overview of the absolute conception, I want to emphasize several issues that will be important in the rest of the dissertation. First and foremost is the hazy relation between truth and absoluteness. If all truth is absolute in its structure (i.e., if it is stable and not losable), how is absolute truth somehow *more* absolute? Second, if something like an absolute conception is possible, where do we fit our everyday understanding or 'manifest image of man-in-the-world'? Do we say that our ordinary understanding supervenes on the way the world is anyway, or do we say that the ordinary features are actually illusory, mere 'manners of speaking'? Another way to put this question is to ask about the *completeness* of the absolute conception. Would an absolute conception account for all the facts, or are there facts that are not absolute?[33] Third, what is the content of an absolute conception? Is it enough to claim that it is *possible*, i.e., that it is a possibility for finite beings, or is it important that we be able to specify what kinds of things can be part of it? Fourth, is an absolute conception structured by a privileged set of concepts?[34] As I see it, these questions are all more or less directly related to the first issue and depend upon a response to the question of how absoluteness can be explained as something beyond truth: what is supposed to be left of (mere) truth once we attempt to deal in absolutes?

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[33] Moore addresses this question directly. The absolute conception doesn't cover all the facts. It leaves out the subjective ones—it doesn't tell us what its like for a cockroach to taste scrambled eggs, for example.

[34] Again, Moore says no. He argues that there could be a plurality of empirically equivalent absolute conceptions.

§3 – Metaphysical Realism

Metaphysical realism takes the same impulse that motivates absolute conception and develops it, making it more concrete. As I noted above, the absolute conception is important because of its articulation and defense of certain fundamental 'realist' intuitions in metaphysics and epistemology. It is an attempt to persuade us, first, that knowledge is only knowledge if it represents the way things are *anyway,* and, second, that much of what we 'know' is not representative of a thoroughly de-humanized world, and so does not deserve to be called knowledge in the fullest sense. The versions of an absolute conception reviewed above explain this intuition in terms of the contrast between absolute truth and ordinary truth ('mere' correctness). The idea of an absolute conception helps us to understand the intuition that motivates this distinction, even if its philosophical defense is extremely thin. At least by comparison with the absolute conception, metaphysical realism is more specific in its development of some of the same intuitions concerning the ontological independence of reality.

Following Hilary Putnam's often cited definition, metaphysical realism is the view that there is 1) a fixed totality of objects, 2) a fixed totality of properties, 3) "a sharp line between properties we 'discover' and properties we 'project' onto the world," and 4) "a fixed relation of 'correspondence' in terms of which truth is supposed to be defined."[35] In short, metaphysical realism rests on the claim that "[t]here is one true complete description of the way the world is."[36]

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[35] Hilary Putnam, *The Threefold Cord* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), p. 183.

[36] Hilary Putnam, *Reason, Truth and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 49.

What is the case for metaphysical realism? The metaphysical realist wants to get as much as possible from the following intuition: if there is such a thing as science, then there ought to be a single, unique science. After all, if there is *one reality* there should also be *one* body of *truth*.[37] That body of truth, whatever its content, is what science is, if there is anything to science at all—one reality, one body of truth, and therefore one science. Since that body of scientific truth represents reality, describing truth as a kind of *correspondence* with reality is supposed to be uncontestable. Furthermore, since the truths of science cannot conflict, the dream of a final science emerges in which the relations between physics, chemistry, biology, psychology, and sociology (for example) are worked out. Such a unified science will tell us what objects *really are*, explaining phenomena at many different functional levels and explaining how those levels interact.

Following this line of thought, Putnam attributes the attractiveness of metaphysical realism to its 'metaphysical' compatibility with science. As he puts it, metaphysical realism expresses the idea that "the way to solve philosophical problems is to construct a better scientific picture of the world."[38]

> Science should be understood 'without philosophical reinterpretation.' In such an outlook Independence, Uniqueness, Bivalence and Correspondence are regulative ideas that the final scientific image is expected to life up to, as well as metaphysical assumptions that guarantee that such a final scientific resolution of all philosophical problems *must* be possible.[39]

Metaphysical realism is not just compatible with science, but stands as its metaphysical guarantor by transforming its regulative ideals into synthetic a priori principles. With this

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[37] Cf. Searle's account of realism in *The Construction of Social Reality,* chs. 6 and 7.

[38] Hilary Putnam, *Representation and Reality* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1988), p. 107.

[39] Ibid.

philosophical backup, there is no question that science must be unified and reductive. For the metaphysical realist, to think of science any other way is to court absurdity. After all, how could anyone think of one true account of the world being incommensurable with another without implausibly positing multiple worlds? By transforming regulative ideas into metaphysical principles, metaphysical realism takes science to provide a path to a unique and complete account of reality. The actual production of such an account may be acknowledged to be a significant technical challenge, but what is sought is clear enough.

According to its defenders, only metaphysical realism's idea of how science works allows the successes of science to be anything less than miraculous. From the metaphysical realist's point of view, the idealist or instrumentalist seems to be claiming that there *really* are no such things as electrons, genes, and curved space-time, despite the fact that scientists use these ideas to predict directly observable phenomena.[40] By contrast, the metaphysical realist suggests that he has the only *natural* explanation of the ability of scientists to predict observable phenomena, namely, *because the theories employed by scientists are approximately true*, where truth amounts to correspondence or match between the entities posited by a particular theory and the furniture of the universe. If we fail to think of science this way, the metaphysical realist asks, how are we to *explain* the predictive success of our theories? In their opinion, we can't just note their successes and leave it at that.

Metaphysical realism is supposed to be explanatory insofar as it provides an 'over-arching scientific hypothesis' for the power and success of science.[41] This 'scientific hypothesis' is spelled out by Richard Boyd as the idea that 1) the terms of mature science typically refer and

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[40] Putnam, *Meaning and the Moral Sciences*, p. 18.

[41] Ibid., p. 19.

2) the laws of a theory belonging to a mature science are typically approximately true.[42]

Although it is undeniable that the metaphysical realist's hypothesis has at least some intuitive appeal, it is not clear why it should cut any ice against an instrumentalist, for example. The claim that metaphysical realism *explains* the power of science must appear dogmatic to anyone that doesn't already agree that this must be the case. If the metaphysical realist believes that failing to offer this explanation makes science mysterious, the instrumentalist will surely claim that the metaphysical realist makes science metaphysical only to satisfy their intuition that they must have a God's Eye explanation of scientific successes and failures. No philosophical 'explanation' of science denies the power of science to predict phenomena and develop useful technologies, but there is a notoriously large step between the fact that predictions are often successful and technologies often work and the claim that our theories *mirror* nature's furniture. After all, couldn't we just as easily suggest, perhaps citing Ockham's razor, that we ought to avoid such metaphysical posits whenever possible? On that assumption, wouldn't the instrumentalist's explanation account for successful predictions just as well but at a lower metaphysical cost? The explanationist defense of metaphysical realism is clearly insufficient. That defense is in poor shape even before getting to the troublesome topic of underdetermination, which seems to confound the metaphysical realist's ambitions at every turn.

To make the metaphysical realist's position clearer by contrast, it is worth taking a moment to consider the position of their arch enemy, Thomas Kuhn. His skepticism about the progress and convergence of science is rooted in ideas about the dependence of reference on context. In defense of their view, realists suggest that Kuhn goes off track by believing that the meanings in which theories are articulated determine the entities to which they can refer. If

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[42] Ibid., p. 20.

meaning determines reference, if reference must always be indirect, the suggestion that there is a one-to-one correspondence of our theories to reality becomes very difficult to defend. If we can only refer to entities *through* their meanings, how could metaphysical realists justify their claim that the ontology they articulate maps onto the *things* themselves? In a nutshell, indirect reference restricts our scientific claims to a particular linguistic context. Insofar as we must refer to entities this way, our theories do not even purport to map onto the world, but merely articulate it relative to a particular meaning-horizon. If we cannot refer to entities not included in our discourse, the breakdown of our discourse will also signal the disappearance of the things the theory was about. The successor discourse cannot claim a superior understanding of the same things because those 'things' will be unintelligible within the new discourse, given its new range of possible meanings and ontological commitments.

By contrast, from the metaphysical realist's perspective it is more plausible to say, for example, that even though the definition of electron in 1905 is not the same as the definition of electron in 1940, it does not mean that researchers were not talking about *electrons* in both instances. 'Electron' is still playing many of the same roles in both cases. Furthermore, as a check on this intuition, it seems clear that a physicist interested in electrons in 1905 would want to know what had been discovered and what shown to be incorrect about electrons by 1940.[43] Interpretive charity does not need to extend very far for us to be comfortable saying that the person talking about electrons in 1905 and 1940 is still talking about *the same things*, and that it is the understanding of *those same things* that has changed from one period to the next, even though the definitions of electron in 1905 and 1940 are very different. Since we can articulate the advantages of the new way of understanding electrons over the old, we call this change of

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[43] Cf. Putnam, *Meaning and The Moral Sciences,* pp. 22-5.

understanding *progress,* and the comprehension of this progress *learning*. The Kuhnian alternative is to explain the change of understanding as a *change of topic* and the comprehension of this process as a (paradoxical) recognition of the truth of historicism (the truth of relativism). Isn't it more sensible to say that our new understanding concerns the same things precisely because what we are seeking to explain are the things themselves, irrespective of any context we may use to access it?[44]

In a similar vein, the metaphysical realist attempts to block a skeptical meta-induction of the following form: a large portion of what was taken to be scientific truth 100 years ago is not the same as what we took to be true 50 years ago, which is also different from what we take to be true today. From these facts, the skeptic would like to infer that most of our current terms do not refer. If the theories of previous scientists did not actually refer during their time, then our terms and theories, we should assume, do not refer today. Since the science of past generations and decades has turned out to be false, what is our warrant for believing current science to be exceptional? The skeptic suggests that there is no sense in waiting fifty years to acknowledge that our scientific terms fail to refer, and that we ought to acknowledge this (constant) failure with a commitment to historicism. If we heed the historicists' counsel, we are supposed to conclude against the realist that most of the claims of our sciences are untrue, however useful they may be in our daily lives. The historicists' strategy is to show that the history of science *itself*—the long history of errors—refutes realism.[45]

The metaphysical realist's best strategy for blocking the skeptic's pessimistic meta-induction is to recast this history of errors as a history of near misses, that is, as a history of

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[44] See chapter 5.

[45] Putnam, *Meaning and the Moral Sciences*, p. 37.

gradual *convergence* on the way things actually are. We may not be there yet, but that does not mean that we should give up the basic idea that structures our pursuit of truth. For the metaphysical realist, that pursuit is motivated by the idea that it is possible to provide an account of the way things are anyway, and that, eventually, if we are successful, we will arrive at an account of the world that is uniquely adequate to the things themselves. Anything less makes skepticism about scientific pursuits too easy. After all, if there isn't one truth to be pursued, how are we to avoid the rather deflating Rortian notion that truth is merely what our contemporaries will let us get away with?

The pessimistic meta-induction is therefore countered by the claim that although the history of science is in some sense a history of errors, it is also a history of *convergence* on the truth. Putnam and Boyd defend this move by first admitting that one version of a realist account of convergence is clearly untenable. Given the fact that any theory is dramatically underdetermined by the data, it cannot be claimed that earlier theories are approximately true because successor theories are conservative, often having many features in common with the previous 'paradigm.' Science does not converge over long periods of time by preserving the laws and posits of previous theories in successor theories. Rather, according to Putnam at least, the metaphysical realist should argue that it is the observation sentences of earlier theories that function as the limiting cases for the successor theories. By retaining old observation sentences and always accounting for new ones, science progresses by accounting for an ever greater number of phenomena. The sciences converge by retaining and accounting for its ever expanding store of observation sentences.[46] So, it is by staying close to the phenomena, by providing an ever

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[46] Ibid., p. 37 and p. 20

more adequate, more objective account of the way things are that we can hope to eventually arrive at an account of the way things are anyway. The history of science *must* be a history of errors, for until science has reached its goal it will be constantly readjusting (i.e., correcting its mistakes) to include new information.

Finally, we should not miss the fact that metaphysical realism's no-nonsense rhetoric is probably one of its greatest attractions.[47] As we observe with its resistance to Kunianism and historicist skepticism, Metaphysical realism presents itself as a hard-nosed defense of common sense against all trendy pluralisms, relativisms, and obscure postmodern theories. What could be simpler: there is one reality, truth is a representation of that single reality, and reality is for the most part independent of what we think about it. Furthermore, in instances where reality is not independent of what we think of it, separating what we contribute from what is there anyway does not present any particular *philosophical* challenge, despite the fact that in practice we may have trouble disentangling facts from values, for example.

Consider John Searle's masterful use of this rhetoric. As he is tells the story, there must be some unique way the world is and the aim of philosophy is to help us see this clearly.

> From a God's-eye view, from outside the world, all the features of the world would be intrinsic, including intrinsic relational features such as the feature that people in our culture regard such and such objects as screwdrivers. God could not see screwdrivers, cars, bathtubs, etc., because intrinsically speaking there are no such things. Rather, God would see *us treating* certain objects as screwdrivers, cars, bathtubs, etc. But from our standpoint, the standpoint of beings who are not gods but are inside the world that includes us as active agents, we need to distinguish those true statements we make that attribute features to the world that exist quite independently of any attitude or stance we take, and those statements that attribute features that exist only relative to our interests, attitudes, stances, purposes, etc.[48]

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[47] This point is emphasized by Hilary Putnam in his first Carus Lecture published as *The Many Faces of Realism* (LaSalle: Open Court, 1987).

[48] Ibid., p. 12.

If God could know the One True Ontology, then we at least ought to believe the idea of an absolute ontology to be intelligible, though not necessarily attainable due to our (lamentable) finitude.

Since metaphysical realists are so comfortable using the rhetoric of hard-nosed common sense, it is important, at least as a corrective, to notice how metaphysical realism actually grinds against ordinary intuitions with its suggestions that 'middle-sized dry goods' or people don't have a place in our first-class ontology. As (later) Putnam emphasizes, at some point in the defense of metaphysical realism as an articulation of commonsense realism, a tension develops between common sense and the "hard-nosed" philosophical theory.[49] Whatever else it may be, common sense is not 'reductive' and absolutely does not endorse an error-theoretic account of ourselves and the objects of our concern. As we will see in the next section and in the next chapter, metaphysical realism is better understood as a boldly revisionary position, quite distant from anything that might be called a scientifically minded articulation of common sense.[50] That disconnect, of course, doesn't stop its defenders from trying to sell it as such. One way that metaphysical realism might redeem itself for common sense would be to somehow temper its reductive ontological claims. In the next section, we will briefly consider whether non-reductive or pluralist metaphysical realism is possible.

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[49] Ibid., chapter 1.

[50] Ibid., Putnam claims that the defense of metaphysical realism is generally based on a slight of hand: you go in for the serious, hard-nosed, commonsense, friendly to science view, and you come out with a commitment to a scientistic, physicalist ontology only a philosopher could endorse.

§4 – Can Metaphysical Realism be Nonreductive?

Does metaphysical realism entail scientism, i.e., that genuine truth is restricted to 'scientific' truth? While he was still officially defending metaphysical realism, Putnam did not think so. He believed that metaphysical realism left space for a kind of pluralism. Within this framework, he attempts to establish the possibility of pluralism—the idea that there can be incommensurable bodies of truth—using arguments centering around underdetermination and empirical equivalence that suggest there are many 'empirically adequate' descriptions of the *same* phenomena.[51] Sticking with a familiar example, think of our use of the word 'rabbit' and the Martian's use of 'gavagai' when appearing to point at the thing we call a rabbit. What does the Martian mean? Does it mean 'rabbithood,' 'rabbit time-slices,' 'undetached rabbit parts,' or something else? We can never find out exactly what the Martian intends by 'gavagai,' but the ontological difference, if there is one, is contained within certain 'empirical' boundaries. The 'natural' sense of 'rabbit' depends on our interests and context, but that does not change the fact that each of those characterizations are answerable to *the* world and are true only if they correspond to the way things are. When it comes time to hunt that real thing over there—whether our ontology tells us it is a rabbit or undetached rabbit parts—we're all shooting at the same thing.[52]

It seems, however, the attempt to defend a non-scientistic metaphysical realism pulled Putnam further from his initial articulation of metaphysical realism than he intended. As a pluralist, he readily acknowledges the legitimacy of types of knowledge that can never be made

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[51] Moore makes a similar point about the absolute conception, granting that it is possible that there could be many empirically equivalent absolute conceptions.

[52] This is Putnam's example from *Meaning and the Moral Sciences,* Lecture III.

exact in the way that the claims of physics can. For example, he does not move to deny that

there can be social scientific knowledge or knowledge of human beings based on the categories

of folk psychology. Despite the differences between what it means to have knowledge in

physics, the social sciences, or folk psychology, all these varieties of knowledge are impossible

without what he refers to as *Verstehen* ('understanding'). His suggestion is that without

Verstehen, which he glosses as "sympathetic understanding" or "right opinion," the acquisition

of knowledge would be impossible. However humble our inquiry may be, we need to know

where to begin, what to take for granted, and who or what to trust. In short, all knowledge is

predicated on a certain kind of general intelligence, a kind of *wisdom. Verstehen* cannot be

formalized as part of our scientific knowledge, but is presupposed whenever we have knowledge.

If we grant that there are such presuppositional or a priori foundations of *all* knowledge, from

physics to folk psychology, this should rule out the science fiction fantasy of all genuine

understanding being (at least potentially) absolutely explicit and independently testable. If that

were an appropriate standard for knowledge, knowledge would be impossible. So, Putnam

doesn't try to 'lift up' non-scientific knowledge, claiming that it is somehow essential or

reflective of the way things are, but instead highlights an epistemological presupposition

common to all knowledge, whether it is knowledge of the microphysical workings of atoms or

knowledge about how to comfort a grieving friend. Since no knowledge of any type is absolutely

objective, we are supposed to lose our grip on the idea that some kinds of knowledge can be

written off because of its mind-dependency or subjectivity.

  While Putnam (of this metaphysical realist vintage) did not doubt that truths must

correspond to the world as it is *anyway*, he correctly insists that this does not mean that all truth

is reducible to the laws of physics plus initial conditions. Although metaphysical realists often

pretend to be too hard-nosed to care, it would be nothing less than insane to fail to acknowledge that there is much more to *know* than bare physical facts and laws. The basic issue—and this is something that I believe motivates many who are averse to reductive theories—is not that it is somehow logically impossible to reduce the lifeworld to matter in motion, but that it not a possibility *for us*. An imagined scientistic reduction is not possible for us now and looks like it will remain impossible for a thousand years. To say that it is possible 'with a finite extension of our cognitive powers'[53] gives us nothing more than a feeling that we know what we are talking about. If we don't have a sense of how we could actually produce such a reduction, the problem is not 'just technical.' Or, perhaps it would be more accurate to say that it is a technical problem in the way figuring out how I can be in two places at once is a technical problem: it has a technical side, perhaps, but is obviously fraught with conceptual difficulties. If *per impossible* such reductive knowledge were available to us, what then? What would it be like for us to acquire detailed knowledge of how we ourselves are illusory? Again, there's nothing *logically* impossible about reductive knowledge with such explanatory power, since there's no general problem explaining a phenomenon in terms that contradict experience. For example, we might acknowledge an experience and still be quite willing admit that what we experienced doesn't really exist, as we do when we learn that the sun doesn't really rise, or as we might if we could be convinced that we thought we saw was just an optical illusion.

The situation changes, however, when it comes to providing that type of eliminative explanation about our very personhood. How could I deny that I myself am a person (a freely acting agent, for example, whose actions are regularly determined by my thoughts and desires)? In general, conceivability may not be a guide to possibility, but for at least two reasons this

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[53] Cf., Moore.

formula changes when we are considering self-understanding. First, for humans *as persons*—as conscious agents, acting in light of norms, etc.—there is no prospect of eliminating the personal perspective from our worldly explanations. Although this claim simply refers to part of the definition of personhood, it is worth noting. A successful 'eliminative' explanation of our own experience of personhood would require radically redefining what it means to be a person. That is, we would have to allow that it still makes sense to call ourselves people even if it turns out that we aren't agents, that consciousness is an illusion, that we never act in light of norms, etc. Since doing this would be a kind of performative contradiction, or at least an absurdity—consciously explaining our consciousness as an illusion—I'm not sure we could do this for ourselves. In such a case, it may make more sense to say that the proof that we are epiphenomenal eliminates personhood. The difference between what we typically mean by 'person' and what a person as epiphenomenon would be are so different that calling them both by the same term seems wrong. It seems more natural to say that we thought human beings were people, but it turns out that they are not, and that, as far as we 'know,' people are mythical creatures (like Homer's gods). So, again, perhaps it is possible that we are epiphenomena, but it is not possible that we are epiphenomenal *people*. As far as I can tell, those terms are mutually exclusive.

Secondly, as noted above in considering Putnam's suggestion that all knowledge requires "*verstehen,*" it is not clear that any explanation at all is possible without the presuppositions available to a human intelligence, something we couldn't simultaneously eliminate and rely upon. That is, any proof of our non-existence would rely upon our understanding for its articulation, but the proof is nothing beyond its articulation. If we are to be re-described as epiphenomena (or eliminated in any way as the kind of persons that we thought we were), that

eliminative description should be able to eliminate all traces of our subjectivity, which seems impossible. How could we rely on an ineliminable aspect of our personhood to prove the non-existence of personhood?

These 'practical' facts suggest that no reductive realism (i.e., global reductionism as philosophical platform rather than the particular reductions of various scientific projects) can be seriously entertained, insofar as its success would annihilate personhood.[54] As I mentioned at the outset, a successful account of *what* there is should not force us to provide an error-theoretic account of *who* we are. Until biophysicists actually produce such an error-theoretic account, it seems that philosophers are tasked with vindicating the multiple legitimate epistemic pathways that we all rely upon for our self-knowledge, theoretical knowledge, and practical knowledge.

From a different perspective, we can consider whether realism is compatible with our various ways of understanding the world by asking whether metaphysical realists can also be conceptual relativists. Any situation can be described in a variety of ways, or, more impressively: the world underdetermines ontological commitment. To make just this point, Putnam explains the idea of a "mereological sum." The idea of mereology is that "for every two particulars there is an object which is their sum."[55] So, while I would probably count my lamp, coffee cup, and computer as three objects, the mereologist would count them as seven. Who is right? As Putnam sees it, both are. Both claims may be true and completely objective, given the possibility of explaining frameworks for each. That is, mereological counting and our more familiar type of counting are both discourses that supply a discipline, they are both completely teachable, and

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[54] Putnam, *Meaning and the Moral Sciences*, p. 63ff; on pluralism, p. 50, on underdetermination, p. 40ff.

[55] Putnam, *The Many Faces of Realism*, p. 18.

there is no problem evaluating whether one is counting correctly using one standard or the other. Even so, when accounting for what is going on around my computer, the mereologist and conventional counter will come up with different answers: the former will correctly claim that there are seven objects, while I might correctly point out that there are only three. Since we are both counting correctly, neither of us can be said to be wrong; but since 7 ≠ 3, our accounts of what is going on are not reducible to one another; and since both are true, neither can claim priority.

Conceptual relativity is a 'relativism' of concept choice, but, of course, does not entail that the evaluations of those descriptions must be less than objective. Though there is a choice of which concepts will be used in a particular case, once that choice is made, claims can simply be evaluated as true or false based on the way they frame some particular content. Conceptual relativity does not deny that our concepts can be adequate to the subject matter, but only that there is no privileged conceptual scheme for understanding a given phenomenon. The 'conceptual framework' supplies the rules for evaluating claims about the world, but the object itself does not dictate which conceptual frame ought to be used. Because of this, conceptual relativity is incompatible with any absolute discourse.

Well, perhaps it is. Metaphysical realists are aware of the intuitive demand for pluralism, whether described as 'pluralism' or 'conceptual relativity.' It is just not possible to restrict truth to claims concerning the putative furniture of the universe, since the idea that 'truth is correspondence to the furniture of the universe' does away (as far as ontological status is concerned) with the furniture of our houses, not to mention the houses themselves, and anybody that happens to be in them. Metaphysical realists have responded to the demand for pluralism or relativity by insisting that truth and ontological commitment are distinct, that is, that there is

truth as correctness, which entails ontological commitment, and truth as direct

correspondence, which supposedly tracks the world's essential ontological structure. A good

example of this strategy has been developed by Terry Horgan, Mark Timmons, and Matijaz

Portrc. Portrc and Horgan outline their case for pluralist metaphysical realism this way:

> What is real? Less than you might think. We advocate *austere metaphysical realism*—a form of metaphysical realism claiming that a correct ontological theory will repudiate numerous putative entities and properties that are posited in everyday thought and discourse, and also will even repudiate numerous putative objects and properties that are posited by well-confirmed scientific theories.[56]
>
> What is true? More than you might think, given our austere metaphysical realism. We maintain that truth is *semantically correct affirmability*, *under contextually operative semantic standards*. We also maintain that most of the time… semantic correctness (i.e., truth) is a matter of *indirect* correspondence rather than *direct* correspondence between thought and language on the one hand, and the world on the other. When correspondence is indirect rather than direct, a given statement (or thought) can be true even if the correct ontology does not include items answering to all the *referential commitments* of the statement. This means that even if a putative object is repudiated by a correct ontological theory, ordinary statements that are putatively about that object may still be true. For instance, the statement "The University of St Andrews is in Scotland" can be semantically correct (i.e., true) even if the right ontology does not include any entity answering to the referring term "The University of St Andrews," or any entity answering to the referring term "Scotland."[57]

To accommodate the demand for pluralism, these metaphysical realists defend the idea of a one-

to-one relation of truth to the furniture of the universe, what they call 'direct correspondence,'

but deny that this alignment must hold for all types of truth.[58]

As long as our claims about Scotland, St Andrews, and Terry Horgan that are not

supposed to directly correspond to the way things are, we are free to talk about them and our

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[56] Horgan and Portrc, p. 137.

[57] Ibid., pp. 137-8.

[58] Cf., Horgan and Timmons.

claims concerning these things may be true. Using the semantic standards appropriate to discourses about institutions, for example, we can evaluate whether a claim about St Andrews is true or false. The truth conditions for these indirect correspondence claims are determined by how things would be in possible world in which such a claim could be true.[59] What results is supposedly a way of acknowledging semantic correctness without frustrating the metaphysical realists' principal dogma. In short, semantic correctness is just "truth without ontological commitment"[60]

These merely correct claims are therefore "no big deal" ontologically, since judged in terms of direct correspondence, in light of the one true ontology, they are just false. These metaphysical realists, however, believe that they now have a principled way of explaining their toleration of such falsehoods. Indeed, since they are no big deal, since they are ontologically inert, they can even accept them as truths. This strategy, they think, justifies their tolerant attitude. So, for example, although they do not want to "relativize content," they are happy to explain the conflicts of the standard counter and the mereologist as no big deal, so long as we don't take them to be making "limit case" or direct correspondence assertions, that is, so long as their truth claims are *indirect*, so long as purported the correspondence of their claims takes a detour though the qualifying semantic parameters that put these claims in their place vis-à-vis the privileged discourse.

However appealing this compromise may seem, if there is a possibility of "limit case" truth—i.e., a body of truth that catalogues the furniture of the universe—we can accept nothing less *as truth*. Once the limit case is identified, where THE WORLD is carved at its JOINTS, in

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[59] Horgan and Portrc, p. 146.

[60] Ibid., p. 140.

terms of its OBJECTS and their PROPERTIES and the RELATIONS among them, it becomes

the *only* relevant standard for truth.[61] Anything irreducible to the privileged discourse can only be

called metaphor, 'a manner of speaking,' or, most straightforwardly, false. Allowing for an

indirect relation to the privileged discourse is not allowing for conceptual pluralism, but only

shows a willingness to call coherent fictions true.

Direct correspondence discourse allows absolutely no conceptual relativity, since that

would entail ontological relativity, which is a non-starter for the metaphysical realist, the

quintessential ontological monist. Moreover, in distinguishing direct and indirect correspondence

discourses, they have no way to explain how we would know if we are having a genuine conflict,

or if our conflict happens to be no big deal in light of the fact that we are not considering a limit

case. In order to solve that problem, the limit case discourse would have to be identified. But

how could we do that? Their solution to this problem is rather disappointing: "On the view we

advocate, contexts in which direct correspondence semantic standards are being employed are

extremely rare and rarefied: they are contexts of serious ontological inquiry."[62] But this is the

kicker, for what counts as serious ontological inquiry? *Almost nothing*. It is easy to determine

when we are involved in limit case discourse since *we never are*. After all, what could the limit

case be, what could possibly be declared The Furniture of The Universe? For these metaphysical

realists the furnishings are indeed spare: "there is really only one concrete particular, viz., the

entire cosmos."[63] If we refuse to buy into this Parmenidean ontology, it seems that deciding what

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[61] Here I'm using Putnam's familiar convention of putting in all caps words that are supposed to carry extra ontological weight as "things in themselves."

[62] Horgan and Portrc, p. 149.

[63] Ibid. p. 137.

has genuine ontological standing and what doesn't would be significantly more challenging. What these philosophers have shown us is that one way of allowing for a plurality of irreducible truths about the world is by declaring that *all* non-Parmenidean truths about the world are actually false (or, correct but ontologically empty).

The problem boils down to this: Parmenindianism notwithstanding, it is impossible to make sense of the metaphysical realists' distinction between truth as correctness and absolute truth. Truth is absolute—that is just what it means 'to say of what there is that it is and of what is not that it is not.' Conceptual relativity only states that there are different ways that we can frame statements of what there is and what there is not, but when such a statement is true, it is just true. There is no sense of true that means "true, but really false." There may be suppressed relativizations in our claims to truth, as we might need in explaining claims about humor, ethics, or people, but when we cash out what we mean in making such claims, and when we evaluate those claims as best we can, ontological commitments result. Ontology is not about mirroring the furniture of the universe, but is about doing justice to the way things are. Such an account, if it is to be responsive to our practical and theoretical needs, must allow for a broad array of real things. Metaphysical realists (at least the Austere ones under discussion) achieve their vision of philosophical perfection by opting out of all reasonable ontological commitments. Unfortunately, as they themselves readily acknowledge, there is more to the world than just THE ONE. They draw a line between the really, really real (THE ONE) and really real but not really, really real (including all the things we are familiar with, which they happy to describe as *realia*, just not as "limit case" *realia*). They cannot have it both ways: they cannot defend the low-risk, austere metaphysics of THE ONE *and* the "full-fledged truth" of claims about a diversity of things in the

world. Acknowledging *and* denying the messy diversity of kinds of things in the world won't

do, and a straightforward denial of the diversity is too implausible even for their austere tastes.[64]

§5 – Physicalism

Discussing the case for an absolute conception or metaphysical realism naturally leads to

a discussion of physicalism primarily because these views are often explained in terms of an

imagined final physical science. 'Whatever our best physical science says is true' tends to be the

content of choice for these ontologically reductive programs. Nevertheless, it goes without

saying that physicalism isn't for physicists: physicalism is part of philosophy, not physics, even

if some physicists are physicalists. When physical science is understood to carry the

metaphysical baggage of being a *privileged* or *absolute* account of the way the world is,

physical*ism* results.

In general, physicalism fits rather comfortably into the framework set out by

metaphysical realism, at least in terms of Putnam's classic articulation of its commitments. It

makes claims about the one true way that the world is, that it has a fixed number of properties

and that, for the most part, we can know what these are. Importantly, like metaphysical realists,

physicalists take their view to be a no-nonsense position stoically bearing the burden of its hard

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[64] "It is important to recognize that austere indirect-correspondence realism delivers full-fledged, bona fide, *truth* despite the austerity of its ontology. Truth under indirect-correspondence semantic standards is not some sort of second-class semantic status, something lesser than full-fledged or genuine truth. To think otherwise is to be too much in the grip of truth that is here being repudiated" (Horgan and Portrc, p.145). Repudiated for the indirect discourse, perhaps, but these metaphysical realists give up their contextualism when it comes to direct correspondence discourse; they are the ones under the grip of an illusion about truth, namely, that it is the mirroring of a world of self identifying objects, or, in their case, THE OBJECT. Moreover, asserting that I don't really exist sounds like a downgrade to an ontological second-class, but perhaps I'm just being sensitive.

truths, and is intended to join comfortably with an equally tough-minded physical science.

Physicalism is a type of scientific realism committed to more than just the idea that science (as

the account of all truth) can provide a description of the ultimate nature of reality. Rather, it is

committed to the notion that reality—absolutely all there is to reality—can be accounted for in

strictly physical terms. Frank Jackson glosses this basic conviction of physicalists as the idea that

"the world is entirely physical in nature, that it is nothing but, or nothing over and above, the

physical world, and that a full inventory of the instantiated physical properties and relations

would be a full inventory *simpliciter*."[65]

An immediate objection to physicalism, unambiguous as it may wish to be, is that 'the

physical' cannot be defined with sufficient precision to make the view meaningful. After all, if

we cannot say what should count as 'physical,' physical*ism* could hardly be an interesting option.

Physicalism cannot just be the doctrine that anything it takes to explain everything is thereby

'physical.' Something has to be ruled out. To circumscribe their account of the physical,

physicalists first point to the stuff around them, from tables and chairs to the air and the

mountains, to ostensively indicate the physical. Next, they draw on physical science to explain

which properties and relations are required for that explanatory work. The faith of the physicalist

is that all that there is can be explained—that a full inventory can be taken—while only

considering physical properties. Physicalists may debate among themselves which unobservables

they are willing to count as physical—Is it all that which is required to explain macroscopic

phenomena? Does this include mathematics? Which parts?—but the basic idea is that everything

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[65] Jackson, p. 9.

must be explained in terms of physical "particulars, properties and relations."[66]

Unsurprisingly, exactly which particulars, properties, and relations count is never specified; but the basic strategy is clear enough: physicalism ties itself to physics in its attempt to account for 'medium sized dry goods' in terms of their fundamental structures. The physicalist's task, since she is not an empirical scientist but a philosopher, is to purify the claims of science, sweeping out any metaphysical contraband, working as a kind of ontological gatekeeper to assure likeminded purists that nothing spooky makes it into the book of truth.

As a proudly 'realist' as physicalism is, it seems reasonable to hope that it would explain or at least not contradict basic realistic expectations. When it comes to meeting these expectations, however, physicalism has the same problem as metaphysical realism. Like metaphysical realism, the rhetoric of physicalism is of the tell-it-like-it-is-and-pull-no-punches variety. From this we come to expect a sensible yet sophisticated anti-dualist framework for explaining and organizing our ontological commitments. Unfortunately, there are some seemingly very real things that physicalism has trouble keeping in play. In the first place, consciousness and qualia, the 'what-it-is-like' of a subject, have a tough time finding a place. But beyond consciousness, which plenty of philosophers appear surprisingly willing to abandon, physicalism has trouble accommodating just about anything studied by the so-called 'special sciences.' These objections to physicalism may seem too basic to be serious, and the reader may imagine that there is are more complicated varieties of physicalism that have overcome these basic problems—there are not. The fundamental problems of this view, a view that would extract the metaphysics from physics by way of more metaphysics, stem from what appear to be the

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[66] Ibid., pp. 6-7.

ineliminable ambiguities what should count as physical, on the one hand, and, on the other, the

challenges presented by the theories of supervenience upon which physicalists rely.[67]

The supervenience related problems of physicalism can be succinctly explained in terms

of the downward drift of causality in a multi-layer system. For example, if qualia are said to

supervene on brain processes, but are not necessary to explain them, then qualia are transformed

into epiphenomena, for the brain processes would be autonomous, at least vis-à-vis qualia. And

however a physicalist confronted with this problem might try to gloss it, being epiphenomenal

means being ontologically insignificant, i.e., unreal. The idea of ontological priority is hard to

deploy half-way; where ontological priority is granted a priori, as it is in the case of physicalism,

the kinds of things granted priority become the only things granted genuine ontological standing.

But isn't this unfair to physicalism insofar as it just articulates our commonsense

confidence in science? While both physicalism and common sense could be said to stand on the

side of science, the physicalist is able to 'side with science' only by clinging to an extremely

contentious conception of it. Common sense 'sides with science' in the unremarkable sense that

it takes for granted that psychology, geology, and chemistry are all genuine sciences,

authoritative in their own domains. To see that the physicalist has to struggle to say even that

much exposes just how revisionary the physicalist's program actually is. As Jaegwon Kim,

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[67] The problem of what should count as physical extends to questions about the normative notions used in physical science itself. If the norms of science are not themselves physical, then the scientific practices that produce the physicalists' conclusions would questionable. After all, how can the physicalists rely essentially upon something non-phyiscal to determine the content of their view? This line against physicalists, claiming that they cannot isolate the physical in the way they might like to, is referred to by Putnam as the "companions in guilt" argument. See Axel Muller and Arthur Fine's "Reaism Beyond Miracles" (in *Contemporary Philosophy in Focus: Hilary Putnam,* ed. Y. Ben-Menahim, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) for a more complete discussion of Putnam's claims.

himself a committed physicalist, puts it, "physicalism, as an overarching metaphysical doctrine about all of reality, exacts a steep price."[68] To get a better sense of physicalism's revisionary character, I will follow Kim in the presentation of two arguments, one regarding mind-body supervenience and a second that is a generalization of the supervenience argument to overlapping scientific domains.

Minimally, supervenience of mind is nothing more than a declaration of covariance between mind and body.[69] There are many ways that this supervenience can be explained, from emergentism to epiphenomenalism, but all physicalisms maintain some type of supervenience thesis about the mind.[70] The supervenience thesis states a *minimal requirement* of physicalism.[71] After all, how could *physicalism* admit non-physical elements into its ontology, which is precisely what independent (non-supervening) mental properties would be. The denial of supervenience would allow that worlds which are exact physical duplicates could actually differ in essential aspects. Physicalism denies this, asserting that reality is "nothing over and above" the physical and that "a full inventory of the instantiated physical properties and relations would be a full inventory *simpliciter*."[72] To deny supervenience and maintain the reality of the mental is just to deny physicalism.

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[68] Kim, pp. 119-120.

[69] Ibid.

[70] Cartesian dualism, for example, openly rejects the covariation of mind and body and is therefore easily identifiable as not being a variety of physicalism.

[71] Kim, p. 15; See also, Jackson, p. 17.

[72] Jackson, p. 9.

Not only is supervenience an essential characteristic of physicalism, but it is supposed to capture physicalism's realism, or, so that we don't confuse it with the ontological strategy we will be discussing later, we should say that it is supposed to capture how *realistic* physicalism is. That is, by emphasizing supervenience in some form—usually as a kind of functionalism—the *autonomy* of the mental is supposed to be preserved. Since supervenience minimally requires only covariance of the mental and physical, not an identity of the mental and physical, the physicalists' hope is that they can hold onto something like 'mental causation' by spelling it out in a suitably refined supervenience thesis. 'Mental causation' (or some account of personal agency) is important for any realist trying, like all other philosophers, to 'save the phenomena.' Philosophers are rightly loath to leave behind the idea that we are frequently the cause our own actions. They want to save this phenomenon while providing a strong account of the mind-independence of the world and the special place the physical sciences have in explaining that independently existing world.

In his aptly named 'supervenience argument,' Jaegwon Kim uses the example of mental causation to highlight some of the problems that arise for physicalists by virtue of being tied to a supervenience thesis. His argument can be summarized as follows. Either supervenience holds or fails:

- If it <u>fails</u> there is no way to understand mental causation in a physicalistically acceptable way, and some kind of dualism would appear to be true. If that is the case then mental causation of the physical would be entirely mysterious (from a physicalist perspective)

because of the closure of the causal domain. Any variety of Cartensian interactionism would be a flagrant violation of this principle.[73]

- If supervenience <u>holds</u>, a mental property M would have a subvenient base P. In the case of mental causation, mental property M is supposed to cause another mental property M*. M* has the physical base P*. How could M cause M* if M is supposed to be a sufficient cause of M* while P must be a sufficient cause of P*? Kim suggests that we might think M causes M* by causing P*, but then what happens to P?[74] There is an overdetermination problem. Both the M to M* chain and the P to P* chain are named as sufficient causes of *one event.* Thus, "the M-to-M* and M-to-P* causal relations are only apparent, arising out of a genuine causal process from P to P*"[75]

Neither horn of the dilemma can be endorsed by the physicalist: if supervenience does not hold mental causation is not explained *and* if supervenience holds mental causation is not explained, "hence mental causation is unintelligible."[76] If the autonomy of the mental is unintelligible when starting with the physicalist's (supposedly necessary) commitment to some form of supervenience, then supervenience appears to be little more than a euphemism for *epiphenomenalism,* which now appears as an implicit commitment of any type of physicalism. When applied to questions about the will, insofar as it dramatically undermines our sense of what it is to be a person, epiphenomenalism is without doubt one of the most revisionary theses

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[73] Kim, p. 40. He explains the problems that would result if supervenience does not hold by spelling out some of Ned Block's statements to this effect.

[74] Ibid., p. 45.

[75] Ibid.

[76] Ibid., p. 46.

philosophy currently has on offer. Although physicalism is supposedly supported by important

'naturalistic' intuitions, it hardly seems that those intuitions are worth satisfying at the cost of

(for starters) explaining fundamental aspects of our own experience as illusory.

One challenge to this argument begins with the observation that there is nothing in it that

appeals specifically to the mind-body/mental causation issue. The argument sets up a dilemma

that appears applicable to all cases of supervenience, showing that supervenience is nothing more

than epiphenomenalism by another name. If that is the case, if the supervenience argument

applies that broadly, it would generalize to the supervenience of the special sciences on physics,

for instance. Since we cannot allow such a generalization, the critic can suggest that we take this

radical result as *reductio ad absurdum* of the supervenience argument. As Kim puts it:

> Wouldn't the [supervenience] argument show that all properties that supervene on basic
> physical properties are epiphenomenal, and their causal efficacy is unintelligible?
> However, there seems to be more than ample reason to think that geological properties,
> say, are supervenient on fundamental physical properties, and if mind-body
> supervenience could be shown to put mental causation in jeopardy, wouldn't the very
> same considerations do the same for geological properties? But no one seems to worry
> about geological causation, and there evidently seems no reason to start worrying. If so
> shouldn't we conclude that there must be something wrong with the argument […] ?[77]

Even if the problems of supervenience are granted, this *reductio* may not (more likely: will not)

be convincing to a committed physicalist, since they may very well consider an account of the

world in terms of its "basic" properties to be an *absolute* conception of the world. They may

think that if they could have that, then so much the worse for common sense and the special

sciences.

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[77] Ibid.

Although they are welcome to do an elaborate dance around it first, it seems that the consistent "materialist" must eliminate the mental.[78] If one begins with physicalist assumptions, the mental (consciousness, mental causation, and the rest) can only be retained by embracing a kind of dualism, but that, quite obviously, is no longer physicalism. Kim shows us that the problems the materialist has holding on to the mental does not have anything to do with peculiarities of the mental, but is a general problem of finding space for the autonomy of *anything* other than basic physical properties, if the relations between 'levels' of discourse (description, organization, etc.) are understood in terms of supervenience. It should not be particularly surprising that one of the greatest problems confronting materialists trying to find a place for the "mind in a physical world" would be a problem that has nothing to do with the mind as such. If the world is nothing more than a collection of matter—and if that is decided in advance to be the limit of any respectable ontology—then of course nothing distinctively mental can enter the picture. There can be no distinctive problems of the mental because there cannot be anything distinctively mental (that is not also completely physical).

Again, because the generalized supervenience argument appears to show far too much, namely, that no properties named by special sciences could be causally effective, it supposedly serves as a *reductio* of the supervenience argument.[79] Kim suggests that such a *reductio* misses its mark in this case, however, due to the fact that we are not *worried* about mental causation or the efficacy of the properties of the special sciences, but simply want an *account* that does not contradict basic physicalist commitments. Being told not to worry about it because it is

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[78] Cf., Searle, *The Rediscovery of Mind* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992).

[79] Kim, p. 80.

obviously not *actually* a problem is just to skirt the philosophical issue.[80] Philosophical

problems have their own urgency; the fact that nothing is going to tumble to the ground if the are

not addressed is no indication of their actuality. In the appropriate sense, it is *actually* a problem.

In the end, then, the physicalist reaches an impasse: the acceptance of the generalized

supervenience argument contradicts both science and common sense, while the only way to deny

the force of the argument appears philosophically evasive.

Outside of philosophy, of course, being evasive in this way is no problem whatsoever. In

fact, we might even ordinarily call this sidestepping of philosophical problems 'pragmatism' and

praise it as a virtue, but here, since we are looking for a philosophical explanation and not just a

way to get on with our lives, evasions of that sort are deeply unsatisfying. Kim does his best not

to be evasive in presenting his own solution, claiming that the supervenience argument only

applies between "orders" (i.e., at the same micro-macro level, where there could be a genuine

problem of overdetermination) and not between "levels" (i.e., different micro-macro levels). But

the justification for the firewalls he tries to establish between levels is insufficient. The fragile

distinction between levels and orders is far too weak to overcome his own concerns about the

generalized supervenience argument. He seems to grant this in his most recent book, which he

himself recognizes as an unsuccessful (or only partially successful) attempt to articulate a

consistent physicalism.[81] Following Kim, therefore, the dilemmas generated by the physicalist's

commitment to supervenience present us with sufficient grounds for deep skepticism about the

prospects for that view.

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[80] Kim, p. 77ff.

[81] Jaegwon Kim, *Physicalism, or Something Near Enough* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

§6 – Conclusion: Ontological Monism

This chapter considered three varieties of ontological monism, which is to say, three ways of thinking about and defending the idea that there is an ontologically privileged discourse. The core intuition in these forms of absolutism is simple: one reality, one deep truth about it, whether we are able to know it or not. Now, these varieties of realism draw their strength from rhetoric about their support of science and their cool-headed, hard-nosed willingness to tell it like it is—these are 'scientific' realisms promising to be realistic. But their simplest and perhaps most nagging problem starts right there. As we've seen, these absolutisms fail to meet those expectations and do so in dramatic fashion. After all, is a realistic account of science one that determines a priori that most of science is bogus? Does a realistic account of our personhood declare that we only *seem* to exist as self-determining agents? Such ideas are hard to stomach, but, setting aside the expectations we might have for these views based on their rhetoric, one certainly doubts that these are 'hard truths,' for we also saw how these ontological monisms run headlong into the swamps of epiphenomenalism and supervenience. In considering these challenges, it becomes clear that whatever lacks a place in their chosen foundational discourse is officially deprived of ontological standing, having no actual counterpart in the world. In order to avoid a commitment to this rather implausible suggestion, these realists attempt to draw a distinction between absolute truths and human-dependent truths, i.e., 'merely correct' assertions that are characterized by their objectivity for us. What is merely correct is supported by a functioning discourse, can be taught, and allows for non-collusive agreement in deciding hard cases, as when we consider whether someone is vicious or whether something is red. However, since such claims do not mirror the way the world is anyway, these claims cannot really be

true—indeed, failing to correspond to the real world, they are strictly false—but they are nevertheless characterized as useful illusions, as 'indirect truths,' that help us get along. And with this or a similar distinction, truth and absoluteness are prized apart.[82]

Fundamentally, these 'realists' see the world as supplying its own ontology; truth simply mirrors it. Beyond the skeptical questions that such a view naturally provokes, this approach to ontology strongly implies that our seemingly over-determined understanding of the world cannot be taken at face value, that it cannot be interpreted as the basis for a diversity of kinds of truth about the world, for our familiar ways of knowing the world are most certainly less than absolute. The requirement that we sort discourses into the categories of absolute (true) and non-absolute (only seemingly true, i.e., false) requires an incredibly revisionary and restrictive approach to ontology. Absolutism, I think it is safe to conclude, is no friend of science or common sense.

As undesirable as its consequences may be, these forms of metaphysical realism are hard to shake. They have one very strong intuition on their side: the world is what it is irrespective of how we happen to think about it. As I've said, I am interested in exploring what is involved in rejecting that fundamental realist premise or whether it is even possible at all. To do this, I'll consider Heidegger's position from the period of *Being and Time*. During that period, he articulates a strong defense of pluralism, something that seems to be necessary for any descriptively adequate account of our ontological commitments, scientific or otherwise. His view also reveals, however, what a commitment to such pluralism seems to cost. In his rejection of realism, Heidegger embraces idealism, the idea that there is being only in an understanding of

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[82] For another critical discussion of this idea that "there are truths and truths," see Putnam, "The Absolute Conception of the World," in *Renewing Philosophy*, p.89.

being. Before getting to a discussion of Heidegger's position, how it ought to be understood

and how exactly he defends 'ontological pluralism,' I need to clarify the categories of realism

and idealism more generally, which I understand as mutually exclusive strategies for dealing

with the inconsistent commitments of common sense. To square the circle, to negotiate these

commitments, both realist and idealist strategies must challenge our pre-philosophical

commonsense ideas, but do so in different ways. We've already seen some of the ways that

realism does this. But before going any further, before considering the ways idealism challenges

and vindicates our pre-philosophical commonsense commitments, in the next chapter I'll explain

this 'common sense' standard in greater detail, I'll say more about what I mean by realism and

idealism, and how the two topics are related. This will set the stage for the discussion of

Heidegger and idealism that begins in chapter three.

CHAPTER 2

NEGOTIATING COMMON SENSE

§1 – Introduction: Common Sense and Ontology

The preceding chapter considered three important realist approaches to ontology—the absolute conception of the world, metaphysical realism, and physicalism—the significance of their guiding intuitions, and some of their notable limitations. First among these limitations is their inability to find a place for pluralism. This leaves them in a difficult spot: their attempts to say *what* there is appear to result in a distorted account of *who* we are. In my view, this distortion can be traced to the distinction they each draw, in one way or another, between truth as contextual 'correctness' and truth as 'absolute truth.' Truth in this latter, supposedly fundamental sense is presented as a map of the furniture of the universe, while the former, 'ontologically lightweight' sense of truth as correctness applies to discourses that only appear to be answerable to actually extant features of the world. The result of this (at least) two-tiered account of truth is dramatic, giving these realists a framework for explaining how the majority of our beliefs about the things we are most familiar with, including our very personhood, may be 'correct' while also being false. As these particular 'absolutisms' have it, there *really* aren't people, institutions, and norms, and, in fact, it may also be the case that there *really* aren't social scientific, chemical, and biological truths. Once the furniture of the universe is said to consist of a particular type of thing, and once the discourse adequate to such things is determined—once an absolute conception is in place—it becomes very difficult to tell a good story about the reality of anything that falls outside that charmed circle. Quite simply, these ostensibly realist accounts leave no logical space

for a anything other than a "screamingly false" explanation of even the most basic aspects of the lifeworld.[1]

The exclusion of the most straightforward explanations of who we are, of our 'manifest image,' obviously does not stem from ignorance about the need to account for normative, personal, or institutional realities, but from presuppositions that have become fixed philosophical points. For example, the attempt to vindicate a completely physical account of the world—the imagined ontology of a future superphysicist—may encourage these deeply revisionary conclusions. Taken by a particular scientific-metaphysical intuition, some physicalists argue as though it were acceptable to 'solve' one narrow problem by creating a very great one, or by simply ignoring the broader phenomena to be explained.[2] These 'scientifically minded' realists fail to meet the real challenge for a realist, for the philosopher whose work embodies a realistic spirit: vindicating realism about *both* the manifest and scientific images of man in the world.[3]

The realisms reviewed in the first chapter are only plausible to the extent that we overlook the broader contexts into which their stories must eventually fit. To substantiate this

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[1] The metaphysical realists Horgan and Portrc use the quoted phrase to describe how one would ordinarily evaluate their claims that, for example, people, Scotland, and universities do not actually exist.

[2] I am not suggesting that I do not have certain fixed points: an account of what there is should not result in a distorted account of who we are, and both the manifest and scientific images of man in the world must retain their autonomy as genuine ways of thinking about the world. In other words, I cannot imagine a reasonable ontology that does not vindicate pluralism. See chapter 5.

[3] This is a loose formulation, to be sure. The realist needn't vindicate realism about *everything* that could reasonably be included in the manifest image. It is the central aspects of this way of understanding the world that are important—that there are agents, that many of the things we believe about our experience of the world are true, etc.—and not the commitment to the truth of particular and potentially dubious aspects of the manifest image, such as the truth of most folk-psychological explanation, for instance. The discussion of the 'platitudes of common sense' in section 5 addresses this issue in detail.

claim, it will be useful to discuss realism and idealism in relation to common sense. That notion is regularly mentioned as a touchstone in philosophy, but failing to consider what it is and the extent to which philosophy may be answerable to it makes it easier for ontology to become little more than a highly theorized echo of our pre-philosophical biases. Glib as it may sound, I believe that in philosophy the esteem of physical science, for example, often becomes physicalism, interest in social sciences may become metaphysical realism or relativism, depending, while interest in religion or humanities may square more easily with idealistic proposals, etc. I contend that having a broader and clearer view of what is to be accounted for (viz., our pre-philosophical commonsense commitments) will temper this tendency to translate ideological and institutional allegiances into ontological commitments. Pausing to consider the broad 'commitments' of common sense, it becomes difficult to deny that ontology should tell (or, at minimum, not rule out) a convincing story about the entirety of our being-in-the-world.[4]

In this chapter, I will argue that philosophy works to bring the inconsistent implicit 'commitments' of common sense in line, developing some and denying others, and that realists and idealists manage these conflicts of common sense differently and in characteristic ways. I am suggesting, therefore, that realism and idealism can be understood by the particular manner in which they part ways with common sense. As I noted in the first chapter, the reference to common sense is crucial to achieving a balanced view: reductive approaches are confronted with the many things they must explain as *fictional* and pluralist programs are confronted by the

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[4] Clearly, there is a place for ontology as a 'highly theorized echo' of particular commitments. In one sense, 'ontology' is nothing more than a description of what a particular theory or discourse says there is. My point is that this narrow idea of ontology, however useful it is for clarifying the commitments of a theory, doesn't necessarily help us achieve the philosophical aim of seeing how things hang together as a whole, and it can even interfere with that process if a regional ontology is illegitimately given global priority.

demand that our body of knowledge be *coherent*. If pluralism leads to a claim about 'incommensurable discourses,' then the idealist has only avoided one offense against common sense (reductionism) to cause another (the idea that *conflicting* claims could be *true* of the *same* object). If, however, the idealist claims that what seem to be irreducible discourses about the same phenomenon *are* commensurable, then a reductive challenge returns, and we may suspect that this pluralism, too, is merely 'a manner of speaking.'

To be clear, my view is not that common sense is neutral between realism and idealism, between claims of ontological dependence and independence, but that it inclines one way or the other depending on the issue. For example, realists may have an easier time accounting for the authority afforded physical-scientific accounts of the world, the closure of the causal domain, etc., while idealists may have an easier time explaining how it is possible for there to be anything like persons, how it is possible to find room for the 'mind in a physical world.'[5] From the perspective of common sense, realism and idealism each have their strengths, but alone neither can simply claim to represent it since it serves as the basis for both. As I hope to make clear in what follows, this means that philosophical work (of a certain scope, at least) is *always* more or less revisionary, since its most basic charge is to work out the inconsistencies of common sense. Philosophical problems emerge from the conflicting suppositions that structure our understanding of the world and our place in it (i.e., the 'commitments' of common sense). If this were not the case, philosophy would be too easy, for philosophical explanations could advance unencumbered by countervailing considerations rooted in our intuitions about how things work. Philosophy cannot twist free of common sense but common sense cannot simply be affirmed as

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[5] For the a physicalist's account, see Jaegwon Kim, *Mind in a Physical World*. For a detailed discussion of some of our pre-philosophical commitments, see section 5 below.

philosophy. Simply put, and I will defend this claim throughout the chapter, realism and

idealism represent different strategies for navigating the inconsistent commitments of common

sense, the intuitions and presuppositions from which our philosophical views grow.[6] Each

accentuates its explanatory or descriptive strengths vis-à-vis common sense and tries to show

that wherever they 'revise' our commonsense commitments that those commitments weren't

worth holding in the first place.

To preview the rest of the chapter, section 2 clarifies what I intend by realism, anti-

realism, and idealism, section 3 explains how my view is not an attempt to revive the

'commonsense school' of philosophy, section 4 distinguishes what I mean by 'common sense'

from what we might call 'common knowledge,' section 5 outlines and discusses some important

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[6] This does mean that I take them to be mutually exclusive and exhaustive approaches to ontology. Nevertheless, I agree with Mark Sacks in calling realism and idealism "presuppositional contradictories" (*The World We Found: The Limits of Ontological Talk*, LaSalle: Open Court, 1989, p. 20). If we deny the ontological dependence of reality, then we accept its independence and set off down a realist path, but only once we make certain *presuppositions*. We must make certain presuppositions before we get on what Sacks repeatedly describes as the realist-idealist see-saw. Unlike Sacks, I do not believe that these presuppositions can be undermined: they are our most basic presuppositions about the way things 'hang together.' They are pre-philosophical commitments, not philosophical mistakes. Sacks' idea is that common sense can be satisfied without resorting to the kind of ontological talk relevant to realism and idealism. All common sense demands, according to Sacks, is that we be able to claim that the things we take to be real are independent of our experience (of "experiencing beings as items in the experienced world"), not of "the form of all experience." As he puts it: "To account for our common sense beliefs we must, so to speak, be able to remove the actors and all of their acts, but the stage can still remain set with the form thereof" (Sacks, p. 133). In my view, this is simply a mistake. This fine distinction between our experience (local ontological independence) and the form of all experience (global ontological independence) is lost on common sense, which asks: how are things *anyway,* absolutely independent of us. That includes *all experience*. The common sense question is just this: what's left when we take away all experience? What's the ontology of things in themselves? If ontology requires that "the table be set by experience," then Sacks has just answered the question in an idealist manner. This is a way of making a revisionary claim *against* common sense, not a way of satisfying it without resorting to what he calls "global ontological talk."

commitments of common sense, and section 6 concludes by highlighting some of the internal

conflicts of common sense that philosophy is called upon to address.

§2 – Realism, Anti-Realism, and Idealism

Realism is primarily concerned with ontological questions related to what is typically

described as 'mind-independence.' Fundamentally, the realist believes that what actually exists

does so independently of what we happen to think about it. Accounts of realism rooted in the

philosophy of language, such as Dummett's view that realism is characterized by its commitment

to the truths of a contested discourse being 'evidentially unconstrained,' only make sense in

relation to realism's basic ontological signification. Why would a realist bother to claim that

assertions in a particular contested discourse may be undetectably true? Only because they are

imagining that the facts to which those particular assertions correspond exist 'in themselves,'

whether or not claims pertaining to those facts are verified or are even verifiable in principle.

The central concept of realism, 'independence,' is obviously a relational

notion—independence is always independence of something else—and since both sides of the

relevant relation (mind and world) are philosophically wide open, it is easy to understand why

discussions of realism quickly become unmanageable. Any adequate account of realism is

obliged, on the one hand, to say something about *us*, assuming we are the kind of things that real

things are independent of. We might ask, for example, about our access to things, what it means

for us to represent things, whether our commerce with the world is even well-described as

representational, and if it is not, how we ought to understand what it is to be a being that thinks

about the world, that is somehow immersed in the world. On the other hand, thinking about

realism also forces us to consider *what* exists independently of us and how we could ever

substantiate any particular answer. When we say that "the cat is on the mat," are we thereby

committed to the idea that something like cats and mats exist? Does our assertion fix what counts

as a cat and what as a mat? More generally, what is the relationship mooted here between truth

and ontology? What is the relationship between our characterizations of some supposed

independently existing things and 'the things themselves'? Is there only one proper way to

characterize these independently existing things or are there many possible ways to adequately

describe them? Fundamentally, we can ask, what is the world? This swirl of issues makes it hard

to keep track of what *the* question of realism is and places constant pressure on the idea that there

is such a question at all. Finding a way to abandon the whole problematic is a constant

temptation, and plenty of clever off-ramps have been proposed. Nevertheless, I believe there is

still something worth discussing under the time-honored heading.

I believe that realism is well-described as a possible framework for philosophical

thinking. One can accept it or reject it but, as a philosopher addressing fundamental ontological

questions, one cannot simply avoid it without approaching intellectual bad faith. Refusing to

answer questions about 'independence' because of pragmatic or 'ordinary language' scruples, or

because of the apparent haziness of the question, for example, doesn't make questions about

ontology and independence go away.[7] As I see it, there are two basic but completely different

paths one might take in rejecting realism: anti-realism and idealism.

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[7] Here I'm thinking of attempts to 'overcome' realism and idealism, something I discuss in more detail in chapter 4 (in the discussion of David Cerbone's work), and responses to questions of realism and idealism like that of Charles Travis who objects to claims that go beyond 'mundane hierarchies.' That is, he rejects the entire philosophical register of realism and idealism in which the issues are pitched. While flying the Wittgensteinian flag, he argues, along with Hilary Putnam (see, for example, *The Threefold Cord*), that philosophy is a "journey from the familiar to the familiar" (*The Threefold Cord*, p. 41). My entire project aims to show that this is wrongheaded, that philosophy is always more or less revisionary, and is not simply a process of

I will discuss anti-realism first because anti-realism is fundamentally a species of realism that rejects a realist interpretation of a particular domain or domains.[8] The anti-realists' suggestion is that in many cases the world is ontologically independent of the way we happen to divide it up, but not in some particular case or cases. For example, ethics, aesthetics, theoretical physics, or mathematics may need to be, either in whole or in part, interpreted anti-realistically in order to explain how despite the fact that we seem to make claims about things related to those domains that function as though they correspond to some independent reality, there actually isn't anything for such claims to answer to, or that what they are really answering to is something quite different than we imagine when unreflectively discussing or engaging entities of those kinds. Although there is 'discipline' in these areas, i.e., the appearance of fact-stating discourse, whatever truths emerge from these discourses do not entail the same kind of ontological commitment as existential claims in other domains.

In *Truth and Objectivity*, Crispin Wright identifies three important anti-realist paradigms[9]:

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clearing up intellectual missteps. "The familiar" certainly has great weight, but once we make clear all that is familiar (see section 5 below), simply adopting it as philosophical bedrock is impossible. For further discussion, see the next section on 'the commonsense school.'

[8] Global anti-realism is a different and complicated exception. Although I certainly grant that Dummett's work is illuminating in many areas, I think his reinterpretation of the realism / anti-realism debate as an argument about theories of meaning misses the core of the issue, which I take to be ontological. Can questions about the verification transcendence of meaning really settle the debate between realists and anti-realists? I can allow, for example, that moral claims transcend our ability to verify them without agreeing that they are facts of a standing similar to those of physical science. *Although verification transcendence may be necessary for a discourse to be construed realistically, it is not sufficient, and this mode of analysis is consequently very far from exhausting the questions we have about realism and idealism.* I will return to these issues in chapters 4 and 5.

[9] Crispin Wright, *Truth and Objectivity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), pp. 4-12.

1. Dummetian anti-realism: the question of realism is here characterized as a struggle over a contested class of statements as opposed to a disputed class of entities.[10] According to Dummett, the realist is committed to the idea that we can make sense of statements within the contested class as 'undetectably true.' That is, if realistically construed, the truth values of claims of that particular class transcend our ability to verify them, even in principle.

2. Error-theoretic anti-realism (Mackie): the anti-realist identifies for the realist domains in which the things that we take ourselves to be addressing do not actually exist. If established, the purported realism of a discourse, e.g., moral discourse, may therefore be written off as a 'metaphysical superstition.' The anti-realist explains how we took ourselves to be addressing something, how that attempt is mistaken, and that, consequently, all our claims about such things are in error. Closely related to this particular error-theoretic rejection of the realism of a discourse is the 'reductive' rejection. A reductionist believes that the putative entities of some domain can be entirely reduced to some other kind of thing that actually exists. In this type of error-theory, one phenomenon is explained away in terms of another, as one might attempt to explain-away ethical truths in psychological terms, or to explain-away biological entities in microphysical terms. Reductionism is a different kind of theory of error, but it shares the

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[10] See Bob Hale's discussion of Dummett in "Realism and its Oppositions," in *A Companion to the Philosophy of Language,* eds. C. Wright and B. Hale (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1997) for a synopsis of Dummett's account of the realism/anti-realism debate.

basic idea of error theory: the phenomena that people take themselves to be addressing

do not have independent standing.[11]

3. Expressivist anti-realism (Hume, Ayer, Hare, Blackburn, Gibbard): many discourses may

   have a surface grammar that leads us to believe that their assertions are genuine

   assertions, but some types of assertions are actually only quasi-assertions, expressing

   something *about* what can be genuinely asserted. For example, an anti-realist about

   morality would claim that although it *seems* like assertions concerning morality are

   genuine assertions, they are actually just *expressions of attitudes* about the phenomenon

   in question: 'the fundamental role of ethical 'assertion' is not to state anything but to

   express an attitude and to (thereby) recommend or discourage certain kinds of conduct.'

Wright suggests that these options 1) do not successfully account for our intuitions about the

standing of particular discourses and 2) do not have good prospects for making good on the their

eliminative analyses. He illustrates this using the example of humor,[12] something that most

people readily interpret in a non-realist manner, that is, we don't typically think that our

judgments about what is or isn't humorous is guided by some feature of the world existing

independently of what we happen to think about it. So, briefly, Wright's complaints about the

three approaches are as follows. First, the Dummettian analysis determines whether something

should count as belonging to a non-realist discourse by asking whether the discourse is

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[11] I believe, pace Bob Hale, that reductionism is a kind of error-theory since, quite simply, it suggests that all claims made about some kind of thing are in error insofar as such things don't exist. If some kind of thing doesn't exist, then attempts to state truths about such things must be in error. In fact, *all* the anti-realist options being considered here are kinds of error-theories. As error-theories, they (1-3) are only differentiated by their diagnoses of where the error is coming from. I call option 2 'error-theoretic' as a way of distinguishing only to keep with the convention of considering Makie-type error-theories as the paradigm case for all error-theories.

[12] Wright, *Truth and Objectivity*, chapter 1.

epistemically unconstrained. Well, it does seem like we would want to say that humor is epistemically constrained—it is hard to imagine something being funny but being beyond our ability to recognize it as such—and so the Dummettian view classifies humor correctly, but we can still ask whether all discourses that are epistemically constrained should be so classified. Citing the example of morality, we might believe that it is properly interpreted in a realist manner without wanting to go so far as saying that it is epistemically unconstrained. It is possible that there are epistemically constrained realist discourses. Second, an error-theoretic interpretation of humor suggests that there is nothing corresponding to humorous comments that could vindicate a realist analysis of them—there are no such 'queer entities.' In essence, then, the error-theorist suggests that the person who believes that it could be true or false as to whether something is funny either fundamentally misunderstands or denies what is actually going on in such a discourse. But we must be careful before applying such a hermeneutic of suspicion, for the discipline of the discourses of both humor and morality, for example, suggest that we should understand these things in just the opposite way, and so it is doubtful that such a revisionary claim about our own self-misunderstanding can be sustained. Finally, the expressivist paradigm (which has much in common with the Mackie/error-theoretic option) suggests that humorous talk, despite its discipline, is not a genuine discourse, but is expressive of an attitude that recommends or discourages conduct. As in the second case, we have to ask whether such a revisionary, reductive program can be carried out, even in a single case.[13] The reduction seems

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[13] The problem with the second and third options, with the reinterpretation of the assertoric claims of apparently 'disciplined discourses,' can be understood in terms of the so-called 'Frege-Geach problem' (P.T. Geach, *Logic Matters*, Oxford University Press: 1972, pp.267-269). These discourses are called 'disciplined' precisely because they obey logical laws such as *modus ponens*. The expressivists, try as they might, come to grief in the attempt to explain how "a nonproposition could function as a premise obeying ordinary logical rules" (Geach, p. 268). To

destined to remain nothing more than a glint in a philosopher's eye, and so its strong

revisionary claims exert little pull.

As I see it, however, it is not that all these paradigms of realism/anti-realism are wrong,

but that they are insufficient, whether on their own or taken together. Dummettian anti-realism

may miss the ontological root of the realism debate by focusing on the semantic issues, but it

focuses our attention on an important way that we distinguish the status of various discourses.

We may need to be cautious before advancing an error-theoretic interpretation of a particular

discourse, but the fact that it involves the revisionary claim that some discourse carries a false

image of itself obviously does not entail that such an interpretation could never be appropriate.

Finally, just because the reduction of an expressive discourse to its genuine root may be

extraordinarily difficult to work out in detail does not mean that such a project is impossible in

principle. Revisionary tactics carry a heavy burden, but that does not, of course, automatically

impugn the wisdom of ever taking on such a burden.

Philosophy couldn't function under such a restrictive, anti-revisionary rule, and, of

course, that is not what Wright is suggesting. He suggests we begin a discussion of realism in a

particular domain by exploring whether a discourse allows for 'minimal truth,' that is, whether it

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use Geach's often cited example: "If doing a thing is bad, getting your little brother to do it is bad. Tormenting the cat is bad. *Ergo,* getting your little brother to torment the cat is bad." "Bad," as Geach explains, cannot change meaning each time it is used. It cannot be an act of condemnation in one use an and ordinary description in another. If the phrases in which "bad" appears were constantly changing their meaning in this way, the discourse could not be said to have 'discipline,' since logical moves within it would be, as Geach puts it, "vitiated by equivocation." It is, of course, not open to the expressivists, at least not without further ado, to simply deny the discipline of, say, moral discourse. As a consequence, expressivist reductions and reinterpretations remain much closer to being bare philosophical promises than realities.

has 'discipline.'[14] Minimal truth is an 'ontologically lightweight' account of truth that is supposed to be acceptable across the board, whether one believes a certain discourse should be interpreted realistically or anti-realistically. This idea of truth is intended to show us that truth doesn't belong to the realist alone. Once a discourse is demonstrated to be minimally truth-apt, it is then possible to begin addressing questions about realism and anti-realism. After all, we still want to be able to explain the differences between truth-apt discourses, explaining the differences between, say, ethics and physics. How do we do this? In Wright's opinion, realists and anti-realists can argue about 1) epistemic constraint 2) the Euthyphro contrast 3) what 'represents' means in a particular case and 4) what 'the facts' mean in a particular case.[15] The different responses to questions like this, filtered through his novel notions of 'cognitive command' and 'width of cosmological role' definitely help us 'save the differences' between different discourses, and, hence, illuminate our interpretations of various regions of being.[16]

As much as I admire Wright's work, I still believe that he misses a stronger sense of realism: realism as a philosophical framework. Working within the framework of realism means believing that ontology is about mapping a pre-articulated world of entities. 'Saving the differences,' in Wright's sense, is about knowing which kinds of things are there independently of us and which are not. Idealism, by contrast, denies that there is any God's-Eye-Ontology, that there is a way things are anyway, and that ontological determinacy is inseparable from an

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[14] We can check to find out whether a discourse has discipline by considering whether, for example, assertions of that discourse present something as true, whether truth-apt content has a negation that is also truth-apt, that to be true means to correspond to the facts, that a statement may be justified without being true, and so forth. See Wright, p. 34ff.

[15] Ibid., p. 85.

[16] Cf. Crispin Wright, *Saving the Differences* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003).

understanding of being. Of course, this doesn't mean that idealists think that there is nothing real except mind, but only that there is no sense to the idea of 'a way things are anyway.' For the idealist, ontology essentially depends on us. Our task is to interpret the world, not to mirror it. In this way, there is no general problem of the 'real being' of the world fictionalizing the world of our concern (as there is in realism, as discussed in the first chapter in relation to the absolute conception). Any would-be absolute conception can only take its advantage interpretively, and not by the supposed a priori authority of a fundamental discourse. Until physicalists, then, take a hermeneutic advantage over those that believe in their real (i.e., non-epiphenomenal) existence, for example, the brute authority of the physics doesn't give the game to them. Physicalism also has its presuppositions, as much as those who have a more typical understanding of the lifeworld. The idealist provides an analysis of these different 'regions of being' and the presuppositions that organize them, whether we are talking about nature, the lifeworld, or the world of mathematics. In short, for idealists, all ontological claims are made with reference to particular horizons, which may or may not be reconcilable, and may or may not be able to take a hermeneutic advantage over each other. In my opinion, the fact that these different understandings of being are irreconcilable is not as traumatic for the idealist as it is for the realist, since the idealist deals in the logic of the understanding and not that of so-called things-in-themselves. It is not possible for a real thing to have contradictory properties, but it is possible that we could have conflicting understandings of something, where neither of those understandings can completely account for the other. What we are left with is an open-ended process of improving our interpretations, of attempting to articulate, explain, and reconcile our various understandings of being, rather than a requirement that we justify the validity of our many understandings of being in light of a standard that is declared absolute in advance.

To continue the discussion of realism/anti-realism and idealism, I want to turn now to an account of common sense (sections 3-5). My suggestion is that reflecting on common sense is important for getting into view exactly what we're setting out to explain and for seeing clearly what realism and idealism demand as revisionary views. Each has a philosophical 'price,' and once we see this, that *both* realism and idealism have revisionary moments, I believe that idealism, as a general strategy, might be able to be considered a live option, rather than just a term of abuse or historical novelty. And I hope this is how we'll see idealism, for in my view, the brilliance of *Being and Time* is intimately connected to its idealism. Its challenging line of argument would be even more difficult to explain sympathetically (much less, defend) if all forms of idealism were rejected in advance as a matter of principle.

As I use the phrase, 'common sense' refers to our basic but pre-philosophical understanding of the world. This understanding can be broken up along many lines, pertaining both to formal questions about the 'shape' of truth, facts, and representation, and extending to material issues such as the status of science, values, or 'folk-psychology.' I call the 'commitments' of this commonsense understanding 'platitudes' because, once articulated, they should be intuitively acceptable enough that the idea of their rejection should strike us as almost absurd.[17] My suggestion is not that common sense ought to be imagined as a line in the sand that philosophical claims must not cross, but rather that philosophy is necessary just because common sense *does not* provide a coherent line. As I understand it, *common sense makes demands on*

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[17] Cf. Crispin Wright's use of 'platitudes' to describe our intuitive commitments concerning truth. See, for example, his "Truth: A Traditional Debate Reviewed," in *Truth,* eds. S. Blackburn and K. Simmons (Oxford: Oxford University Press), section 6 and appendix.

philosophy that are impossible to satisfy completely.[18] To do its explanatory and descriptive work, philosophy is *necessarily* revisionary vis-à-vis common sense. Only by making revisionary claims can philosophy—any philosophy—attain its ends. In line with this approach, the label "idealism" represents one kind of revisionary program and "realism" another.

§3 – Not 'Commonsense Philosophy'

With respect to my claims about common sense, I want to make explicit what may already be obvious: my aims are not those of a Moorean 'common sense philosophy,' and this is not a defense of the ultimate epistemic authority of common sense. That 'school' suggests that "we know pretty much what we think we know"[19] and that we can use our commonsense knowledge to challenge philosophical theories. Philosophers of this persuasion assign a greater weight to what we all already (supposedly) know about the world than to any philosophical 'theory' that might contradict it. By contrast, my view is that philosophy *must* contradict common sense at some point because its diverse commitments are inconsistent. It is philosophy's job to either explain how certain inconsistencies are in fact unproblematic or how portions of that supposed commonsense knowledge is not what it seems to be. Importantly, either strategy

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[18] For this reason I reject Putnam's suggestion that philosophy is a journey "from the familiar to the familiar" (as Putnam approvingly quotes John Wisdom in *The Threefold Cord,* p. 41). *Of course* philosophy must return to 'the familiar' in the sense of being answerable to it, but returning to it 'the familiar' will be explained rather differently, for if it were not taking journey would be rather senseless, and philosophy would best be characterized as a kind of affliction. Despite the popularity of such a view, it doesn't square with his rather definite and ambitious philosophical claims concerning the contextual a priori, overcoming fact/value dichotomies etc. Those views may be substantially correct, but they are not correctly characterized as 'familiar.'

[19] Cf., Noah Lemos, *Common Sense: A Contemporary Defense* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 2-12.

requires a 'revision' of common sense. Though there is no need to discuss the common sense tradition of philosophy in detail, two observations about it may be useful in considering how to productively use common sense in addressing questions of realism and idealism.

Philosophers of this school begin in a tough spot. If they decide in advance to stubbornly defend the "positive epistemic status"[20] of commonsense knowledge, they are openly subscribing to a kind of dogmatism, which is the traditional and most obvious charge to bring against them. If, however, belonging to this school only means defending the claims of common sense against speculation *all things being equal*, then their approach is at best trivial. It would be hard to find a single philosopher willing to deny that 'all things being equal' we ought to respect common sense. The complication is just that once we start doing philosophy we realize that when it comes to articulating the explanations, descriptions, and proposals that make up any philosophical story, 'all things' are seldom 'equal.' Philosophers can hardly take a single argumentative step without being drawn away from common sense by countervailing arguments, whether because of pressures from inside philosophy itself or from those generated by natural sciences or other humanistic disciplines.

Moreover, as I have indicated by calling common sense 'inconsistent' and as I will explain in the next section, 'all things are not equal' even when considering common sense on its own. As I see it, common sense is at odds with itself, and does not form a coherent body. It is unsurprising that common sense should be this way, since we are not ordinarily in the business of reflecting on our commonsense understanding to explain its contradictions and reconcile its overdeterminations. From a pragmatic point of view, common sense gets us around just fine, but in this context that detail is beside the point.

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[20] Lemos, p. 6.

Since the ground of philosophical inquiry—common sense—is not stable, philosophy is tasked with more than the therapeutic recovery of a lost state of pre-philosophical equilibrium.[21] If philosophical therapy is successful and resolves implicit contradictions in common sense, then it's not merely therapy, but if it simply leaves us with common sense, it is inadequate. The defender of commonsense philosophy or therapeutic philosophy may respond that

> The proper claims of common sense are claims to validity and not claims to exclusivity. And so while both science and common sense provide us with instructive and acceptable representations of reality, they do so at very different levels of detail and precision proceeding in rather different ways and with decidedly different ends in view.[22]

Here Nicholas Rescher suggests that because common sense and science, for example, map the world in such different ways, that their maps cannot really conflict. Common sense claims only that its understanding of the world will be borne out by science, not that its truths *exclude* others. This is an appealing attitude, but it makes for rather mealy-mouthed philosophy. Although, pre-philosophically, common sense may politely restrict itself to claims of validity as opposed to exclusivity, the favor will not be returned by partisans of other perspectives, who may not grant the distinction at all. Science is (really, scientifically minded philosophers are) not so generous. The casual acceptance of ontological pluralism cannot take us very far.

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[21] In a pragmatic sense there plainly is something like 'pre-philosophical equilibrium' (we are able to get around), but in terms of our understanding of our 'being-in-the-world,' to use Heidegger's phrase, common sense provides no such stability, and we are everywhere surrounded by aporias and equivocal claims.

[22] Nicholas Rescher, *Common Sense: A New Look at an Old Philosophical Tradition,* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2005).

§4 – Common Sense vs. Common Knowledge

Common sense has no global commitment to realism or idealism.[23] Quite simply, common sense has no –isms, since such things belong only to philosophically developed points of view. For this claim about common sense's lack of philosophical affiliation to be plausible, what I intend by 'common sense' must be circumscribed with much greater care. After all, in the sense of 'what everybody knows,' understanding is extremely amorphous and accounts of it from certain perspectives may favor particular philosophical biases. For the sake of clarity, I will call the precarious body of understanding that varies dramatically over time and between individuals 'common *knowledge*.' Our common knowledge is shaped by the world we grow up in, influenced by everything from folk wisdom, practical customs, to organized instruction, all varying widely over time and place. In my estimation, common *knowledge* is too variable to be of much use as a philosophical touchstone, at least insofar as philosophy aims to produce something that will endure.

Granting the instability of common knowledge, we can still recognize the sturdiness of what I will refer to as *common sense*, by which I intend a set of presuppositions and principles that structure our everyday understanding of the world. Yet, even if one were to admit that there may be such a thing as 'common sense' as I intend it and that describing its content may be philosophically useful, the problem would remain of how these commonsense principles and presuppositions should be brought to the surface.[24] As essential as they may be to our

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[23] As I noted at the outset, it is not that common sense is neutral between realism and idealism, but that it inclines one way or the other depending on the topic. See section 5 below.

[24] In the hermeneutic tradition this is usually known as *background knowledge*. See Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking* (trans. W. Hohengarten, Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992) or *The Theory of Communicative Action* (trans. T. McCarthy, Boston: Beacon Press, 1984), for example. See

understanding of the world, the principles and presuppositions of 'common sense' are most

definitely not on the tips of our tongues. Common knowledge, by contrast, can easily be mined

by reading a newspaper, watching television, engaging in casual conversation, and so forth. We

rely on the 'commonness' of common knowledge all the time. For example, when we meet a

stranger at a bar we may talk about the crazy weather, about an upcoming election, about our

families, about the music playing in the background, about the quality of our drinks, and much

else. We all know something about such things, and together these ideas are part of our shared

background knowledge of the world. But this background comprehension of the world also has a

deeper level so simple and important that it isn't brought out by casual conversation, nor would

anyone ever have a reason to want to bring out such ideas in casual conversation. There is,

however, a time and place for it. As I see it, uncovering the fundamentals of common sense is a

traditional philosophical task that, under very different headings, has been approached in many

ways.[25] Since I'll be talking about Heidegger, and therefore also about themes from Kant, I'll

explain my effort to mine the fundamentals of common sense in terms of weak transcendental

arguments.

   As a kind of background understanding, common sense can be brought out by

considering what a representative person *would* assent to *were* they pushed to reflect on some

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also Searle's account of background knowledge in *Intentionality* (Cambridge: Cambridge
University Press, 1983).

[25] From Aristotle's categories to the rationalist's innate ideas, such 'fundamentals' are the stock
and trade of philosophy. I suspect that there is virtually no canonical philosopher who does not
have a related category. The difference between those ambitious views and my own approach
here is that the 'fundamentals' I am concerned with are provisional and loose—they are not
intended to constitute a closed or definitive system. I am not defending their universal validity,
but only highlighting their importance, suggesting that they impose a burden on philosophers to
vindicate, modify, or deny them.

basic (i.e., realism-relevant) issues. We can give this question a 'transcendental' form: what

are those intuitions and background presuppositions that our ordinary, everyday understanding of

the world cannot do without? I called this a *weak* transcendental form because I take it for

granted that it will ultimately be necessary to deny or modify some of these commonsense

commitments, or, if you will, these 'platitudes' of common sense. In proposing these platitudes

my aim is *not* to press common sense for a consistent view, but is, more modestly, to articulate

some of these platitudes so that philosophy, which *is* called to resolve intellectual tensions and

contradictions, may be presented with a clearer and more balanced agenda. I will use this

background to inform my approach to realism and idealism, which each trade, but trade

differently, on the internal conflicts of common sense and of common sense with scientific and

philosophical explanations.[26]

One would like to know, of course, whose 'ordinary understanding' I could be referring

to. Whose 'common sense' should serve as the standard? Who could possibly qualify as a

representative person? In my view, the skepticism implicit in such questions stems mostly from a

confusion between what I intend by common knowledge and common sense. The content of the

former can be loosely described as empirical while the content of the latter may be thought of as

having quasi a priori status. This status implies a kind of universality for the platitudes, and that I

am able to achieve a kind of neutrality in articulating them. That said, I aim to provide a

universal or perspective-neutral account of the platitudes in the following sense only: *no* realist

or idealist metaphysics will be complete without addressing these issues. I do not claim that the

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[26] The conflict of common sense with scientific explanations can also be described as an internal conflict of common sense because it is part of common sense to trust not only its own experience but also the expertise of researchers. As I put it later, for common sense, ordinary facts and scientific facts are both facts. See section 5.2.4 below.

list of platitudes in the next section is complete, it certainly is not, but only that the platitudes

I do list are both central and reasonable. Distorting the platitudes would bias my account in favor

of one ontological strategy or another, illegitimately lightening its philosophical burden. If, for

example, I were to argue that it is a platitude that what really exists is just what our 'best physics'

tells us, I would be expressing a clear scientistic bias, declaring that a kind of physicalism is

prima facie plausible.

Despite my insistence on the difference between common knowledge and common sense,

I recognize that there is no *absolute* division between the two. Common sense is not pure and

common knowledge not independent of common sense. If we consider how our common sense

presuppositions arise historically, this is obvious. For example, although there is a fundamental

tension between the 'manifest' and 'scientific' images of man-in-the-world, it is not a timeless

conflict, for it was not possible until the rise of modern science.[27] So, I may consider aspects of

the 'scientific image' to be part of common sense while recognizing that these ideas were not

accessible prior to certain historical events. Precisely what was significant enough to create a

split between the manifest and a specifically *scientific* image of man-in-the-world is of course

debatable, although it would be hard to discuss this conflict of images without considering the

contributions of Copernicus, Galileo, Newton, the advent of transmutationist thinking in biology,

including Darwin, the bacteriological revolution, right up to the mysteries of Relativity Theory.

But whatever one may wish to emphasize, the point it just this: although the platitudes have a

quasi-transcendental status,[28] they are most definitely 'contaminated' by historical contingencies.

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[27] Sellars, "Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man," section 1.

[28] What this means will be made clearer below. In essence, I claim that the platitudes of common sense have a quasi-transcendental status insofar as their denial results in absurdity, not

Without historical instantiations, the fundamental conflicts that structure our commonsense understanding would be invisible.

Despite the fact that the specific content of the tension between the scientific and manifest images is relatively new, the conflict it embodies is not. First and foremost, the conflict of these images is grounded in the demand that our understanding of the world be coherent. Whatever we happen to believe, coherence always stands as a central intellectual challenge. Consider, for example, how this issue might be framed prior to the advent of modern science. We might ask how theological claims about miracles can be reconciled with our personal experience of nature, or how a perfectly good god can allow evil in his creation. From our perspective, the tension between the scientific and manifest images differs from the theological-experiential one in that our modern conflict does not seem to be similarly resolvable by a decision in favor of one side or the other.[29] With this new kind of highly reliable knowledge, we seem to be stocked with mutually exclusive but equally verifiable facts about the same objects. For example, whether we are concerned with the different descriptions we could give of a table (solid or mostly empty space), what time it is (which in no way seems to be relative to my speed), or our beliefs and agency (I believe that *I* decided to get married, to live in this town, etc., while others might believe that choice is an illusion, that whatever attractions and aversions

contradiction. Obviously, I'm modeling this suggestion on Kant's claims about synthetic a priori principles, namely, that they are not just 'logical' principles, and so are not derived from the principle of contradiction alone. Since they are synthetic, their denial never amounts to an outright contradiction, but could at most seem to make our experience of the world unintelligible. The platitudes have a *quasi*-transcendental status insofar as they are open to revision, and at least some will need to be revised (i.e., denied or modified) in order to produce a coherent philosophical position. The platitudes serve as a placeholders for new or revised 'synthetic a priori' principles that we adopt after negotiating the challenges presented by common sense.

[29] Metaphysical realists' claims to the contrary notwithstanding. For a discussion, see the section on pluralism and metaphysical realism in chapter 1.

I feel are a function of my genetic makeup, while still others may think that my feeling of freedom is an illusion in a deeper sense, insofar as all change is only to be accounted for in physical terms, in accordance with the laws of physics plus initial conditions, etc.), our understanding is over-determined by incomplete explanations, which each supply a set of facts, solidly grounded either in experience or scientific principles. The platitudes concern our respect for each type of fact, and the tension between the scientific/manifest image is based on that. We've always aimed at respecting the facts; all that's new is the way these facts seem to be at odds with one another.

Still, if there is no hard and fast line between common knowledge and common sense, how can we have any confidence that a proposed platitude is not simply a very general piece of common knowledge? For example, why couldn't 'god exists' be a platitude? After all, isn't it something that most people believe, that many people depend upon to structure other beliefs, and that requires explaining if it is to be denied? We can distinguish platitudes of common sense from common knowledge by making reference back to the idea that these platitudes are identified using weak transcendental arguments. As such, they are supposed to register as conditions of possibility for our ordinary understanding of the world and that, therefore, their denial should verge on absurdity. We can, for example, pair a claim about the non-existence of god with any empirical claim without contradiction. There is nothing contradictory about the claim 'there is snow and ice atop Mount Everest and god does not exist.'[30] Whereas the negation of certain platitudes paired with empirical claims, such as 'there is snow and ice at the top of Mount Everest and the external world does not exist' (Searle's example) results in absurdity. We

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[30] See Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality,* chapters 6 and 7.

must presuppose an external world in order to make sense of any claim about it, but we need not presuppose god to make similar empirical claims intelligible.

For another example, compare the platitude 'truth depends on how things are' (1.1) with another general claim about truth: 'the New York Times reports the truth.' Now, it may be part of common knowledge that the New York Times is a so-called 'paper of record' with good fact checkers, but nothing about our general understanding of the world hangs on that. If we learn tomorrow that a dozen reporters from that newspaper have been fabricating sources, as shocking as that would be, it would not shake our basic understanding of the world. Learning about surprising corruption is not like trying to digest the idea that truth (somehow) doesn't depend on the way things are. It seems almost absurd to accept that claim, though we could if we needed to, but we would have to know why, and we would have to reflect for some time on how exactly we should go about reorganizing our understanding of the way things are. We'll consider this platitude and possible denials of it below. The point here is just to distinguish common knowledge, as very general pieces of knowledge that organize our lives, from the commitments of common sense, which are the presuppositions that structure our very understanding of the world and our understanding of our own understanding.

Departure from our standard background understanding obliges us to articulate a revisionary view, where articulating a revisionary view means explaining how the absurdity we register in negating a 'commitment' of common sense is a biased (though perhaps principled) reaction based on our entrenched presuppositions and not an indication of a valid underlying objection. Revisionary views—which includes all philosophical views of a certain scope—suggest that at least one of the platitudes, despite appearing to be a necessary

background commitment for our understanding of the world, actually is not.[31] Establishing a

distinctively philosophical claim that runs contrary to common sense is extraordinarily difficult,

which is one very important reason why revisionary claims, and so philosophical theories

generally (which are laced with revisionary claims), are virtually impossible to keep afloat.

§5 – Platitudes of Common Sense

  The platitudes of common sense I'll discuss can be loosely organized under the headings

of truth, existence, and experience. The platitudes related to truth suggest a link between truth

and ontology, namely, that for common sense a wide range of truth claims involve ontological

commitment: when we claim that something is true, we are also supposing that what the truth

claim is about exists. The platitudes concerning existence have to do with the *way* things are.

When we say something is true we claim that something exists, but we do not yet say *how*. Most

fundamentally, we do not yet say whether something exists in such a way that it is dependent or

independent of what we happen to think about it. For example, it is not lost on common sense

that there is a different kind of existential commitment implicit in statements like "this rock

weighs a ton" and "this university is prestigious."[32] We think of the existence of rocks and their

weight differently than we think of the existence of universities and their reputations, and in what

follows I hope to draw out some of the commonsense presuppositions related to a few of these

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[31] For example, some realists want to break the link between truth and ontological commitment (1.1), while some idealists assert that there is a sense in which truth does not transcend belief (1.3). This will be explained further in first pages of the next section (section 5).

[32] In what follows, the repeated personification of common sense is a just a way of avoiding unnecessarily complicated locutions, like "is consistent with the quasi-transcendental analysis of…" and the like. My intention is not to pretend that I'm reporting on an interview I had with Ms. Common Sense.

differences with respect to their 'mind-dependence' and 'independence.' The third group of

platitudes concerns experience, and, in particular, our experience of ourselves as persons.

Needless to say, our experience of ourselves as agents is important to our commonsense

understanding of the world. It was already noted in the first chapter how the personal or agentive

perspective is one of the first things to disappear in realist attempts to reconcile the manifest and

scientific images of man in the world.

I have lumped platitudes into these general categories to emphasize the non-systematic

character of our commonsense commitments. The platitudes are neither entirely independent of

each other, nor are they are entirely consistent. It is precisely the fact that their interconnections

are *not* explained and that their contradictions are *not* resolved that makes them *platitudes* of

common sense, and not, for example, a realistically or idealistically tuned ontology, theory of

mind and world, or account of personhood. With these platitudes of common sense, the idea is to

articulate some of the diverse claims that common sense makes (on philosophy), so that in our

attempts to negotiate these claims, whether realist or idealist, our burden of argument may be

clearer and our approach more balanced. I am willing to admit that my aim is also quite

obviously polemical, since I believe that reflecting on common sense highlights the (frequently

overlooked) revisionary character of realism.

(1) There are four commonsense platitudes that concern truth.

(1.1) *Truth depends on how things are*.[33] This first platitude states the link mentioned

above between truth and ontology. It is worth noting that this claim is totally neutral as to *how*

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[33] Since these are supposed to be platitudes of *common sense,* I do not want to say that this is just
the equivalence schema 'p' is true ≡ p, although it may serve as a kind of shorthand for it. The
equivalence schema, however, doesn't provide the specifically ontological thrust that I believe
this first platitude has.

things are. That is, although truth depends on reality, reality is not here declared to be

physical reality, social reality, spiritual reality, or any other possible way that we might qualify

reality. The claim is only that truth and reality are linked, with the former being dependent on the

latter. Determining what can be true and the range of possible 'realities' is a different issue.[34]

This platitude also suggests that truth is a kind of correspondence. This is not to say that

the correspondence *theory* of truth is platitudinous. Not at all. It is only to say that the *idea* of

correspondence is basic to our idea of truth. Truth has to do with getting things right about the

world, with 'telling it like it is.'[35] A *theory* of correspondence is obliged to explain truth bearers

and truth makers, what the representational relationship of correspondence is supposed to be, and

how 'the facts' should be understood. By contrast, the idea of correspondence only declares that

truth is world-dependent. Truths must get the world right and so, in that minimal sense,

correspond to it.

Can this platitude reasonably be denied? Of course. Explaining truth in terms of

coherence or warranted assertibility, for example, is a denial that truth consists in a direct

relation between propositions (or statements, sentences, beliefs, claims—take your pick) and the

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[34] That truth and reality are recognized to be bound together is also indicated by the great efforts that all sorts of philosophers have made to explain truths about the past, truths about fictional topics, and truths about mathematics. Common sense thinking about such topics leads us to wonder: if there can be truths about such things, how should we explain the reality of what makes such claims true?

[35] This is how Crispin Wright explains a similar 'platitude.' Note that Wright means something quite different by 'platitudes.' For him, the correspondence platitude is not deniable, but is a minimal adequacy condition for any philosophy of truth. My view is similar to this, insofar as any 'philosophy of truth' must explain their relation to the idea of correspondence, but I do not believe that such an explanation should necessarily be described as a vindication of the correspondence platitude—'taking into account' is not always a vindication. To me, it seems more accurate to describe many revisionary positions as providing principled rejections of the correspondence platitude.

world. What's more, on the other side of the correspondence relation, a theorist could tamper with the notion of world, i.e., what is to be corresponded to, by defining it as something other than 'the collection of *realia*.' In such a case, the meaning of world-dependence would be fundamentally altered. The point here is only to suggest that the platitude can be denied, but only by way of some notably counterintuitive claims, by rejecting a commitment of common sense.[36]

(1.2) *Truth is stable*. This merely expresses the idea that if something is a truth then it is always a truth. I am not suggesting that common sense has it that all truths are so-called 'eternal truths.' The idea of stability is just that particular claims to truth, made at a particular time and in a particular context, are either true or not,[37] and if we revisit the context in which the claim was made, then the claim will retain its truth value no matter when we return to it. We may revisit a situation and observe that a claim that we previously believed to be true is not—perhaps some important information was unknown or overlooked—but in such a case we just say that the claim is false, not that it was an unstable truth or that truth was 'lost.'

We only accept claims about changing truths when qualified by an observation that something in the world has changed and that our new claim refers to the thing in question in its new state. If you tell me, "it's true, she was nice, but now she's quite vicious." The modification

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[36] Horgan and Portrc, for example, explicitly break the link between ontology and truth, and feel obliged to explain this move at length, both in terms of their semantic theory and in terms of the way their view relates to common sense. They acknowledge that it *seems* to fly in the face of our basic intuitions concerning truth, but in fact does not. This is precisely the kind of argument I expect from those that take the content of these platitudes seriously. See the discussion of Horgan and Portrc in Chapter 1.

[37] Common sense is not aware of the Sorties paradox or problems of vagueness. In fact, these problems, and common sense's lack of concern with them, help to emphasize that common sense is not a philosophical position, but is rather a touchstone, background, or baseline that we strive to explain as best we can while taking account of the problems that emerge from its contradictory and incomplete holdings.

makes perfect sense because we typically believe a person can change. "That wall was red, but now it's green" suggests no metaphysical mystery because walls get repainted all the time. However, it *is* unacceptable to claim that "John Q. Smith the 9th wore a tuxedo at his first wedding, from 6PM until midnight, and that tuxedo was black," and then to later claim that "John Q. Smith the 9th wore a red tuxedo on the night of his first wedding, from 6PM until midnight." Either this is some sort of riddle and I am supposed to figure out how these claims do not conflict (perhaps he was wearing a red tuxedo under the black one), a mistake was made and one of the claims is false, or what was true one day was lost by the time the second claim was made. My suggestion is that the last option is unacceptable to common sense without a very interesting explanation of how a truth could be *lost*.

Noting that interpreting truth as warranted assertibility makes truth 'losable' is sufficient to establish that this is not a trivial platitude (that is, it is deniable).[38] For example, the claim about John Q. Smith the 9th wearing a black tuxedo may have been justified—rationally assertible—until there was an opportunity to see the Mr. Smith outside the hall, perhaps under the bright lights of the parking lot. Outside the dimly lit hall it became clear that the tuxedo was actually a very dark shade of red. So, although an assertion about a particular historical episode may be warranted at one point, with further evidence it may no longer be, and thus the 'truth' of the earlier claim, when truth is understood as warranted assertibility, may be 'lost.' Usually this is taken to be an important reason why truth cannot *be* warranted assertibility, but here it only serves to suggest that denying this platitude is extremely difficult, and that an idea of truth that makes it 'losable' would be philosophically revisionary.

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[38] Hilary Putnam focuses on this in *Reason, Truth, History* in explaining his internal realist conception of truth as *idealized* rational acceptability. The idealization is intended to protect the 'stability' of truth.

(1.3) *Truth transcends belief.* Commitment to this platitude means being able to distinguish truth from belief, and understanding that beliefs may be true or false—conceptual distinctions that are well within the purview of common sense. Our beliefs can be false because truth is something that is in some sense *beyond* our beliefs. It has to be part of common sense that, in some sense, beliefs are 'in us' and truths are 'out there.' Quite simply, truth and belief do not set limits on one another. For example, a child's belief that there is a monster under their bed is not constrained by the fact that there isn't one under there. Of course, the refusal to believe that there is a monster under our bed does not make it the case that there actually isn't one. This just goes to say that it is part of common sense that any of our beliefs could turn out to be false, since (except with claims that concern our own beliefs) truth depends on something beyond ourselves, beyond what we happen to think.

How could the idea that truth transcends belief be denied? After all, the claim seems to rely only upon an analysis the meanings of 'truth' and 'belief.' Indeed it does, but it is possible, for example, to understand the relationship between belief and truth such that our beliefs make our truths possible and so cannot be transcended by them, that truth must be somehow 'internal' to belief. We will return to this idea of truth being 'internal' to belief (or meaning, paradigms, epistemes, disclosures of being etc.) in the discussions of idealism that follow, particularly in chapter five. The only point that needs to be established here is that 'internalist' conceptions of truth are revisionary. In my estimation, it is revisionary to say that there can only be a monster under my bed because my 'paradigm' or 'disclosure of being' allows things like monsters to

appear. Common sense must deny this insofar as it has it that the reality of the thing under

our bed is totally independent of what we might believe or presuppose as a possibility.[39]

      (1.4) *Truths do not conflict*. It is part of common sense that truths do not conflict with one

another. As common sense has it, truths fit together to produce a coherent 'map' of reality. Why

is this part of common sense? Insofar as truths must correspond to reality, and insofar as reality

is a coherent whole, that which corresponds to it should also be a coherent whole. I am here

allowing that a kind of realist explanationism is part of common sense, which is to say that

realists have strong intuitions on their side when they state that truth 'comes together' into a

coherent whole *because* reality is a coherent whole, with true claims tracking that reality. In this

way, realists believe they can *explain* the coherence and convergence of truth. Such an inference

to the best explanation may be philosophically contentious (from the perspective of

instrumentalists, for example) but is intuitively compelling.[40] Again, the idea is not that the

platitudes are philosophical truths, but only that they show where the burden of argument lies in

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[39] A related platitude about the 'publicness' or 'publicity' of truth might be an appropriate addition here. Truths are not *essentially* private: at least in principle, we can communicate the way things are with others, we can cooperate to learn about things, etc. In short, truth is not ineffable. Of course, this intuition is in tension with some of the presuppositions with might have about the privacy of our inner lives. Thanks to Axel Mueller for this suggestion.

[40] Common sense therefore seems to take sides in what Crispin Wright calls the Euthyphro Contrast. Debates about the direction of explanation have the same form as the debate in Plato's *Euthyphro* between Euthyphro and Socrates over whether the gods love acts *because* they are pious, or whether acts are pious *because* they are loved by the gods. Transferred to questions concerning realism, it can be asked: is it because we have a discipline that allows us to say that things are some way that they are that way, or is it because they are some way that we are correct in describing them that way? In short, the Euthyphro Contrast asks us to consider whether there is more to truth than agreement in judgment. The explanationist defense of realism claims that there definitely is more to truth than agreement in judgment, claiming, in addition, that they have the *only* viable explanation of this agreement. The intensity of this platitude is illustrated by the realist's presumption that other possible explanations are absurd to the point of being embarrassing to mention.

certain realism-relevant debates. Here, it seems, the burden lies with those wishing to reject this kind of explanationism.

(2) The first group of platitudes posits a link between truth and ontology but does not explain what that link entails in terms of the being of that which is held to be true. That is, it says nothing about *how* the objects posited in truth claims exist. The second group of platitudes explores some commonsense presuppositions about this, particularly with respect to mind dependence and independence.

(2.1) *Some things exist only in relation to us and other things exist independently.* To assert that a thing exists independently of our representations of it is to claim that it is how it is independently of whether or what we may think about it. Conversely, the suggestion that something is mind-dependent means that the thing's 'essence' somehow depends on us and that without us it would no longer exist.

For example, let's say that the 'external world' exists independently of our representations. It seems almost impossible to adhere to an opposing view, which would be a kind of radical subjectivism of a variety that might be mooted in a philosophy seminar or Hollywood movie. Consider, even if we imagine our solar system destroyed or all life as nothing but the dream of an all powerful being, this would still require the independent existence of the 'external world.' The apparent inconceivability of denying the thought-independent existence of the 'external world' indicates that it has the quasi-transcendental force of a platitude; it is something always already presupposed in every empirical claim we make.

Impossible as it is to deny the independent existence of the 'external world' from a commonsense perspective, it also seems difficult to deny that the external world exists *in some way* irrespective of what we think about it. How could we think of the world existing as a 'what'

without a 'how'?[41] It is part of common sense, therefore, that the external world not only

exists independently of our representations of it, but that it also has 'in itself' its own particular

character. It is what it is irrespective of what we think about it. Now, it may seem as though this

is an affirmation of the absolute conception discussed in the first chapter, but this is not the case.

This platitude will certainly resonate with defenders of an absolute conception, but there is no

problem with that. The reason the absolute conception is worth discussing in the first place is its

importance for common sense. As philosophically problematic as the absolute conception is, it

hits upon central commonsense 'commitments'—in particular, the mind-independence of what

'really is.' The problem with the absolute conception is not its affirmation of this idea, but its

affirmation of it to the exclusion of all other commitments of common sense. For example,

fictionalizing dependent existences, as absolutists are want to do, is absolutely not part of

common sense.

To consider the flipside of independence, it is certainly part of common sense that there

are aspects of the world that exist only in light of our representations or ideas. In different places,

for different people, and at different times, different phenomena have been described as

dependent, and in different ways. The workings of humor, taste, or fiction typically serve as

examples of things that exist only by virtue of the way that we happen to think about (feel,

experience, etc.) them. An example from the last chapter might serve as a good example:[42]

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[41] Obviously there are plenty of non-realist answers to this rhetorical question. But since the response, in my opinion must court absurdity from the perspective of common sense, this does not cast doubt on my suggestion that we have fundamental intuitions about mind-dependence and –independence and what that entails.

[42] See the discussion of Horgan and Portrc in Chapter 1. They deny that institutions should have ontological standing because they are not part of the furniture of the universe, but are merely mind-dependent 'existences.'

common sense is comfortable explaining the existence of, say, Northwestern University in terms of the beliefs of human beings. That is, we are typically happy to allow that institutions don't exist 'in themselves,' but only in relation to our understanding of them. Whatever example you care to use, the idea is only that it is part of our rich preconception of the world that parts of it depend on us and parts are independent of us. Furthermore, it is clear that the difference cannot be determined simply by virtue of whether there is a discipline in place for a discussion about the thing in question. We can talk about something's beauty with as much facility as we can talk about its mass. Questions of dependence and independence concern whatever could single out a particular discourse as referring to things that exist as they do independently of us.[43]

(2.2) *There is one way that the world is and many ways to describe it.* Beginning with the commonsense idea that there is an independently existing external world, it is (at the very least) perplexing to try to imagine the independently existing world not having its own particular character. That is, it seems absurd to imagine the independently existing world as not existing in some way—there must be some way that the world is. If there is some way that the world is, there may also be many ways to describe it. The flipside of the 'metaphysical' idea about uniqueness or singularity of the way the world is 'in itself' provides an opening for an 'epistemological' idea about pluralism. It may seem wrong to group metaphysical and epistemological issues like this, but for common sense it is precisely metaphysical 'uniqueness' that makes epistemological pluralism palatable. There is nothing to offend common sense in the notion that we may accurately describe things in a variety of ways, that we may, for instance, weigh things using kilograms or pounds. The fact that there are many valid systems of

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[43] In *Truth and Objectivity,* Crispin Wright has some good suggestions about what might do the 'singling out,' using tests he calls Width of Cosmological Role and Cognitive Command.

measurement is intuitively acceptable only when joined with the idea of the ontological independence of the world.

I am not here trying to ascribe a strong form of pluralism to common sense, but only to explain the degree to which common sense does include some kind of pluralism, and why it is at the very least open to the idea. In addition to the commonsense commitment to there being some way the world is, perhaps it is the idea that there are many different human perspectives on the world that prepares us for pluralism and reminds us of its importance. We get different views of an elephant from a bushman, a zookeeper, a biologist, and a physicist. Which view of the elephant is the correct one? Well, my contention is that it is part of common sense that all of them have a kind of legitimacy. Since there is some way that the elephant is, there is nothing spooky about describing the way the thing is in many different ways: as game, as an ancient and wise animal, as having a certain genetic makeup, or as collection of protons, neutrons and electrons. While the last platitude (2.2) may seem to have favored the absolute conception, this platitude seems to favor the kind of pluralism that non-realist solutions to ontological questions appear well-suited to address. Again, my intention is to avoid a biased account of common sense, but when common sense looks to be tilting in favor of this view at one point and that view at another, things are as they ought to be. My general point about philosophy and common sense includes the idea that if a philosophical view was not strongly supported by common sense at some point (at exactly which point may vary widely), it would be utterly uninteresting and unconvincing. Without some support from common sense, philosophy is completely impotent. There is no such thing as a completely revisionary philosophical view; such a 'view' would be sheer nonsense, unintelligible and useless.

(2.3) *Global skepticism is false*. It is platitudinous for common sense that our access to the world, our understanding of the world, is not fundamentally blocked or distorted. The types of skepticism encouraged by arguments from illusion are not native to common sense, which takes its experience of the world at face value. If it seems like I am sitting at my desk, typing on my computer, then I am. If it seems like one billiard ball is causing the other to glide across the table, then it is. Common sense is not attuned to the skeptical problems of representation or Humean/Goodmanian problems of induction.[44]

(2.4) *A fact is a fact*. When I say that common sense takes its experience at face value, I also mean that for common sense, though it differentiates between phenomena that are more or less dependent on us (see 2.1), all phenomena that may be evaluated as to their truth point to underlying realities. So, although there are some things that are representation dependent and some that are independent, both are considered real, and common sense doesn't trouble itself attempting to draw a bright line between these kinds. For example, just as we can know that there are cars parked on the street outside, we can know which cars are nice, which are cheaply made, which are ugly, and so forth. To deny this is also to court absurdity, since it would depend on making a distinction between our ability to unproblematically discuss which cars are ugly and the reality that some cars are ugly. We would have to say something like, 'that car is ugly, but not really,' or something like "that car is obviously ugly, but I don't believe it is." These odd-sounding statements might be justified by an error-theory about aesthetic properties, for example, explaining how we could have a disciplined discourse that is not genuinely truth-apt insofar as there aren't any facts of aesthetics to be known. But, for common sense, knowledge tracks truth

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[44] See, for example, Nelson Goodman, *Fact, Fiction, and Forecast* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), especially chapter 3, "The New Riddle of Induction."

and truths are ontologically significant. To have multiple truth predicates—genuine truths about the world and mere correctness as applied to our semantic practices, for example—is to move in the direction of a philosophical theory that 'revises' common sense.

Since a having multiple truth predicates (e.g., merely correct versus absolutely true) is a sure sign of 'theory,' a sure sign of having stepped beyond common sense, I want to say that common sense supports *both* 'ordinary' and 'scientific' facts as *brute facts*. Common sense accepts the findings of 'mature' sciences as reporting matters of fact about the world. Yet, it also typically accepts that the things we perceive and use are just as they appear to be. When I see a table before me I thereby know that there really is such a thing as this table, that it is really right here, slightly cluttered, light in color, etc. Seeing the table I absolutely *do not* wonder whether it is *really* part of the world (part of the furniture of the universe, so to speak); I simply take it for granted that it is. Again, consider the absurdity of an error-theory here, suggesting the discourse is merely correctness- but not truth-apt. Common sense resists the suggestion that a discussion of the tables and chairs in this room might be considered 'just a manner of speaking' to be later reduced to or eliminated by a more sophisticated understanding of what tables and chairs 'really are.' Therefore, for common sense at least, ordinary truths are also brute facts. Common sense accepts that there are scientific facts, that there are ordinary facts, and that neither is weakened or relativized by the presence of the other.

This last point recalls Sellars' distinction between the manifest and scientific images of man-in-the-world. It is just because the scientific facts and the 'manifest' facts must be understood as *facts*, and nothing less, that such a tension arises. Since common sense has it that facts about the world are facts about real things, our liberal epistemological-metaphysical attitude grows into an ontological tension. This tension between scientific and ordinary facts,

between facts that depend on the participant perspective and those concerning unseen explanatory structures, is a driving force in the dialectic of realism and idealism.

(3) The third set of platitudes is about us. There are presuppositions we have about ourselves as people that structure our experience and understanding of the world. Realists and idealists alike must explain or leave space for an explanation of 1) how the subjective point of view fits into an objective account of the world, and 2) how there is space for human agency in a seemingly over-determined world. Some of the challenges of preserving personhood and agency have already been discussed in the first chapter. Considering the problems physicalism encounters in trying to account for 'mental causation,' it will be useful to explicitly state a couple important realism-relevant commonsense presuppositions related to personhood.

(3.1) *A complete description of the world must account for both its subjective and objective elements.* An objective account of the world remains incomplete insofar as it leaves out the subjective determinations of individuals. Looking, for example, at the ways in which my brain lights up in an MRI does not tell you what it is like for me to be in pain, to experience something as red, to make a moral determination, or to think of something beautiful. It is 'like something' to be a subject, and a full account of the way things are cannot simply ignore this. Attempts to account for personhood entirely from the outside seem to miss precisely what they intend to explain. In line with thoughts like these, common sense has it that a completely objective account of the world would *not* be a complete account of all that there is.[45]

(3.2) *People are agents.* Common sense cannot resist the idea that our decisions and dispositions can often determine our actions. In other words, it is almost impossible not to think

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[45] Cf., Jackson p.9, on physicalism: "a full inventory of the instantiated physical properties and relations would be a full inventory *simpliciter*."

of ourselves as having free will, however restricted our liberty may be. As a platitude of

common sense, there is not much substance to this idea of freedom other than the idea that we

interact with the world and initiate causal chains. We are not just human billiard balls bouncing

off one thing and then another. I think it is fair to say that common sense is not well disposed

towards compatibilism about free will, but is much closer to a voluntarist idea of free will, a

belief that we have the ability to do otherwise.

§6 – Conclusion: Unavoidable Conflicts

This brief sketch of the platitudes of common sense is hardly exhaustive, but even this

partial list focuses our attention on the difficulties facing both realism and idealism: neither can

chart a course through common sense without challenging some of its platitudes and direct

corollaries. For example, the platitude linking truth and ontology (1.1) is in tension with the

platitude dissociating them, insofar as the world is one way but may be properly described in

many ways (2.2). The platitude concerning the stability of truth (1.2) sits uncomfortably next to

the platitude concerning dependent existences (2.1), since ontologically dependent entities may

not support truth claims once their categories disappear—are there truths about phlogiston, for

example? The platitude that suggests truth transcends belief (1.3) runs into trouble with

platitudes about pluralism, such as (2.2) and (2.4). The platitude requiring that a complete

description of the world include both objective and subjective aspects (3.1) and free will (3.2)

appears to be in conflict with the demand that our truths not conflict (1.4), insofar as

overdetermination is a conflict of (equally true) explanations about the same phenomena. In

terms of realism and idealism, then, the realist trying to defend the sufficiency of physical

explanations of the world is faced with the burden of defending a revisionary proposal about

'mental causation'; the idealist defending ontological pluralism is confronted with the suggestion that the world must be some way irrespective of how we happen to think about it; the realist that wishes to draw a sharp distinction between what we discover and what we project is pressed to convince her audience that, contrary to common sense, truth does not entail ontological commitment; the idealist defending the correctness of the manifest image is confronted with the commonsense demand that we respect the authority of science, since common sense is not skeptical about either. And so on.

Articulating some common sense propositions and using those claims as a touchstone should help us see that *realism* should not be used as a proxy for 'intuitive,' 'hard-nosed,' or 'commonsensical' and that *idealism* should not function as a stand-in for 'revisionary,' 'counter-intuitive,' or 'metaphysically extravagant.' My hope is that this brief excursus on the content of common sense helps us see that *both* realism and idealism will have characteristic costs, and that common sense is not tied to any particular philosophical approach. I don't want to say that common sense is neutral between realism and idealism, but rather that it appears to incline one way or the other depending on the precise question put to it. As I noted at the outset, common sense has no –isms, which are only characteristic of elaborated philosophical views. That, however, does not mean that with respect to particular issues realism or idealism may have a lighter burden.

In addition to suggesting that both realism and idealism (whatever their particular varieties) are *necessarily* revisionary, the foregoing considerations also imply that taking a stand vis-à-vis realism and idealism is *unavoidable* for philosophers articulating positions of significant scope. Realism and idealism are unavoidable because common sense lacks a consistent philosophical counterpart. That is, it is impossible to simply 'deepen' common sense

into a philosophical position, because fundamental aspects of common sense are at odds.[46]

Philosophy is *always* more or less revisionary; realism and idealism are just different methods of revision. They square the inconsistencies of commonsense presuppositions in one direction or another so that our understanding of the world might survive philosophical scrutiny.

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[46] For example, I agree with Mark Sacks in his claims that 'internalist' philosophers that hope to sidestep questions of global ontological dependence and independence—philosophers like Rorty, Quine, and Putnam (from *Reason, Truth and History*, for example)—utterly fail in this aim because their very commitment to internalism raises external questions. So, as Sacks explains, we cannot avoid the notion, no matter how stubbornly Quine, say, sticks to making ontological claims "within a theory," that "beyond the different ways of cutting the cake, there is the cake itself, or at least the base of it" (Sacks, p.35). It is not for philosophers to simply decree that that further ontological questions cannot be posed. In my view, they must either deny or accept ontological dependence. Sacks, as I mentioned earlier, thinks we can get off this see-saw of realism and idealism. I'll explain further in chapters 4 and 5 why I don't think this is possible. For now, I can repeat that realism and idealism are about negotiating our pre-philosophical commitments. As I see it, there is no way to undermine the commitments to be negotiated. Philosophical arguments to this effect will beg the question against our pre-philosophical commitments, against common sense, something that we are far clearer about than any theory of meaning that would be used to show that "we cannot get our words to mean what we would need them to mean" (Sacks, p. 179) to pose such questions.

CHAPTER 3

HEIDEGGER

§1 – Introduction: Why Heidegger?

The first chapter discussed three varieties of ontological monism to show how these seemingly intuitive and popular forms of realism actually have highly implausible consequences. Specifically, in pushing through their reductive programs, these 'scientific realisms' leave no room to account for the genuine ontological standing of what I've informally called, following Sellars, 'the manifest image of man-in-the-world.' At all costs, their intention is to satisfy a rather specific but deep intuition about the way the world is: there is one world, one self-structuring reality, and one real truth about it.[1]

In the second chapter, I maintained that this is clearly not the only broad ontological intuition that needs to be satisfied, but that there are a wide range of diverse intuitions that philosophy must address. Philosophy arises from this collection of pre-philosophical ideas and it is answerable to them, or so I argued. I called these ideas the 'platitudes of common sense' or 'pre-philosophical commonsense commitments.' These commitments do not form a consistent, coherent whole but are in tension with one another. However, this claim about the inconsistency of common sense must not be interpreted to suggest that we're all walking around struggling with deep philosophical contradictions and aporias. This, I think, is clearly not the case. What is actually inconsistent is the philosophical extension of common sense. As we develop our pre-

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[1] To be clear: I don't question the intuition, for there is plainly something to it, but only the way they attempt to satisfy it completely and at any cost. In my view, pretending that there is no such pre-philosophical intuition is as bad as holding on to it at all costs.

philosophical ideas into philosophical claims, they inevitably come into conflict with one another. To deal with this situation, philosophers must decide which developed intuitions can be sustained, which must be written off as misguided, which can be accepted so long they aren't given authority over some other commitment or set of commitments, and so forth. So, although pre-philosophically we have inconsistent ontological 'commitments,' this inconsistency does not become an issue until we attempt to impose systematic coherence on these ideas. At that point their inconsistencies are uncovered, and it is philosophy that is called to square this circle, to cut a path through this mess of commitments.

I also argued in chapter two that what we mean by realism and idealism, what really interests us in this seemingly endless debate, is the type of path that philosophers are cutting through this field of common sense commitments, something realists and idealists do in characteristically different ways. I am not claiming that there is only one realist path and one idealist path and that all philosophers addressing questions of a certain scope must pick one or the other. That is obviously not the case. There are as many varieties of realism and idealism as there are paths through the complex web of our pre-philosophical commitments. The possibilities are limitless. Be that as it may, that does not mean that different strategies cannot be organized into different kinds or that there are not important general differences between realist and idealist approaches to the issues.

Having considered some of the important problems with three strongly realist approaches to ontology, I now want to consider the case of a philosopher who emphatically resists that general ontological strategy in a way that is neither merely negative nor oblivious to what makes metaphysical realism tempting in the first place. In the remaining three chapters I will therefore take Heidegger as a kind of case study, focusing on his work from the late 1920s. His work from

this period presents an excellent idealist alternative to metaphysical realism, but also, and equally importantly, his approach challenges those that believe philosophy can be done at a much lower metaphysical cost—or without any. That is, many wish to challenge both realism *and* idealism from a deflationary, 'therapeutic' or 'pragmatist' perch, lowering the metaphysical stakes, showing how all the high-flying metaphysical speculation is unnecessary or even nonsensical. Heidegger's work, as I read it, presents an original and incisive critique of metaphysical realism and a challenge to those that would try to declare philosophical victories without ruffling common sense even a bit, i.e., those that want to combine the best aspects of scientific realism and ontological pluralism for free. The broad and heterogeneous desiderata of philosophy, including, for example, respect for both the manifest and scientific images of man, cannot be satisfied without paying a price vis-à-vis common sense. Although I readily admit that I cannot stick with Heidegger all the way to the end—I cannot accept his deep relativism, as I will explain in chapter 5—I have nevertheless found it to be a useful corrective to certain anti-philosophical trends in contemporary philosophy,[2] providing an important challenge to the idea that there is a philosophically principled way to separate pluralism from relativism.[3]

This chapter will lay the groundwork for a detailed discussion of some of the secondary literature on Heidegger's approach to ontology (chapter 4) and my reading of Heidegger as an idealist (chapter five). My first task, then, will be to introduce some of the key notions from the

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[2] Exactly what I mean by this will be clarified in chapters four and five, where I explain why Heidegger cannot be appropriated by such philosophical movements as pragmatism, therapy (Wittgenstein-ism), Rortian relativism, and metaphysical realism.

[3] I discuss this in sections 4, 5, and 6 of chapter 5, where I explain Heidegger's argument that vindicating synchronic pluralism (the idea that we can correctly describe the same thing in multiple irreducible ways) requires also defending diachronic pluralism (the idea that there can be irreducible but true accounts of the same thing over time—i.e., an incommensurability thesis).

first division of *Being and Time* in the following sections: 2.1 Being, 2.2 Dasein, 2.3 World, 2.4 Understanding, 2.5 Reality. This brief and (hopefully) relatively uncontentious introduction to Heidegger's most important work will provide a background for the explanation in section 3 of why, despite the fact that Heidegger officially refuses to apply the titles of realism and idealism to his own work, I find it to be helpful and entirely appropriate. To do this, I'll consider a few of Heidegger's programmatic claims about realism and idealism, some of which have been cited as evidence that he is somehow beyond realism and idealism, that he has somehow overcome this problematic. Now, I've argued already that I don't think *any* philosopher of a certain scope can do that—they can only address the issues; evasion is just a bad answer—but given Heidegger's comments on the subject, and how vocal some critics that put him far above the (realist-idealist) fray have been, it is imperative that I address this issue directly. Finally, in the concluding section of this chapter, section 4, I defend a basic premise of my interpretation: Heidegger's view is incompatible with any kind of metaphysical realism. Now, I am hardly going out on a limb in making this claim, for it is made, at least in passing, by virtually all the authors I'll will consider in the following chapters. However, since most of these authors are unable to interpret Heidegger to their satisfaction without backing away from his rejection of metaphysical realism, and because I will criticize them for it, it is important to see why a return to metaphysical realism is completely impossible for Heidegger.

§2 – Introducing *Being and Time*

Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time* is an original combination of phenomenology, hermeneutics, and Kantianism, folded together with reflections on anxiety, death, and meaning that later came to be associated with 'existentialism.' Needless to say, it has been hugely

influential both inside and outside academic philosophy. Outside philosophy, particularly

insofar as it serves as the basis of the more popular and accessible French variety of

existentialism, it has influenced generations of authors and artists. Inside philosophy, *Being and*

Time has been one of the most influential works of the 20th century. For example, authors as

diverse as Arendt, Sartre, Merlou-Ponty, Foucault, Levinas, Derrida, Habermas, and Rorty all

draw directly on Heidegger's work. More recently, *Being and Time* has received increasing

attention and respect from Anglophone 'analytic' philosophers, thanks in no small measure to the

efforts of Hubert Dreyfus and his students.[4] Why is there a burgeoning interest in *Being and*

Time among Anglophone philosophers whose teachers and intellectual idols thought of

Heidegger's work, if at all, as a collection of nonsense propositions and pseudo-problems, an

example of what happens when language goes on holiday? If we follow Michael Friedman's

argument in *A Parting of the Ways*, contemporary analytic and Anglophone philosophers may be

seeking a new path away from Kant, having already exhausted the possibilities for a classical

type of analytic philosophy stemming from logical positivism. That strain of philosophy placed

logical form and natural science on center stage, whereas a rethinking of the Kantian legacy from

a Heideggerian point of view emphasizes the fundamental role of human finitude and practices

(language and understanding, above all) in the constitution of a meaningful world.[5] This

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[4] The key text for this group of interpreters is Hubert Dreyfus' *Being-in-the-World* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991).

[5] There are, of course, other ways that analytic philosophy has attempted to renew itself. Among others, there is the ever-increasing interest in later Wittgenstein, a fascination with American Pragmatism, as well as a more 'scientific' path, inspired by research in artificial intelligence and cognitive science. Heideggerian phenomenology may be a particularly good fit for some Anglophone philosophers, however, since his attention to everydayness and emphasis on being ready-to-hand lends itself to assimilation to pragmatism, while phenomenology lends itself to

orientation toward human finitude and 'worldliness' (the inseparability of Dasein and world) challenges and compliments the ambitious, scientifically-minded analytical projects of the 20th century.

This Anglophone rediscovery of Heidegger and hermeneutics is good thing, both for Heidegger scholarship and for the systematic work it will influence. The general philosophical hygiene and admirable clarity of many of these post-analytic philosophers is helping to liberate some of Heidegger's important philosophical insights from the clutches of the obscurantist and insular community of the old-fashioned Anglophone Heideggerians. Heidegger's work (appropriately or not) resonates with the post-analytic Anglophone philosophers' interest in pragmatism and holism, but, in keeping with its Kantian roots, raises fundamental ontological questions that may have been previously thought too 'metaphysical' for them. What's new, however, is that this metaphysics is not to be just a metaphysics of natural science, but also a metaphysics of everydayness, taking into account our meaningful ordinary engagement in the world, asking how this is possible, how scientific understanding may grow from it, and what this implies for ontology.

Beyond this general sense that looking into Heidegger's work might give Anglo-American academics another go at the philosophical problems of the 20th century—on meaning, a priori knowledge, truth, the relation between culture and nature, etc.—there is particular interest in his original analysis of world as a contexture of significance rather than as a collection of entities, and whether this has anything to do with pragmatism; his prioritization of understanding over knowledge (and perception), and the related idea that philosophy is

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being understood in terms of conceptual analysis—simply read the phenomenology of *x* as the conceptual analysis of *x*.

hermeneutics; his account of the dependency of truth on 'unconcealment'; his treatment of discourse, language, and reference; his interpretation of the dependency of clock time on something he calls originary temporality; his engagement with the history of philosophy, particularly Kant, Descartes, and Aristotle; his rediscovery and original appropriation of the (existentialist) themes of death, anxiety, conscience, resoluteness, and authenticity; and, underlying most of these other themes, his account of human existence as Dasein, as being-in-the-world. With such a broad set of issues, and even this is just a sampling, *Being and Time* touches upon many debates while, of course, settling almost nothing. The book does, however, bring something new to all of these topics, and I hope to begin to show this in at least a few areas in what follows. Since an adequate introduction to *Being and Time* would require its own book, since I barely have the space of chapter, and since there are many such introductions available, I have confined my introduction to five key areas: 1) the question of being, 2) Dasein, 3) world, 4) understanding, and 5) reality. A discussion of these topics should be sufficient both to orient or reorient readers to the book and to begin to show in some detail how I believe it ought to be understood.

§2.1 – Being

The stated aim of *Being and Time* is to "raise anew the question of the meaning of being."[6] Unfortunately, considering its apparent importance for Heidegger's project, it's not at all

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[6] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (1927), trans., J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson, San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1962, p. 19. Hereafter, *Being and Time* will be cited as BT.

clear what this means. He declares that the question is fundamental,[7] despite being

consistently rejected or neglected as a suitable issue,[8] and despite saying that he intends to work

out the question concretely,[9] his comments on the topic tend to be negative, explaining what the

question of the meaning of being is *not*, and what are *not* insurmountable problems for it. Taken

together, however, these negative comments are instructive, and by considering some of the

reasons he doesn't think that the question is useless or impossible to address, we may be able to

get a more positive sense of what the question of the meaning of being actually is.

In the first place, according to Heidegger, our way to the question may be blocked by a

presupposition that we already know what being is, namely, that it is nothing more than the most

general concept reached by abstraction from that which is concretely 'in being.' The idea here is

that if we go up the ladder of abstraction far enough,[10] we eventually reach the most general

concept of all, 'being,' and our question is answered. Heidegger's claim, however, is that the

universality of being is not the universality of a class or genus. It is not the most general

classification of one type of thing or another. Moreover, abstracting from different types of

beings leaves us with rather different ideas of being: the being of nature is very different from

the being of numbers or the being of a fictional character in a story.[11] The highest generic

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[7] "…providing a stimulus for the researches of Plato and Aristotle… [persisting] through many 'retouchings' down to the 'logic' of Hegel" (BT, p. 21).

[8] "…a dogma has been developed which not only declares the question about the meaning of being to be superfluous, but sanctions its complete neglect." Ibid.

[9] "Our provisional aim is the interpretation of *time* as the possible horizon for any understanding whatsoever of being" (BT, p. 21).

[10] Cf. William Blattner, *Heidegger's Being and Time* (New York: Continuum, 2006).

[11] Dreyfus, p. 10.

concepts are diverse—what do the being of nature and the being of numbers have in common?—and can only be united by analogy. But isn't being unified by more than a word? Its unity is presumably illustrated by its absolute necessity to all things, though it is not something discoverable as hidden 'inside' everything like a secret ingredient. Following this clue, being may be described as a kind of 'transcendental' universal. But what is that? All that has been said so far only goes to show that being is actually *not* well understood, however important it may be.

Some also presuppose that, as a consequence of its "supreme universality," the concept of 'being' is indefinable.[12] We cannot reach the concept of being from above, since there is nothing greater than it to identify it with, and not from below, because we could never reach (all-encompassing) 'being' by way of any collection of entities. Moreover, being does not have the character of a super-entity, and so cannot be defined in the ordinary sense of noting its particular and distinctive properties. Heidegger, of course, insists that this kind of indefiniability does not mean that the concept of being is meaningless, but just that it will have to be approached differently. We are not looking for the most general category, the most important ingredient in things, or any kind of entity. We are looking for what makes beings intelligible as what they are.

Finally, it is also presupposed that of all concepts 'being' is the most self-evident. After all, any time that we assert anything or comport ourselves towards anything we are 'making use' of being and so must have some kind of understanding of it. Heidegger grants that in our everyday, ordinary dealings we have an understanding of being, but that it is only a kind of average intelligibility of being that "merely demonstrates that this is unintelligible."[13] Our

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[12] BT, p. 23.

[13] Ibid.

average intelligibility only indicates that any time we understand anything as anything there lurks an "*a priori* enigma." The centrality of 'being' combined with our limited understanding of it seems, again, to make it an appropriate philosophical topic. On the positive side, the fact that we do have an average understanding of being is essential to the rest of the investigation, since it is something that we can develop in philosophical reflection, and could not advance a step in the study of being (i.e., ontology) without.

What Heidegger wants to communicate through these initial reflections is not only that we lack an answer to the question of being, but also that the question itself has not been adequately formulated. The official task of the book, therefore, is to find a frame for this question and a concrete way of pursuing it. To begin, then, it would seem that we need to have some idea of what being is. From the discussion of common presuppositions about being we can gather a few things. First and foremost, being is not an entity. Rather, "being is that which determines entities as entities, that on the basis of which entities are already understood, however we may discuss them in detail."[14] In asking the question of the meaning of being, Heidegger is not forming a search party for god, he is not looking for a super-entity that makes all others real. Asking about the meaning of being is asking for an account of how it is possible for something to be identifiable, determinable, or intelligible as whatever it is.

The sciences are one way of bringing determinacy to entities, but in so doing they *already* operate in an understanding of being, that is, they already draw upon a prior understanding of what it is about beings that 'counts,' that makes them intelligible as what that they are. As contrasted with the sciences, the question of being aims at "ascertaining the a priori

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[14] BT, pp. 25-6.

conditions … for the possibility of the sciences … [and] also for the possibility of those ontologies themselves which are prior to the ontical sciences and which provide their foundations."[15] In other words, the sciences give accounts of entities, while ontological questions are concerned with the (always prior) determinations that allow entities to appear as the entities that they are. The question of being concerns how it is possible for us to have such an understanding, that is, how it is possible for us to make sense of anything at all, and, in particular, what the different possibilities for being are, its different modes, the scope of our a priori understanding, etc. Addressing 'regional' questions about different types of entities, as science aims to do, will never add up to an explanation of how all these regional ontologies are possible in the first place. In Heidegger's jargon, science is ontic, concerned with entities, while philosophy, which Heidegger identifies with ontology, is strictly ontological, concerned with being, with what determines entities as such entities.

The question of the *meaning* of being isn't a free floating question; it is also a question about us, about how beings are meaningful to us as the things that they are, about how it is possible for us to both understand and misunderstand the world and all that we encounter within it. In the Kantian spirit, Heidegger is asking 'how possible' questions not only about the intelligibility of nature as nature (as Kant did), but of all aspects of being—whether something has presence-at-hand, readiness-to-hand, or Dasein as its kind of being—of how these different modes of being are related, how they are accessed, who we are that we are given this access, and what all this means for ontology, for what it means to determine entities as entities.

If being is always the being of entities (since it doesn't hover behind things, like a magical spirit), it is the entities themselves that must be interrogated in addressing the question

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[15] BT, p. 31.

of the meaning being. In that case, however, there is a question of *which* entities should be interrogated. What has priority? As Heidegger puts it:

> Being lies in the fact that something is, and in its being as it is; in reality; in presence-at-hand; in subsistence; in validity; in Dasein; in the 'there is.' In which entities is the meaning of being to be discerned?[16]

Unsurprisingly, there is something which all these varied references to being share:

> Looking at something, understanding and conceiving it, choosing, access to it—all these ways of behaving are constitutive for our inquiry, and therefore are modes of being for those particular entities which we, the inquirers are ourselves. Thus to work out the question of being adequately, we must make an entity—the inquirer—transparent in his own being.[17]

All questions of the being of entities depend on our access to those entities. Any question about the being of entities therefore presupposes a question about our being, the being which has an understanding of being. Since there is no God's Eye View from which to investigate the *meaning* of being, the perspective from which we are going to explore being, our perspective, must be made transparent. The hope is that investigating our access to being will be ontologically significant. If Heidegger is correct, the question of the meaning of being and the question of access are inseparable. As an aside, it should be noted that the questioning of the questioner undertaken in *Being and Time* is only done with the intention of addressing the broader question concerning the meaning of being. There are many insights that arise in *Being and Time* suitable for a philosophical anthropology, but that legitimate ontic task is not the book's; it is concerned with ontological rather than psychological or anthropological questions.

Inquiring into the being of something means asking about the horizon within which something is intelligible as the thing that it is. As Heidegger attempts to stretch his analysis

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[16] BT, p. 26.

[17] BT, pp. 26-7.

toward ever wider horizons, the project eventually falters in the attempt to interpret time as the horizon for being in general. That famous failure, and the eventual abandonment of the (specific) project of *Being and Time*, does not mean that the question of the meaning of being was doomed from the start or that the critics that believe the question of the meaning of being to be a pseudo-problem have been vindicated.

The fate of Heidegger's project should not be taken as an indictment of his basic question. He notes the broad importance of the question of being on the first page of *Being and Time*, suggesting that it was the "stimulus for the researches of Plato and Aristotle." As I see it, the question plays a similar role for Heidegger, having a kind of regulative importance, an importance as a fundamental philosophical stimulus. Undoubtedly, the question will remain unanswered—I'm happy to go out on a limb and say that it will never be solved once and for all. *Being and Time*, and the question of the meaning of being more generally, is not like a murder mystery, solved as if it were some kind of whodunit. There is neither an ultimate horizon for our understanding of being, nor a single way that being must be understood. However our understanding of being may be deepened, however sophisticated we may become in our approach to ontology, the issues will also remain open. The question of the meaning of being calls us to explain our (seeming inexhaustible) presuppositions about being, to address questions concerning how beings are able to be as the beings they are. Doing this, the question of the meaning of being stimulates ontological research. It presses us to explain our own role as the being which has an understanding of being, and to articulate the multi-faceted being of that which is always understood—the world. It calls us to ask for more than regional and ontic explanations of phenomena, suggesting that these categories should be explained further, in terms of their very possibility. The question of the meaning of being asks about unity amidst

ontic diversity and for philosophical insight in a time when 'pragmatism,' 'therapy,' and 'scientific-mindedness' pretend to have put systematic philosophy to sleep once and for all. Heidegger's question of being is the stimulus for an open-ended but systematic philosophy: He challenges us to take a synoptic view of our ontological commitments, but also reminds us that our ontological commitments aren't static, and that understanding our ontological system will require an understanding of ourselves, of our own historical Dasein, of our factical disclosedness.

§2.2 – Dasein

In pursuing the question of the meaning of being, the first being to be interrogated is the one doing the questioning. Access to beings is important for ontology, whether one operates within the Cartesian frame of a 'knowing subject' trying to understand an 'external object' or not. Even if we reject the 'Cartesian framework' of isolated subject and objects, we are still owed an explanation of how it is possible for human beings to grasp things just as they are, as well as how our apprehension of things does not somehow effect what is understood—after all, it's far from obvious that the categories we use to think about things are suited to the things themselves. If it is not an issue of 'fit,' if that is somehow too Cartesian, that will also have to be explained, since it suggests that our access to beings is somehow automatically acceptable or is somehow constitutive of its object. Whatever the case may be, access is an ineliminable part of ontology.

Access is particularly important for Heidegger, since he clearly believes that our way of disclosing beings shapes how they are properly understood—whether it is the discovery of things ready-to-hand as equipment, of things present-at-hand in their substantial presence, or the disclosure of ourselves and others as beings defined by the ability to take a stand on their own being. For each of these three basic modes of being, Dasein's access to being, however anti-

Cartesian your gloss of Dasein may be, is essential to the way these beings are disclosed and discovered 'in themselves.'

So, as is already clear, Heidegger calls the being doing the investigating "Dasein," a term that designates the kind of being that each of us are.[18] The term emphasizes existence, while attempting to avoid prejudicing the interpretation of exactly who we are with notions of humanity, rationality, consciousness, being created by god, or any other familiar philosophical baggage. According to Heidegger's analysis, Dasein is not (in the first place, at least) to be understood as a *thing* that has some very special properties, such as rationality or consciousness, or a very special history, such as being created by god. Indeed, the essence of Dasein is categorically different from that of any determinate present-at-hand or ready-to-hand thing. Instead, "the essence of this entity lies in its 'to be.' … *The 'essence' of Dasein lies in its existence*."[19] That which we assign to the being of Dasein are not the properties of a substance, like the tallness of a tree or the blueness of a house. That which is predicated of Dasein are ways for it to be, ways that it may or may not take ownership for. They are not properties that attach to it essentially as if it is a kind of soul-substance or subject.

To say that Dasein's essence is existence is tantamount to saying that Dasein has no essence in the conventional sense, that is, in the way that ordinary things present-at-hand or ready-to-hand do, although it this certainly doesn't prevent us from understanding people as things present-at-hand that we might, say, measure, or as something ready-to-hand that we might

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[18] We don't simply say that Dasein is code for human beings for at least two reasons. 1) Debatably, at least, Heidegger leaves it open whether humans are in fact the only kinds of beings that are Dasein, and, more importantly, 2) talking about Dasein that way will tend to prejudice our understanding its being.

[19] BT, p. 67.

use for our own purposes. Furthermore, saying that Dasein has no essence in the way that

things have an essence, a fixed identity, obviously cannot mean that there is nothing constraining

the kind of being that Dasein is or can make itself into; we obviously cannot just become

whatever we care to imagine. Dasein is most certainly constrained, and these constraints

constitute Dasein's facticity. Dasein's facticity is not like the factuality of things present-at-hand,

which must respond to circumstances in mechanical or automatic ways. Dasein is more than a

differential response mechanism, insofar as the facts about Dasein are always already taken up

and "interpreted" (though not necessarily explicitly or consciously) by existing Dasein. We take

up our constraints and 'project' our possibilities (again, not necessarily explicitly) based on that

appropriation, an appropriation that has everything to do with the world that we have grown into.

Dasein exists as a thrown-project: it is always already in the world understandingly, projecting

its own possibilities in it and ontological possibilities for it.

To say that Dasein exists is to say that being is always an issue for it. So long as Dasein

is, it is always concerned with being, its own being and the being of the innerworldly entities in

its environment. Actual things in the ordinary sense, things present-at-hand or even things ready-

to-hand, like a house, tree, or a hammer are not comported toward being at all. For such things

being neither is nor is not an issue, they have no comportment whatsoever. Being-comported

requires having an understanding of being—it means to exist not as a thing, but as an entity

whose being is an issue for itself. To say that Dasein's essence is to exist means that concern

with being, its own being, other Dasein, and the being of entities within the world, is not an

interest that Dasein may or may not have, as a person may or may not have an interest in

baseball. In its very being, Dasein is that being for whom being is an issue: it always already has

an understanding of being. This a priori understanding structures Dasein's possibilities for

being, possibilities that it may seize upon, allow to pass, or take up in just going with the flow.

Even if it is not possible to determine the essence of a particular case of Dasein outside of

its concrete possibilities for being and the way in which it lives these possibilities, it is still

possible to formally describe the being of Dasein just as being-in-the-world. For Heidegger this

phrase indicates the unity of what he calls the "existentialia" of Dasein, which are formal

characteristics of the being of the being defined by its existence, to be contrasted with

"categories," which define the being of entities unlike Dasein. Things unlike Dasein are defined

by their specific ways of being ready-to-hand or present-at-hand. Consider, for example,

Aristotle's or Kant's categories, categories of substance, unity, plurality, causality, and the like.[20]

Saying that something is an existeniale of Dasein or a categorical property of an entity unlike

Dasein is to assert that some thing or some ability is necessary for a kind of being to be the thing

that it is. For example, we may assert of a tree that it is spatial, that it interacts with other things

in causal relations, that it is a substance, etc. Denying that such a thing fails to fit these categories

is to make it unrecognizable as what it is. What, for example, is a causally inert or non-spatial

tree? Although 'existentialia' are ways of being for Dasein and are not categories for things

ready-to-hand or present-at-hand, they are analogous to categories insofar as they say something

about the way Dasein must be in order to be what it is: a being with a special relation to being,

that is, Dasein is a being that is at once ontic and ontological and, as such, has special ontological

significance.

Heidegger calls this analysis of Dasein in connection with the question of being

fundamental ontology. This title is appropriate because insofar as Dasein exists it always already

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[20] BT, p. 70.

has an understanding of its world and the entities that become accessible within it.[21] Because

of this *priority* with respect to being—since being is *always* an issue for Dasein, determinative

for it—the existential analytic of Dasein *is* fundamental ontology. The interpretation of the being

of Dasein "exhibits the horizon for any further ontological study of those entities which do not

have the character of Dasein." At least in this respect, fundamental ontology is a recognizably

Kantian analytical project of "working out the conditions on which the possibility of any

ontological investigation depends."[22]

     Like Kant, Heidegger emphasizes that the ontological priority of Dasein "has obviously

nothing in common with a vicious subjectivizing of the totality of entities."[23] He attempts to

counter that impression by citing Aristotle's *De Anima,* which notes that "man's soul is, in a

certain way, entities."[24] He continues, "the soul which makes up the Being of man … discovers

all entities, both in the fact *that* they are and, in their Being *as* they are—that is, always in their

Being."[25] Without Dasein there is no *access* to being, but that does not mean that Dasein creates

entities or that entities only exist as an idea in Dasein's mind. Nevertheless, the question of

whether Heidegger's ontology subjectivizes being (even after it does away with 'the subject')

remains a nagging question. Heidegger needs to explain the ways in which Dasein's access is

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[21] BT, p. 33.

[22] BT, p. 62. "Philosophy is universal phenomenological ontology, and takes its departure from the hermeneutic of Dasein, which, as an analytic of *existence*, has made fast the guiding-line for all philosophical inquiry at the point where it *arises* and to which it *returns*" (Ibid.).

[23] BT, p. 34.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Ibid.

related to what is accessed. To say that 'Dasein frees beings to be what they are' hardly

resolves the issue.

The apparently conventional opening move of his project (i.e., the analysis of Dasein as

the ontologically privileged entity, as the 'subject') buries him with questions that grow from a

traditional Cartesian analysis. And this is entirely appropriate. After all, how is it possible to

inquire into the being of the subject (whether called the subject or 'Dasein') as the pivot point for

all ontological inquiry without confronting *subjectivism*? Methodologically, how can one begin

with the subject without asking how that subject can access *objective* reality? In light of his

repeated denials of the Cartesian problematic—that Dasein is not a subject and the world is not

an object—he is nevertheless obliged to actually defend this claim by explaining why traditional

subjectivist concerns are not to the point, and that attempts to address them accomplishes little

more than the entrenchment of unfounded (but apparently intractable) pseudo-problems. He

spends the better part of the first half of *Being and Time* explaining how Cartesian questions

concerning skepticism, knowledge, and access to the objective world are inappropriate, and are

only possible when presupposing a mistaken idea of an independent subject trying to get a grip

on an independent world.

Against the subjectivist interpretation of his work, Heidegger holds that Dasein is being-

in-the-world, and, as such, has always already grown up into its world, understanding it and itself

in terms of it. Dasein and world are not separate things that are somehow joined together by

consciousness, but two sides of the same coin, one side absolutely unintelligible without the

other. In its being, Dasein always has an understanding of its world, understanding itself in terms

of this world and projecting its understanding back into it. To see more clearly why Heidegger

believes subjectivist concerns are inappropriate here, we will have to learn more about what it

means to say that Dasein is being-in-the-world, which can only be done if we first explain what Heidegger intends by 'world.'

§2.3 – World

According to Heidegger, the subject-object schema underlying the traditional problems of epistemology is 'phenomenologically inadequate': Dasein is never an isolated subject struggling to reach the world. I've already discussed some of what goes into Heidegger's re-imagining of the subject as Dasein, as being-in-the-world, and now it is important to think about another aspect of that new schema, 'the object.' In *Being and Time* this means considering what Heidegger means by 'world.'

Again, for it to be reasonable to accuse Heidegger of 'subjectivism' in metaphysics, Dasein must be a subject and the world must be the object that the subject distorts, creates, or perceives, depending. Heidegger does not describe Dasein this way at all, of course. Unlike a Cartesian subject, Dasein cannot be cut off from the world, for being Dasein means being world-disclosive. Dasein cannot be what it is without disclosing the world. Yet, although Dasein and world are inextricably linked, Dasein (being-in-the-world) can nevertheless be analyzed in terms of *who* it is (Dasein in its everydayness), how we should understand its *being-in* (in terms of understanding, state-of-mind, and discourse), and what is meant by *world*.

This analysis is obviously not like a scientific dissection of an entity, investigating the precise way in which Dasein is 'plugged in' to the world, as though we were explaining the way that the femur fits into the pelvis. There is no 'side-by-sideness' of Dasein and world, as if they

were two entities in 'world-space.'[26] 'Being-in' is not a spatial property added on to Dasein as a thing present-at-hand. Insofar as Dasein has 'properties,' they are not properly considered in the same way as the properties of a thing, although this is also possible and in many ways. But, for the most part, this is not how Dasein shows itself. Dasein is usually dispersed in its world, concerned with its world, fascinated by it, and all that presses in upon it in everyday existence. Dasein is not thing with an additional property called 'being-in-the-world,' and the relationships that would make that kind of analysis appropriate are only possible in the first place *because* Dasein is being-in-the-world, because Dasein as being-in-the-world made presence-at-hand, and the side-by-sideness of things and persons accessible as such, not the other way around.[27]

The fundamental Cartesian mistake, according to Heidegger, is to imagine Dasein and world as two things side-by-side, or as a small thing inside a larger thing, where the smaller thing, relying on its special property of 'thinking,' eventually reaches out to the larger thing in order to establish a connection. The Cartesian calls this relationship *knowing*, and believes it is the basic way that we are related to the world. Heidegger denies this, arguing that the relation of knowing' is only possible because we are, in our very being, being-in-the-world. This means that there is no Dasein without an understanding of being, which is always already an understanding of its world. 'Worldless Dasein' is an oxymoron, while 'worldless subject' is not, and is serves as the basis for the lion's share of the great early modern epistemological problems. With that

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[26] BT, p. 81.

[27] BT, p. 84.

paralyzing set of problems in mind, Heidegger is at pains to establish that, "subject and

object do not coincide with Dasein and the world."[28]

> When Dasein directs itself towards something and grasps it, it does not somehow first get
> out of an inner sphere in which it has been proximally encapsulated, but its primary kind
> of being is such that it is always 'outside' alongside entities which it encounters and
> which belong to a world already discovered. Nor is any inner sphere abandoned when
> Dasein dwells alongside the entity to be known, and determines its character; but even in
> this 'being-outside' alongside the object, Dasein is still 'inside,' if we understand this in
> the correct sense; that is to say, it is itself 'inside' as a being-in-the-world which knows.
> And furthermore, the perceiving of what is known is not a process of returning with one's
> booty to the cabinet of consciousness after one has gone out and grasped it; even in
> perceiving, retaining, and preserving, the Dasein which knows *remains outside* and it
> does so *as Dasein*.[29]

Essential to the subject-object schema is the idea that the subject is a kind of whole, sufficient

unto itself, but that it can open itself in perception to the world, allowing images, sounds, and

smells, etc. to flow into its inner sphere. In this schema, we are inside, the world is outside, and

there will always remain a question as to whether we have really gotten outside to the world with

our faculties of perception, or whether we are just putting on a show for ourselves. But this way

of imagining a gap between the outer world and inner consciousness is only possible on the basis

of our existence as being-in-the-world. As being-in-the-world we are always already 'outside' in

the world understandingly. It is possible for us to subsequently identify ourselves with the things

around us and to misidentify ourselves as things with special properties (the ability to think or

talk, for example) and the world as a super-thing, as the super-substance.

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[28] BT, p. 87.

[29] BT, p. 89.

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger outlines three senses of 'world.'[30] First, there is the 'ontical' sense of the world as a collection of entities, as an agglomeration of all the stuff around us, from tables and chairs to planets and galaxies. Second, there is an 'ontological' sense, concerning the being of those entities. To understand world in this sense, think of possible objects of a particular sort: the possible objects for a mathematician, the possible objects of nature, etc. In order to distinguish which possible objects are acceptable, we must think of the being (whatever makes those entities intelligible as the things they are) of those things. So, in this second sense of world, the term refers to all the things that a person concerned with a particular domain could mention as belonging to that domain. It is not just the collection of entities, but a determination about why such entities fit where they do. In this way, this sense of world is 'ontological' and not 'ontic,' that is, it is not just concerned with entities, but with their being. Third, we can think of world as the 'wherein' Dasein lives. In this sense, we can say that there is a public world, a political world, a world of sport, and so forth. World in this sense is not a thing but a contexture of significance *'wherein'* Dasein exists. It is a framework 'wherein' things are able to make sense as the things that they are, into which Dasein is thrown and always already finds itself, and into which it can project possibilities, both for itself and for the things that it understands within the world. This is the central sense of the term in *Being and Time*. In addition to these three senses of world, there is the ontological-existential (pertaining to being and the existence of Dasein) notion of worldhood in general (Heidegger actually refers to this as a fourth sense of world). 'Worldhood' points to the general structure of world in the third sense, to it's a priori character, to the structure of the world as the contexture of significance wherein Dasein exists.

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[30] BT, p. 93.

In order to explain this notion of a 'wherein' of our being-in-the-world, Heidegger begins with an account of our environment, which is also to say, an account of our absorption in those things in our midst that concern us. We are constantly 'dealing' with something, putting something to use, returning something to its place, improving or producing something, or just idly fiddling, as when we flip through television channels, surf the internet, or arrange things on our desk. What we encounter in this everyday concern is equipment. It is always equipment for… even if it is just equipment for residing and 'doing nothing.' Equipment is something suitable and appropriate for our particular ends. There are as many kinds of equipment as there are types of ends that we may have. There can therefore be equipment for building, for making music, for relaxing, for cooking, getting from one place to another, for amusement, and so forth. There are also therefore limits as to what can count as equipment for what. We can't use a house as equipment for residing if it's made out of ginger bread and only two feet high, for example. Equipment has the kind of being that Heidegger calls readiness-to-hand. It is debatable whether everything with this kind of being is equipment, or whether equipment is a subclass of being ready-to-hand, which has the additional character of being suitable for… and appropriate for…, but it is not necessary to work out such details here.[31]

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[31] Those that see *Being and Time* as a kind of phenomenology of 'absorbed coping' find details such as these to be fascinating. Is a hammer still equipment when it is sitting in a drawer? Is it ready-to-hand or unready-to-hand? Are these separate ways of being, or is unreadiness-to-hand a subclass of the readiness-to-hand? And so forth. Perhaps there is an interesting phenomenology of practice to be done, but I find such questions tedious. There are more pressing questions that remain unaddressed, from what Dasein-dependence of being really amounts to, to what this all means for Heidegger's idea of objectivity. It is not that that we have to choose to address one set of issues or the other, but the undue emphasis on the structure of practice makes it seem as though an analysis of practice were Heidegger's primary concern, as if practical engagement with equipment were something more than just one way in which we disclose the world. I discuss the pragmatist reading of *Being and Time* in chapters 4 and 5.

Importantly, Heidegger emphasizes that there is no such thing as 'an' equipment.[32] Since equipment is necessarily relational, it is impossible to meet up with isolated pieces of equipment that are only subsequently collected to make up a world. What we meet up with in the first place, for example, is not a chair as equipment for sitting, then a table as equipment for setting down our coffee, then the lamp as equipment for the illumination of a magazine, which may be equipment for entertainment. What we encounter first of all is the room

> not as something 'between four walls' in a geometrical spatial sense, but as equipment for residing. Out of this the 'arrangement' emerges, and it is in this that any 'individual' item of equipment shows itself. *Before* it does so, a totality of equipment has already been discovered.[33]

In normal circumstances, entering a room means encountering contexture of equipmental 'assignments' within it. In the room we find a place to rest, with chair, table, and lamp all assigned to one another to make this room the kind that it is, suitable, perhaps, for reading a book or having a conversation, but not for making a pot roast. We don't usually open the door to a room and tabulate assignments, *inferring* that this room is suitable for this or for that, but just go into the room and use it appropriately or inappropriately, or find it unsuitable for our purposes. What we are encountering environmentally is not first of all a collection of present-at-hand things with additional subjective coloring, with the added on value of being good for, say, book reading. As Heidegger's description is an attempt to draw our attention to the fact that we do not first discover things present-at-hand only to tack on the 'value' of its being useful for this or that or of being related to this or that thing. Calculation of properties, relations, and uses may come after the fact or in very unusual circumstances, as when we enter a room unlike any we've seen

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[32] BT, p. 97.

[33] BT, p. 98.

before, as we might if we had unearthed some unfamiliar structure in an archeological

expedition. Most fundamentally, and for the most part, we just press forward into our

environment, finding situations and circumstances more or less supportive of our ends, whatever

those may be.

It is important to exercise caution here, because it is easy to misunderstand the kind of

priority that equipment (things ready-to-hand, always already bound up in context of significance

that pertains to our way of living, and appropriate for use in achieving our ends) has over things

present-at-hand (things with calculable properties, substances) as a claim that the world is

essentially constituted by equipment, or that equipment rather than 'nature' (as something always

already present-at-hand) is fundamental, in the sense of being the 'ground level' of reality.

Presence-at-hand and readiness-to-hand are *both* fundamental ways of being, but collections of

entities present-at-hand or ready-to-hand do not constitute the being of the world. Entities are

'within the world' or are 'innerworldly,' but the world itself is not an entity within the world; it

is always prior. In Heidegger's terms: even if the priority of the ready-to-hand over the present-

at-hand can be demonstrated

> …have all these explications been of the slightest help towards understanding the
> phenomenon of world ontologically? In interpreting these entities within the world,
> however, we have always 'presupposed' the world. Even if we join them together, we
> still do not get anything like world as their sum.[34]

Heidegger is not advocating a 'pragmatic' conception of world over a 'theoretical' one, as some

commentators would like to believe. It is true that the ready-to-hand is *encountered* first in our

everyday being-in-the-world, but that does not mean that the world is 'in itself' made up of

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[34] BT, pp. 101-2.

practical relations any more than it is 'in itself' composed of things present-at-hand.[35] As

noted in the passage, the world has priority over all entities, whether ready-to-hand or present-at-

hand. It is only on the basis of the world that both practical 'assignments' and the 'bare' things of

nature are intelligible in the first place.[36]

In order to clarify this unfamiliar idea of world as a phenomenon that makes the entities

within the world intelligible but is not itself an entity, Heidegger considers situations when

something is missing, unusable, or in the way. When things are out of order the assignment

structure of our environment becomes conspicuous. For example, my reliance on an internet

connection is never more evident than when the connection goes down. My possibilities of

communication are curtailed, the formerly useful computer on my desk is reduced to a rather

unremarkable word-processor, and in my inability to talk on the phone, get news, or send an

email, I realize the ways in which I rely on that connection to do what I do. In the unusability of

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[35] Moreover, it is also not the case that Dasein could be what it is if it were only involved with its environment as something ready-to-hand. Dasein is distinctive in its ability to be engaged in the world both practically and theoretically—for Dasein to be Dasein it must be more than a being that mindlessly copes with its environment, however important this may be.

[36] Again: "The world is not an entity within the world… but only insofar as 'there is' a world can entities be encountered in their being" (BT, p. 102). Odd as it may at first sound, there can be no question of either the ready-to-hand being founded on the present-at-hand or the present-at-hand being founded on the ready-to-hand. Both the ready-to-hand and present-at-hand are ways of being, are ways of being intelligible. Both ways of being are founded on the unitary phenomenon called being-in-the-world, not each other. If the question is 'what is the furniture of the universe?' the answer depends on how that question is unpacked. In our ordinary experience we have a view of 'what there really is,' and science has an ever evolving idea of how to characterize this 'furniture.' Getting at 'the furniture' is an interpretive project of finding a perspective that can take an explanatory advantage on all others. We can rest assured that for the time being there is no such perspective. Powerful as science is, is has not explained-away the lifeworld, and as vivid as our experience of the lifeworld may be, it has yet lead us to cast off science and all its odd posits of things like quarks, electrons, particles, and waves. The present-at-hand and ready-to-hand are autonomous ways of making phenomena intelligible. When it comes to asking which is 'really real,' the answer has to be both.

the internet connection, the way I work, my 'workshop,' is 'lit up' and laid open for consideration. The smooth functioning of my afternoon grinds to a halt: in the breakdown of my workshop the 'wherein' of my concern is brought to my attention, and in this breakdown "the world announces itself."[37]

This is not the announcement of some great or important thing or collection of things—not something(s) present-at-hand or ready-to-hand—but of the 'there' that abides prior to our dealing with any particular entity, prior to our ascertainment of the many details about our various environments and contexts that, if need be, we can list off.[38] The world is announced as the always already disclosed contexture of significance wherein entities can be the entities they are, whether as we proximally encounter them in their readiness-to-hand, or shorn of their ordinary referential relations as things just present-at-hand-and-no-more. It is not that things present-at-hand are without significance and are therefore worldless, but that their significance is calculated in terms of quantifiable properties also present-at-hand; it is just a different model, to borrow term from economics. The possibility of discovering things present-at-hand is *also* revelatory of world, albeit of a different aspect of our world than we discover in our everyday dealings with the things closest to us.

Again, we might be tempted to ask, what is the world 'in itself'? In Heidegger's estimation, so long as we take our clue from entities ready-to-hand or present-at-hand we will miss the point. He is not arguing that things really are the way they show up in our practical

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[37] BT, p. 105.

[38] Ibid. Of course, we may be able to list off much about our environments, but we don't need to be able to analyze our environments explicitly, or provide an account of the things (present-at-hand) in before us for these things to be discovered in this way. Discovery need not be explicit or articulated, which is not to say that it is unrelated to discourse or somehow possible without it or prior to it.

involvements any more than things really are the way we understand them when quantified

by physical sciences. Both presence-at-hand and readiness-to-hand are ways of being that entities

within the world show themselves *in themselves*. Both reveal the being 'in itself' of these beings,

even though neither way of accounting for these things properly characterizes the being of the

world, for it is not (in the first place) an entity or collection of entities. The world is not 'in itself'

either present-at-hand or ready-to-hand, and it is only on the basis of the world that such ways of

being can be encountered. It is only with reference to world that the notion of 'in itself' makes

sense ontologically. It is idle to ask, for example, about the *being* of the 'unworlded' world, as

some are tempted to do. The 'unworlded world,' as Heidegger occasionally notes, is essentially

unintelligible because it is essentially worldless.[39] Intelligibility is tied to world-disclosure.

The world is a condition of possibility for the intelligibility of all things within the world,

and in inquiring into the being of the entities within the world, we can go no further in

uncovering their true being than by understanding the disclosure of the world that makes them

intelligible as what they are.

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[39] It would be a mistake to think of this unintelligible de-worlded world as the real stuff that we are unable to get to because of an interfering veil of perception. It is Dasein's way of being that discloses the being of entities within the world in the first place. This disclosure reveals entities as the entities they are, and without this disclosure of being, these entities would lack identity conditions—they would not 'be.' It is not, of course, that the 'realia' would disappear, but that without a context of significance, they would be meaningless—they could not show themselves as they are. There is no 'absolute' contexture of significance that abides in nature, supplying identity conditions with or without the disclosure of Dasein. To think this way is to think of the world as disclosed by god—a god's eye point of view—but that is just to think of god as one more eternal Dasein that discloses a world that is magically adequate to things as they are anyway, irrespective of any way they may happen to be disclosed. But, again, this is to think of entities as having identities 'in themselves,' outside of all identity conditions.

> The world is … something 'wherein' Dasein as an entity already was, and if in any manner it explicitly comes away from anything it can never do more than come back to the world.[40]

There is no possibility of asking any *further* question about the 'true being' of entities within the world, for the world is always prior to any determination we might make of the being-in-itself of entities. Heidegger's claim, of course, is not that the world, as a manifestation of our always prior understanding of being, inhibits us from understanding things as they really are. To the contrary, it is only because we always already have an understanding of being that entities can show up for us as they are. Without world, without an understanding of being, there is no ontological determinacy whatsoever—there is no being outside of an understanding of being.

§2.4 – Understanding

'Understanding' has ontological significance for Heidegger, and his questions about understanding do not amount to epistemology by another name. In *Being and Time*, understanding is not one way of cognizing among others, but is the basis of all cognition as its condition of possibility.[41] Questions of ontology—questions about the meaning of being and the being of entities—are intimately bound up with questions about Dasein's understanding. After all, questions of ontology are nothing more than questions about being insofar as it is intelligible to Dasein, even if the question is 'what is there *anyway*?' For what there is anyway to have any meaning for us whatsoever, it must be disclosed by Dasein, and so must be made accessible in Dasein's understanding of being.

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[40] BT, p. 106-7.

[41] BT, p. 182.

This isn't intended to (implausibly) rule out realism by definition. Realist interpreters may agree with the point about access while also believing that Dasein can, as it were, 'deworld' its understanding so as to grasp entities, or at least have some coherent idea of them, just as they are anyway, independently of their involvements with Dasein. And indeed, Heidegger talks from time to time about deworlding and an understanding of things as just present-at-hand-and-no-more. Considering his claims about understanding will help us decide whether such detached, God's Eye View realism is actually an option for a someone following Heidegger's basic approach.

Understanding is constitutive of Dasein's 'being-in,' and is therefore a fundamental aspect of how Dasein is *being-in*-the-world. This 'being-in' is characterized by what Heidegger calls 'projection.' Accordingly, we are never just 'there' seeing things outside of all contexts. The very possibility of discovering beings as they are depends upon the disclosedness of Dasein, which depends on the possibility of understanding running ahead of any interpretation of particular entities within the world. Our *projective* understanding supplies the identity conditions for entities by supplying the meaningful context within which entities can be identified as the things that they are. On this view, therefore, projective understanding has priority over all perception. There is no possibility of 'simple seeing' without prior understanding. Without understanding we simply could not see anything *as* anything, whether as a bare physical presence, as a coffee cup, or as a crime. Understanding discloses the world, and makes the entities within it discoverable. In understanding

> not only is the world, *qua* world, disclosed in its possible significance, but when that which is within-the-world is itself freed, this entity is freed for *its own* possibilities. That which is ready-to-hand is discovered as such in its serviceability, its usability, and its detrimentality. The totality of involvements is revealed as the categorical whole of a *possible* interconnection of the ready-to-hand. But even the 'unity' of the manifold

present-at-hand, of nature, can be discovered only if a *possibility* of it has been disclosed.[42]

Possible ways of being must be disclosed before particular entities may be discovered. That this principle would apply to that which is ready-to-hand is not surprising. If we haven't ever known of anything like a tool for working wood, it wouldn't be possible to understand that we have come across something of that sort in encountering what we call a hammer. To understand the being of some equipment in itself, as it is (appropriately) used, it stands to reason that we would need to have some prior grasp of what these kinds of tools are in general, in what particular kind of 'workshop' this one might fit, and so forth.

When it comes to beings present-at-hand, however, it is perhaps less obvious that possible ways of being would need to be disclosed prior to the discovery of particular entities. With regard to beings present-at-hand, the commonsense supposition is that no prior disclosure is necessary to make substances intelligible as substances present-at-hand-and-no-more. One may think that for this kind of bare apprehension all that is presupposed is that we are able to open our eyes to passively take in what is given. Registering the given should be nothing more than a matter of *looking*.[43] Of course, Heidegger denies that there can be a presuppositionless apprehension of the given, particularly if one means by this that what is just always out there is grasped in its absolute independence of us. We may try, we may stare blankly at things so that we see them as something abstract, as the bare extended stuff of nature, for example, but even in such attempts at 'deworlding' all perception remains worldly. Before things of nature can be discovered, we must already have an understanding of what it means to be nature, whether this

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[42] BT, p. 184.

[43] I'm just using the example of sight for convenience. This is a general claim about perception.

means being calculable in terms of physical-scientific properties, or as something which is just there for us so that we may use it or let it be. Categories for the apprehension of things present-at-hand, although not thematized in our pre-ontological understanding of being, have priority over the entities that are discoverable as belonging to them. In other words, "beings are disclosed in accordance with the conditions of their possibility," conditions supplied by our projective understanding, not from the entities themselves.[44] This does not mean that any categorization will do, that we can just dictate or decide upon the being of entities. We may discover beings more or less appropriately, but the way that beings are disclosed nevertheless always depends on Dasein.

In line with this broadly Kantian approach, understanding always has priority over perception.[45] Sight (again, as representative of perception in general) traditionally represents our ability to grasp bare things just-present-at-hand-and-no-more. For Heidegger, however, this is not the case:

> …all sight is grounded primarily in understanding (…), we have deprived pure intuition [*Anschauen*] of its priority, which corresponds noetically to the priority of the present-at-hand in traditional ontology. 'Intuition' and 'thinking' are both derivatives of understanding…[46]

There is no such thing as pure looking or pure intuition: understanding *always* has priority. This priority of understanding naturally extends to interpretation—we do not interpret and then understand as a result. To the contrary, interpretation develops understanding: "Interpretation is

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[44] BT, p. 184.

[45] See Cristina Lafont, "Hermeneutics," in *A Companion to Heidegger*, eds. H. Dreyfus and M. Wrathall (Malden: Blackwell, 2005).

[46] BT, p. 187.

the working out of possibilities projected in understanding."[47] Interpretation makes the 'as' structure of understanding explicit. This structure can be made explicit when, for example, we *assert* that we are seeing something as a table or chair, but it need not be made explicit for it to be the case that we are seeing things 'understandingly.' As Heidegger puts it, "any mere pre-predicative seeing of the ready-to-hand is, in itself, something which already understands and interprets." "In the mere encountering of something, it is understood in terms of a totality of involvements; and such seeing hides in itself the explicitness of the assignment-relations (of the 'in-order-to') which belong to that totality."[48] As it turns out, therefore, seeing is already a kind of interpretation. To see something is to see something *as* something, it is to draw the 'as' structure from that which is already disclosed in understanding.

His account of the "fore-structure" of understanding adds important details to this basic story. All understanding has a certain fore-having, fore-sight, and fore-conception.[49] *Fore-having* refers to the grasp of the totality that orients our thinking. *Fore-sight* indicates the way that we appropriate that which is to be understood; phenomena are incorporated into our understanding in one way or another, and we do this in accordance with our particular fore-sight. As Heidegger puts it, fore-sight refers to the "first cut" that we make in understanding anything *as* anything. Finally, *fore-conception* indicates the specific conceptuality that we draw upon in understanding and interpreting a phenomenon. Heidegger emphasizes that this conceptuality can be more or less appropriate and can be applied more or less tentatively.

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[47] BT, p. 189.

[48] BT, p. 189.

[49] BT, p. 191.

The idea that understanding always operates within a certain fore-having, fore-sight, and fore-conception has far reaching consequences.

> Whenever something is interpreted as something [which, remember, is *not* only when there is an assertion or acknowledgement that something is explicitly held to be something—HK], the interpretation will be founded essentially upon fore-having, fore-sight, and fore-conception. An interpretation is never a presuppositionless apprehending of something presented to us. If, when one is engaged in a particular concrete kind of interpretation, in the sense of exact textual interpretation, one likes to appeal to what 'stands there,' then one finds that what 'stands there' in the first instance is nothing other than the obvious undiscussed assumption of the person who does the interpreting. In an interpretive approach there lies such an assumption, as that which has been 'taken for granted' with interpretation as such—that is to say, as that which has been presented in our fore-having, fore-sight, and fore-conception.[50]

In this passage, Heidegger is asserting yet again that there is no simple seeing (whether as perception or interpretation) of things in some kind of pure state, untouched by our a priori understanding of being. When we naively attempt to counter this idea, appealing to 'what just stands there,' whether we are interpreting a text or some other phenomenon, what we can find 'just standing there' is just what is taken for granted in our fore-having, fore-sight, and fore-conception.[51] Of course, the realist may believe that the 'fore-structure' of our understanding conforms to the things as they are anyway since they are (somehow) also drawn from the world (which, in part, is what makes them realists), but that already presupposes self-structuring entities outside of the identity conditions imposed by any understanding, and which council the understanding on how they ought to be identified. We can pursue this question of the relation

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[50] BT, pp. 191-2.

[51] See also, e.g., Martin Heidegger, *Phenomenological Interpretations of Kant's Critique of Pure Reason* (1927-28), trans., P. Emad and K. Maly, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997, p. 22. Hereafter, *Phenomenological Interpretations of Kant's Critique of Pure Reason* will be cited as PIK.

between actual stuff and entities as particular entities, as disclosed in an understanding of being, in the next section on Heidegger's idea of 'reality.'

§2.5 – Reality

Heidegger's discussion of reality begins with the reminder that "the question of the meaning of being becomes possible at all only if there *is* something like an understanding of being."[52] Dasein, as a being that is both ontic and ontological, always has an understanding of being, even if this understanding is undeveloped as a theme. Heidegger calls this undeveloped understanding of being 'pre-ontological.' It is our way into philosophy. The fact that this pre-ontological 'way in' carries with it a particular understanding of reality makes a 'phenomenally well secured' analysis of being-in-the-world difficult. That is, the fact that our ordinary understanding is pre-ontological does not mean that it is ontologically neutral. Dasein "has for the most part diverted itself into an understanding of the 'world'."[53] It is oriented toward understanding *real things*, an orientation that shapes our commonsense understanding of the world and of ourselves. Our tendency is to 'fall in' with things, thinking of things as the fundamental building blocks of being out of which ontological determinacy emerges. From this 'commonsense' perspective, reality is a collection of things, some of which have been invested with value. As for ourselves, even Dasein can easily be considered as a thing with a special property called 'thinking'—as the *res cogitans*.

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[52] BT, p. 244.

[53] BT, p. 245. 'World' as used here in quotation marks, refers to the universe of entities present-at-hand. This self-understanding in terms of things in the world is what Heidegger calls 'falling.'

Starting with Dasein's tendency to fall in with the world of things, to understand itself in terms of it, Heidegger goes on to tell a just-so story about why we seem to be so well-disposed towards (what we now call) metaphysical realism despite the many intractable problems it creates, and despite its blindness to the phenomenon of being-in-the-world. The story goes like this. As fallen, Dasein "takes its orientation … from the being of entities within-the-world." With this starting point, readiness-to-hand is ignored, and entities are considered as a "context of things (res) which are present-at-hand." By ignoring readiness-to-hand, the mode of being of things like equipment that we take up and use in pursuing our ends, 'being' is equated with reality as substantiality. With this, reality as substantiality acquires priority in ontological reflection, making it seem appropriate to understand even Dasein in terms of its substance and properties. Ontological inquiry is therefore distorted before it is even taken up as a theme. For fallen Dasein, "all other modes of being become defined negatively and privatively with regard to reality."[54] The hope of accounting for and surmounting this fundamental distortion motivates Heidegger's project:

> …the working out of the question of the meaning of being in general must be turned away from a one-sided orientation with regard to being in the sense of reality. We must demonstrate that reality is not only *one* kind of being *among* others, but that ontologically it has a definite connection in foundations with Dasein, the world, and readiness-to-hand.[55]

And this is precisely what *Being and Time* is occupied with throughout its first division: (1) the existential analytic of Dasein is designated as fundamental ontology, as that "from which alone

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[54] Ibid.

[55] Ibid.

all other ontologies can take their rise,"[56] establishing a connection between reality and Dasein, (2) Dasein is always already in a world as the 'wherein' of significance where anything like reality can show itself, establishing a connection between reality and world, and (3) the proximate kind of being that we encounter 'in reality' is not presence-at-hand but readiness-to-hand, which proves to be an irreducible aspect of reality that cannot be sufficiently accounted for as a collection of meaningless present-at-hand entities 'invested with value,' establishing a connection between reality and readiness-to-hand. In short, working out the question of being includes explaining how reality is properly understood in connection with Dasein's being as being-in-the-world and not as a Dasein-independent substrate to which all ontological determinations must be accommodated.

The misunderstanding of reality as an abiding Dasein independent substrate allows ontological questions to be diverted into questions about "knowing the external world." From Heidegger's perspective, the problems of traditional or Cartesian ontology do not stem from shoddy inferences as much as a willingness to stubbornly (but predictably) follow the wrong road from the start. Once substantiality is equated with reality, the sensible question to ask is how a substantial thing like us (the subject) can be related to another substantial thing outside us (the world as object). Because this ontology posits that all substance is as it is, present-at-hand beside other self-identifying substances irrespective of our disclosedness—because this is taken for granted at the outset—the ontological question is transformed into an epistemological one: How do we *know* that we are a present-at-hand thing beside other self-subsisting present-at-hand things? Since *knowledge* is supposed to be what establishes our being-in-the-world, epistemology is identified as first philosophy.

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[56] BT, p. 34.

Heidegger, of course, takes a rather dim view of this demand for an epistemological proof of our side-by-sideness with other things. In response to this demand, he denies what the seemingly timeless challenge of epistemology presupposes, i.e., that the relation of knowing is our primary access to entities. Dasein and world, and hence Dasein's understanding of entities are inseparable, and so there can be no particular philosophical problem about "knowing the external world."

> According to this analytic [i.e., division one of *Being and Time*], knowing is a *founded* mode of access to the real. The real is essentially accessible only as entities within-the-world. All access to such entities is founded ontologically upon the basic state of Dasein, being-in-the-world.[57]

Saying that all access to entities is "founded ontologically" upon Dasein—and not just ontically—takes ontology in a direction incompatible with the traditional identification of reality and substantiality. Although it may be true enough, the point here is not that access to entities takes place only through 'subjects' since, necessarily, access implies that someone is doing the accessing (viz., 'experiencing')—Dasein's 'access' is not simply an ontic 'gateway.' That is, what is accessed depends on Dasein's kind of being to be accessible in the first place. As being-in-the-world, Dasein accesses being in line with its own type of being, developing its understanding (clarifying its access) out of and back into its factical disclosedness. This factical disclosedness supplies the conditions of determinacy for entities, i.e., the basis for any ontology. Heidegger is therefore proposing that *reality* should be understood in its connections to Dasein, world, and readiness-to-hand, and not as an eternally present-at-hand thing that carries its own ontology inside it, waiting, as it were, for someone to come along and trace it out. Instead,

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[57] BT, p. 246.

Dasein's 'access,' Dasein's being-in-the-world, is ontologically determinative in the sense

that the ontological determinacy of entities does not precede Dasein's understanding of being.[58]

If knowledge does not constitute Dasein's primary access to the world, skeptical

questions lose their force. As Heidegger puts it:

> The question of whether there is a world at all, and whether its being can be proved, makes no sense if it is raised by Dasein as being-in-the-world; and who else would raise it?[59]

Skepticism is only possible on the basis of 'founded' or derivative conceptions of world and

Dasein. Again, it is not false to say that in some sense Dasein is present-at-hand, just as it is not

false to say that the world is a collection of entities present-at-hand. The problem with such

claims is not their falsity but their claims to ontological priority. If we don't first recognize the

being of Dasein as being-in-the-world, it is simply not possible to defeat the skeptic, or so it

seems to Heidegger at least. Thus, the primary confusion he observes among skeptics and anti-

skeptics alike is the failure to see the phenomenon of world (as the significant 'wherein' of

Dasein) and to distinguish it from 'world' (as a collection of entities present-at-hand). The fact

that we may have legitimate questions about what we know, about exactly what beings are

discoverable in the world as disclosed, does not also mean that skeptical worries are also

legitimate. That requires the possibility of 'worldlessness,' something that may be a standing

possibility for the Cartesian subject, but is an absurdity for Dasein understood as being-in-the-

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[58] What's the *proof* of this? This is not something to prove, but is the idealist starting point, the hypothesis that is tested in the first division of *Being and Time*. As Heidegger puts it: "one must seek a *way* of casting light on the fundamental question of ontology, and this the way one must *go*. Whether this is the *only* way or even the right one at all, can be decided only *after one has gone along it*" (BT, p. 487).

[59] BT, pp. 246-7.

world. Things can only be hidden, things can only be unknown, to a being that is already in-the-world.[60]

The point of this too brief discussion of skepticism in what is supposed to be a discussion of Heidegger's idea of reality is just to give a sense of why he believes that ontological questions about reality are typically diverted into such skeptical questions about 'the reality of the external world.' He does not refute skepticism, but tries to show how such concerns are unfounded insofar as they assume what is in fact rather dubious, namely, that reality is just constant presence-at-hand, and that Dasein, as the subject, is a worldless observer, whose connection with reality is totally external.

Considering that questions of realism and idealism are at the center of this project, I will discuss Heidegger's idea of reality in greater depth in what follows, particularly in chapter five. Although I don't want to get ahead of myself here, advocating for my particular idealist interpretation of *Being and Time* in what is supposed to be a more or less neutral introduction to Heidegger's general claims, a few more comments are necessary. In thinking about Heidegger's idea of 'reality,' it is essential that it be distinguished from what he calls 'the real,' as he does in the following well-known passage:

> As we have noted, being (not entities) is dependent upon the understanding of being; that is to say, reality (not the real) is dependent upon care [viz., the being of Dasein].[61]

As I noted, we will consider exactly how this fundamental claim should be understood later, but here I just want to emphasize the distinction between the real and reality, a key distinction in Heidegger's work, however one ultimately decides to interpret it. The real, according to

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[60] "[T]he real can be discovered only on the basis of a world which has already been disclosed. And only on this basis can anything real still remain hidden" (BT p.247).

[61] BT, p. 255.

Heidegger, consists of the actual stuff out there, that which is most certainly not 'mind-dependent' or 'Dasein-dependent' for its subsistence. Reality, by contrast, is a 'category' of Dasein. There is no reality apart from Dasein's disclosedness, and it only with Dasein's disclosedness, with Dasein's understanding of being, that reality can be. Reality includes determinacy, 'the real' or 'realia' does not. The determinacy of reality is constituted in Dasein's disclosedness. The actuality of the real is independent of Dasein. This distinction will get much more attention in what follows, but seeing the basic difference here between reality and realia will help us avoid misunderstandings about the interpretive claims that will be made in the next two chapters. It will help us consider whether realist interpreters mistakenly reduce reality to realia, as something just there, irrespective of whether or not Dasein exists, and it will help us avoid misunderstandings about idealism, which, in general, does not maintain that real things are created in the imagination or in the minds or ideas of Dasein. Actual things are actual with our without us, what depends on Dasein (for the idealist) is reality—the world in its specific determinacy.

Though there is clearly much more to be said about each of these topics, and I will say more in what follows, this introduction is sufficient for now, initiating a discussion about some of the key themes of the first division of *Being and Time* and giving a provisional indication of how I think they ought to be understood. These topics will be picked up again in the next chapter, where I will consider how they are handled in different non-idealist interpretations of Heidegger's work. Before continuing this discussion of Heidegger's approach to ontology, however, I need to spend a few pages justifying my decision to discuss Heidegger's work in terms of realism and idealism. It seems to me that the first division of *Being and Time* raises a wealth of realism-relevant issues, if anything does, and so provides an excellent backdrop for

considering what is at stake in such questions, but because Heidegger officially resists

applying these designations to his own thought, I need to pause here to defend my approach.

§3 – Beyond Realism and Idealism?

To some orthodox Heideggerians, my insistence on considering questions of realism and

idealism in connection with a philosopher that officially scorned both as relics of discredited

Cartesian presuppositions will appear misguided, even perverse. I am far from alone, however, in

asserting that his official position masks the depth of his engagement with the topic.[62] His aim

was not to find a clever way to dismiss questions of realism and idealism, and he did not manage

to leave both behind as a matter of course. Rather, he moved to resolve the surrounding debate

by defending a de-transcendentalized form of idealism. To head off fundamental objections to

my attempt to show this, I want to begin by explaining why it is incorrect to think that Heidegger

was somehow beyond realism and idealism.

Those that object to statements concerning both Heidegger's realism and idealism

typically maintain that realism and idealism are *epistemological* designations. Supposedly at

issue in realism and idealism is only whether the subject can *know* the world, the object, just as it

is, independent of our cognitive contributions, whatever those may be. Idealists are said to argue

that we know the world only through the irremovable spectacles of our subjectivity. Realists, by

contrast, argue that there is nothing in principle that prevents us from knowing the world in its

own terms, just as it is in itself. This familiar characterization of realism and idealism suggests

that realists and idealists both presuppose the subject-object schema and that knowing is our

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[62] For example, all of the commentators I will discuss in the final two chapters have some published view on Heidegger's realism or idealism.

fundamental way of 'being-in.' That is, they both supposedly presuppose that the pursuit of knowledge means getting our internal state into agreement with the world as it is anyway, or (in idealism) explaining why that is an impossible wish, why 'noumenal' reality must remain off limits, but how they can explain the possibility of something worth calling knowledge nonetheless. Those that object to interpreting Heidegger through this lens remind us that Heidegger radically reconceived the 'subject' as Dasein, the being that in its very being has an understanding of being. As being-in-the-world, Dasein is a 'subject' that is always-already 'outside' in the world, that is essentially worldly, so that worries about 'worldlessness' and skepticism must be misplaced. For Dasein as being-in-the-world there is no 'gap' between a 'subject' and 'object' to be either traversed or tolerated.[63]

In my estimation, this shortcut to 'overcoming' realism and idealism is extremely unconvincing. First of all, whatever their epistemological implications may be, questions of realism and idealism are primarily ontological (whether or not there is an epistemological variant of these questions) and the suggestion that these questions do not arise for a philosopher that identifies philosophy with ontology and sets out to address the question of being by way of what he calls fundamental ontology, i.e., an existential analytic of Dasein, is simply absurd. Next, even if we were to grant that Heidegger's challenge to the subject-object schema were completely successful, a very dubious proposition in itself, there is still the question of what takes its place. What and who is Dasein as being-in-the-world? This new schema must still explain our access to being, what kind of entities count as real entities, how it is reconcilable with ontological pluralism (if it is), how it frames the notion of the 'in itself,' and so on.

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[63] Cf. Cerbone and discussion of Cerbone in chapter 3.

Establishing that Heidegger overcame the subject-object schema would not be the end of the story.

Heidegger's advertised view is driven in part by his low regard for the unthinking way traditional philosophical categories and labels are used. As he sees it, -ism talk in philosophy is likely to be little more than useless chatter.[64] It is usually just pretentious gossip, oblivious to the phenomena, giving a false impression of understanding through the deployment of several all-purpose schemas and arguments. Officially, therefore, it is the detachment from 'the matters themselves' that labels like realism and idealism allow that explains Heidegger's occasionally dismissive attitude towards them. Nevertheless, when feeling generous, Heidegger acknowledges that "a grain of genuine inquiry is to be found in each of these."[65] So, while talk of realism and idealism may tend toward idle chatter, he grants that the positions they embody nevertheless still spring from engagement with the matters themselves.

What is the grain of genuine inquiry Heidegger finds in realism and idealism? Where is the point of engagement with the matters themselves? This passage from *Being and Time* is characteristic:

> Along with Dasein as Being-in-the-world, entities within-the-world have in each case already been disclosed. … In so far as this existential assertion does not deny that entities within the world are present-at-hand, it agrees—doxographically, as it were—with the thesis of realism in its results. … But what distinguishes this assertion from realism

[64] "True, '-isms' have for a long time now been suspect. But the market of public opinion continually demands new ones. We are always prepared to supply the demand. Even such names as 'logic,' 'ethics,' and 'physics' begin to flourish only when original thinking comes to an end. During the time of their greatness the Greeks thought without such headings. They did not even call thinking 'philosophy'" ("Letter on Humanism," in *Martin Heidegger: Basic Writings*, trans. D. Krell, San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1993, pp. 219-220).

[65] BT, p. 250.

altogether, is the fact that in realism there is a lack of ontological understanding. Indeed realism tries to explain reality ontically by real connections of interaction between things that are real. … If what the term "idealism" says, amounts to the understanding that being can never be explained by entities but is already that which is 'transcendental' for every entity, then idealism affords the only correct possibility for a philosophical problematic.[66]

Heidegger is plainly not going to side outright with any familiar account of realism or idealism. But, even so, as he explains it, a basic realism-relevant question remains: is being to be explained in terms of entities or in 'transcendental' terms? The cited passage, far from signaling a rejection of realism and idealism, shows Heidegger's engagement with this set of problems, and signals sympathy with idealism. For a more direct statement, consider the following passage from *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, a lecture course given just after the publication of *Being and Time*:

> To this very day I am unaware of any infallible decision according to which idealism is false, just as little as I am aware of one that makes realism true. We may not make into the criterion of truth what is the fashion and bias of the time, a solution belonging to some faction or other. Instead, we have to ask what this idealism—which is today feared like the foul fiend incarnate—is really [eigentlich] searching for. It is not an already settled matter whether idealism does not in the end pose the problems of philosophy more fundamentally, more radically than realism ever can. But perhaps also it is not tenable in the form in which it has obtained up to now, whereas of realism it cannot even be said that it is untenable, because it has not even pressed forward at all into the dimension of philosophical problems, the level where tenability and untenability are decidable. To declare something to be idealism may, in contemporary philosophy be a very dexterous partisan political stroke in outlawing it, but it is not a real ground of proof. Viewed with minute exactitude, the anxiety that prevails today in the face of idealism is an anxiety in the face of philosophy.[67]

This does not sound like a 'therapeutic' rejection of the problematic of realism and idealism, but much more like a refusal to use the terms unthinkingly or as terms of abuse. So, again, I think it

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[66] BT, p. 251.

[67] Martin Heidegger, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology* (1927), trans., A. Hofstadter, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982, p. 167. Hereafter, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology* will be cited as BP.

can and should be asked: does Heidegger explain reality by real connections between real things or through 'being' as that which is always already 'transcendental' for every entity? If the latter, as seems to be the case—however original and groundbreaking his approach to 'the transcendental' may be—how does his analysis not fall prey to the many familiar problems of idealism, such as the detachment from 'the things themselves' and relativism? If the former, how does he not suffer from common realist troubles, such as skepticism, restrictively austere ontologies, and problems of supervenience?

So, contrary to the protestations of certain orthodox and 'therapeutic' (i.e., Wittgensteinian) Heideggerians, the discussion of Heidegger in connection with questions of realism and idealism isn't an interpretive category mistake. Despite his understandable impatience with the unthinking use of '–ism' labels and traditional schemas, he was anything but allergic to the ontological questions that constitute their substance. As Heidegger himself sets up the issue, realism and idealism characterize different basic approaches to interpreting our being-in-the-world and the very structure of ontological inquiry. As I see it, and as I think Heidegger's statements above indicate, unless ontology itself is 'overcome' realism and idealism will remain relevant guides for ontological inquiry, even if these notions may be abused.

§4 – Rejecting Metaphysical Realism

An important premise of my interpretation of Heidegger's work needs to be articulated and defended as fixed point. Without being absolutely clear about the incompatibility of his work with metaphysical realism, an interpretation of his work remains, in my opinion, rudderless. The potential for polemical distortion of his view is great, largely because of his deep desire to be a philosophical radical and to rethink just about every traditionally identifiable category—when it

comes to the key issues, the honest interpreter can rarely be certain of their footing. To avoid

responding to this difficult interpretive situation by resolving to only speak of Heidegger in his

own frustratingly equivocal terms or by crudely assimilating his view to one's own (after all, if

he believes everything and nothing, he might as well agree with me), a firm starting point is

needed, one that is intelligible to non-Heideggerians but defensible in terms of his own work. To

say it again, to be very clear: Heidegger's work must be understood as fundamentally

incompatible any kind of metaphysical realism or absolutism.

To see why this is a reasonable frame for interpreting *Being and Time*, consider

Heidegger's claim that "being is what determines entities as entities."[68] With this definition of

being, it is still very much open to the metaphysical realist to say, for example, that the specific

properties of the chair itself determines the chair as the thing that it is in itself.[69] There may never

be an occasion for such an assertion, but, from the metaphysical realist's perspective, it is not

false. But a fundamental disagreement between Heidegger and all kinds of metaphysical realists

becomes plain with another general proposition about being that gives shape to the first: being

'is' always in an understanding of being.[70] Heidegger believes that what determines entities as

entities is always something that pertains fundamentally to an *understanding* of being, that is,

that being is fundamentally linked to Dasein. Taken together, these two propositions suggest a

third, namely, that there is no being without Dasein. And with this the separation from all forms

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[68] BT, p. 25.

[69] Lafont, "Hermeneutics," p.280, and "Heidegger and the Synthetic A Priori," in *Transcendental Heidegger* (Stanford University Press, 2007), p. 106.

[70] "Being 'is' only in the understanding of those entities to whose being something like an understanding of being belongs" (BT, p. 228).

of metaphysical realism is clear, for this is precisely what they cannot allow. Above all, the

metaphysical realist is determined to maintain the mind and Dasein-*independence* of being.[71] To

be a metaphysical realist is just to believe that being is the way it is *anyway*, irrespective of any

understanding we may have. Insofar as there is some way that things are, independent of the

existence or non-existence, understanding or non-understanding of Dasein, being must 'be'

without Dasein.

Heidegger insists that what determines entities as entities is not itself an entity. Since

what determines entities as entities is being, being cannot be an entity, and he says as much.[72]

For the metaphysical realist, however, being is nothing other than entities; it is not something

subjective or intersubjective, and is certainly not transcendental. What determines a being as the

being that it is must be nothing other than the properties of the thing itself. Because, for the

metaphysical realist, the world is a collection of self-standing, self-identifying entities, it is

possible to meaningfully reflect on beings in their being apart from what anybody happens to

understand or could possibly understand about them. Indeed, the possibility of a God's-Eye-

Ontology is their guiding idea. After considering some of Heidegger's basic views on being,

Dasein, world, understanding, and reality it should be plain that this is obviously not the case for

Heidegger, whose writings explore the holistic interrelations between being, understanding,

reality, and truth. For Heidegger, therefore, talk of the reality or being of things independent of

the understanding of Dasein is nonsense. In his estimation, it is a fundamental misunderstanding

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[71] Clearly, 'Dasein' is not well-glossed as 'mind,' but for the metaphysical realist, the assertion of the Dasein-dependence of being is certainly sufficient to offend their sensibilities.

[72] See 2.1 above.

of ontology as the attempt to explain "reality ontically by real connections of interaction between things that are real"[73]

The project of *Being and Time* is structured by the 'priority' of Dasein, a priority that is both ontic and ontological. The metaphysical realist may agree that 'Dasein' has ontical priority insofar as this means nothing more than that every time we access being, *we* access being. That is, there is no way to access anything without a being to do the access*ing,* and that being has to be the kind of being that is capable of access, i.e., it must be the kind of being capable of understanding being. To say that Dasein has ontical priority is just to say that we can't understand the world without Dasein. How could we? We are Dasein. We can't understand the world without ourselves, can we? Metaphysical realists would not, however, go along with Heidegger's claim that Dasein also has ontological priority. To say that Dasein has ontological priority is to claim that Dasein is the condition of possibility for any ontology whatsoever; it is to say that *fundamental ontology* should take the form of an *existential analytic of Dasein.* Now, while the metaphysical realist may grant that Dasein is required for access, they could never grant that the way things are, the being of entities, depends on Dasein. Or, as Heidegger puts it, that "Dasein has […] priority as providing the ontico-ontological condition for the possibility of any ontologies."[74] Ontologically Dasein has priority because Dasein is the being that in its being always has an understanding of being. For Heidegger, it is not just that we would not be able to access being without a pathway of access, Dasein, but that without that pathway there would be no being to be accessed, no truths to be discovered—all discovery depends on the prior disclosedness of Dasein.

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[73] BT, p. 251.

[74] BT, p. 34.

Heidegger attempts to capture some of the metaphysical realists' basic intuitions in the distinction he draws between what he calls 'the real' or *realia'* and being. That is, successfully or not, he is at pains to note that although there is no truth, no being, and no reality without Dasein, that does not mean that there isn't anything real without Dasein. Admittedly, his talk of 'the real' outside of reality is obscure, but it indicates, at the very least, that he respects the realist's intuition that there must be something that is there 'anyway,' irrespective of our dealings with it. The lingering question is whether 'the real' must be said to have a truth about it, to have being or determinacy, and whether it makes any sense to talk about it as lacking such being or identity 'in itself.' For now, however, the point is to see that Heidegger's nuanced approach to this issue, however one ultimately wishes to understand it in detail, and whether or not one agrees, is incompatible with any kind of metaphysical realism.

My aim in this section has not been to put forward a hasty claim that *all* kinds of realism are off limits to Heidegger. We have yet to consider whether Heidegger's view is a variety of pragmatism, transcendental idealism, or is reconcilable to the 'Natural Ontological Attitude,' just to cite a few contenders. All that remains to be discussed. Also undecided is whether Heidegger's rejection of metaphysical realism is tenable in its own right. As I've already noted in the first chapter, despite the many dissatisfactions philosophers have with metaphysical realism, articulating a tenable counter-position that respects the basic realist intuitions that motivate it is a tall order. It is by no means clear that Heidegger's attempt succeeds, however provocative or influential his view may be. To begin to find out, the next chapter will review several interpretations of his work that declare their agreement with my proposed interpretive starting point—that Heidegger is not a *metaphysical* realist—but are either unable to sustain that resistance (collapsing the argument of *Being and Time* into a kind of metaphysical realism), or

are only able to maintain their rejection of metaphysical realism in the context of an

interpretation of Heidegger that slides into an extreme relativism.

CHAPTER 4

ON HEIDEGGER'S CHALLENGE TO METAPHYISCAL REALISM

§1 – Introduction: Three Readings

The last chapter provided a short introduction to *Being and Time* and defended what I take to be an uncontroversial but crucial interpretive premise: Heidegger's work from this period is incompatible with metaphysical realism.[1] Briefly, metaphysical realists believe that the universe is comprised of a fixed number entities, with a fixed number of properties, that it is "self-structuring," and that when we consider the way things are, it is possible to draw a line between those properties that we project, and those that are there 'anyway.'[2] Because Heidegger believes that *being* is what determines entities as entities, that the being of entities is not itself an entity, and that Dasein—the kind of being that we are—has ontological priority, i.e., that it is impossible to address ontological questions without considering the being of Dasein, his rejection of metaphysical realism is taken for granted by most commentators. It is, however, one thing to recite theses incompatible with metaphysical realism and quite another to have a coherent position that can actually challenge it.

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[1] In my opinion, Heidegger's rejection of metaphysical realism only becomes more pronounced in his later work, where he talks about "language as the house of being," etc. However, since my interest here is only in his work from the period of *Being and Time*, I restrict my claims, perhaps over-cautiously, to Heidegger's work 'from this period.'

[2] This definition of metaphysical realism comes from Putnam (Cf. *The Threefold Cord*, p.183 and *Reason, Truth and History*, p.49) and Williams (*Descartes*). For a detailed discussion of metaphysical realism, see chapter 1.

So far, this project has been organized around the possibility of such a challenge: chapter one reviews metaphysical realism and related positions to see why it may be worth resisting, chapter two reflects on the relationship between realism, idealism, and common sense to clarify the demands placed on any ontology, and chapter three introduces *Being and Time* as an important alternative to metaphysical realism. What remains to be explained, and what I'll focus on for the remainder of the dissertation, is how exactly this resistance to metaphysical realism should be understood. This means figuring out both how Heidegger's view from the period of *Being and Time* ought to be read and whether this view is systematically convincing, particularly insofar as it serves as a counter to metaphysical realism. To find the best approach, I will consider a range of views from some of the most important Anglophone commentaries on *Being and Time*. These fall into several broad categories: therapeutic, pragmatist, realist (but not 'metaphysical realist'), and idealist, whether temporal, transcendental, or hermeneutic.

This chapter considers the first of these approaches—therapeutic, pragmatist, and realist. The therapeutic approach (section 2) is centered around the claim that Heidegger's view is not well characterized as a kind of realism or idealism, but that both of these approaches only make sense within the Cartesian subject-object schema, where the knowledge-relation is the fundamental link between the subject and the world, and where the subject has to escape its 'cabinet of consciousness' to come to know the world as something entirely separate from it. If this approach were correct, any attempt to read Heidegger as either an idealist or realist would be misguided, and my analysis of what's at issue in the realism/anti-realism/idealism debates would be wrong. However, as I'll explain in the next section, the therapeutic approach doesn't work. Questions of realism and idealism—ontological questions—are certainly an issue for the philosopher trying to reawaken the question of the meaning of being, and, moreover, I think my

discussion of realism, idealism, and common sense in chapter two provides good independent

reasons for rejecting the therapeutic approach outright, whether for Heidegger or anybody else.

Next, I'll consider pragmatist approaches to *Being and Time* (section 3). Such readings

are more philosophically ambitious than 'philosophical therapy,' they make more positive

claims, but share with the therapeutic approach a similar distaste for metaphysics. I will discuss

two related pragmatist arguments. One focuses on the supposed priority of Heidegger's idea of

'understanding-how' and the other on the contingency of our understanding of being. Both are

problematic: the first retreats from its own conclusions into a form of metaphysical realism,

while the other collapses into an untenable relativism.

To conclude the chapter, I'll review two realist readings of *Being and Time* (section 4).

The challenge here is to articulate a vision of realism consistent with Heidegger's claims that

doesn't collapse into metaphysical realism or absolutism, thereby picking up all the problems

that his work sets out to avoid or resolve. Unsurprisingly, I find that this is not possible and that

these readings fail on both counts. Of course, it's true that Heidegger's work may itself have the

problems that I have associated with realism, whether or not he tried to avoid them (e.g., conflict

of images of man-in-the-world, supervenience, etc.[3]). But if we can supply an interpretation that

manages to avoid these problems without raising new ones that we can't live with, there will be

little reason to read what was clearly intended as a radical work as nothing more than an oddly

phrased variation on the standard metaphysical realist's story. The task of the final chapter is to

show that there is such a reading—an idealist reading—and that not only is it successful as a

reading of *Being and Time*, but that it also provides a systematically compelling, even if

ultimately problematic, approach to ontology.

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[3] See chapter 1.

§2 – Therapy

As I noted in chapter three, it is tempting to think that Heidegger's occasional statements about the limitations of realism and idealism indicate that he managed to avoid a commitment to either. Although I've already made a case for the unavoidability of the problematic of realism and idealism, before going on to discuss exactly where Heidegger stands, it will be useful to consider a reading of *Being and Time* as an attempt to do just what I have claimed cannot be done, that is, as an attempt to avoid the problems of realism and idealism altogether. These considerations should confirm my claim, showing that it is nearly impossible to believe that *Being and Time* could be read as achieving this 'overcoming.'

The attempt to excuse Heidegger from a commitment to any kind of realism or idealism begins by tying the entire problematic to epistemology, while narrowly identifying epistemology with questions about the subject's ability to know the world, to transcend its consciousness to meet up with the object of knowledge. This epistemological problematic is then rejected as irrelevant to questions about Dasein as being-in-the-world, which is not an isolated subject trying to make a connection with the world as if from the outside. Rejecting epistemology means rejecting the questions of realism and idealism rooted in it. And this does have some resonance with what Heidegger actually writes. For example, he acknowledges in *Being and Time* that "a grain of genuine inquiry is to be found [in realism and idealism]," but concludes that "their neglect of any *existential analytic of Dasein* has kept them from obtaining any basis for a well-secured phenomenal problematic."[4] In other words, Heidegger finds a trace of insight in these

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[4] BT, p. 250, italics added.

approaches, but that their distortion of the phenomena under discussion vitiates them almost completely. On this story, a radically new account—neither realist nor idealist—is needed.

What is an 'existential analytic of Dasein' and why should it relieve us of the need to address questions of realism and idealism? If realism and idealism name strategies for solving epistemological problems about access to an 'external world,' the validity of those claims depend on a particular idea of the subject as something beset by problems of access to the world. The problem of access to an external world, however, only has teeth when spatial metaphors of mind are allowed to dominate our thinking about subjectivity. Only then can it appear that there is a genuine puzzle about how a subject, only able to have experiences of what is *inside* and immediate for it, is able to get *outside* in order to know the world, the object, as it is in itself (realism), or how what is *outside* the subject is still in a sense *inside*, since its objecthood depends essentially on our subjectivity (idealism). But if the subject-object schema and its metaphors of interiority and exteriority must be rejected as 'phenomenologically inadequate,' the problematic of realism and idealism must evaporate. The 'existential analytic of Dasein,' which is given its most complete expression in division one of *Being and Time,* supposedly provides a phenomenologically well-secured analysis of what is interpreted in the subject-object relation. As Heidegger puts it in the *Metaphysical Foundations of Logic*:

> The theory of knowledge … has repeatedly made the subject-object relation the basis of its inquiries. But both idealist and realist explanations had to fail because the explicandum was not sufficiently definite. …The consequences of our problem, where it is really carried out and achieved, lead to the disappearance of a possible problem in the sense of the idealistic or realistic theories of knowledge.[5]

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[5] Martin Heidegger, *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic* (1928), trans., M. Heim, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984, p. 131. Hereafter, *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic* will be cited as MFL.

Asking about realism and idealism in relation to Heidegger's work is therefore supposed to be a category mistake. These problems can only arise around subject-object relation, but, as Heidegger likes to remind his reader, subject and object *do not* correspond to Dasein and world—Dasein just is being-in-the-world. With the destruction of the subject-object schema, epistemology can be dismissed as a pseudo-discipline that will continue only so long as philosophers turn their backs on the phenomena. In short, the phenomenology of Dasein in the first division of *Being and Time* undermines the presuppositions common to realism and idealism that sustain epistemology and without that discipline questions of realism and idealism are meaningless.

But these claims about the power of the existential analytic should be reviewed in more detail.[6] The target of the existential analytic is called 'Dasein.' Heidegger uses this term precisely to avoid bias, so it will not automatically evoke familiar ideas of subjectivity, consciousness, or humanity. After all, his aim is to work out a fresh account of beings like us in order to address the question of being and taking on the philosophical baggage of 'subjectivity' would be a poor place to start. Instead, he begins with the idea that Dasein's essence is existence. Dasein is not a thing with a special property, but a 'thrown project': it always finds itself in the world, always already having taken up certain possibilities for being and having passed others by. Into and out of this situation it projects its possibilities, possibilities that it may or may not take ownership for. Most fundamentally, however, what distinguishes Dasein, what makes its existence as thrown projection possible, is that it always already has an understanding of being. As the being

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[6] See the previous chapter for further discussion, particularly section 2, subsections 2 and 3 on Dasein and world.

for whom beings are intelligible, it is attuned to their possibilities, continually projecting them anew.

Since Dasein is the being that always already has an understanding of being, it has priority with respect to the question of being—which, we should remember, is the question *Being and Time* has set out to address or 'reawaken.' Consequently, Heidegger calls this analysis of Dasein in connection with the question of being *fundamental ontology*. Since the interpretation of the being of Dasein "exhibits the horizon for any further ontological study of those entities which do not have the character of Dasein," the existential analytic of Dasein *is* fundamental ontology.

So, despite Heidegger's insistence that Dasein and world are not synonymous with subject and object, he is still pursuing metaphysics through the analysis of beings like us, insisting that we have priority with respect to being, and that we cannot address the question of being without first clarifying our access to it, that is, without clarifying our own way of being. And, moreover, that this clarification is not irrelevant to the status of the beings discovered, unless fundamental ontology is somehow irrelevant to ontology. However radical Heidegger may declare his thought to be, the fact that his approach to the question of being leads through Dasein opens the door to familiar concerns bound up with the Cartesian subject-object schema and, quite appropriately, he spends the bulk of the first division of *Being and Time* addressing them.[7]

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[7] Which questions are these? Well, Heidegger begins his analytic by pursuing the question of being through beings like us, goes on to ask about 'world' with Descartes as his interlocutor, asks about the ontological importance of Dasein's state-of-mind, understanding, and discourse, and finally concludes with a discussion of problems about the status of reality. As radical as one may claim Heidegger to be, it is hard to see a great 'overcoming' in these topics. It seems much more plausible to call this engagement.

Although Heidegger may take up traditional topics, his concern is to secure his analysis of Dasein as being-in-the-world. As being-in-the-world Dasein has always already grown up in its world and cannot exist as something separate from it. Worldless Dasein is an impossibility:

> …we know Being-in-the-world as a way in which Dasein's character is defined existentially. Thus worldhood itself is an existentiale. If we inquire ontologically about the 'world,' we by no means abandon the analytic of Dasein as a field for thematic study. Ontologically, 'world' is not a way of characterizing those entities which Dasein is *not*; it is rather a characteristic of Dasein itself.[8]

If world is the significant 'wherein' Dasein finds itself, it does not make sense to think of it as subsistent without Dasein or as something that Dasein could lose. The same certainly cannot be said of the Cartesian subject, which is always vulnerable to losing the world to skeptical doubts. If we think of the world as something completely outside ourselves, something that just has the significance and features it has irrespective of whether or not Dasein happens to have anything to do with it, 'losing the world' is as easy as failing to coordinate our beliefs with the way the world really is 'in-itself.' It is entirely possible that the world could exist in a totally different manner than we believe or that it not exist at all. Cartesian skepticism is just the suggestion that doubt about our connection with the world is legitimate; the perennial questions that arise from this skepticism reflect the fact that once the problematic has been accepted, its demands appear to be impossible to satisfy.

For the time being we can assume that Heidegger isn't driven into this corner. For the purposes of considering the viability of the therapeutic reading of *Being and Time*, I'm happy to grant their key claim and to allow that Dasein and world cannot be assimilated to the subject-

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[8] BT, p. 92.

object schema. Allowing this, however, what follows? Does it follow that questions of

realism and idealism disappear? Are there no questions about realism or idealism left for the

philosopher who identifies philosophy with ontology and sets out to reawaken the question of the

meaning of being?[9]

In claiming that realism/idealism is not an issue, that it has been 'overcome,'

commentators supposedly mean that the question has been rendered meaningless. As I argued in

chapter two, however, realism and idealism are not just epistemological categories, but are

strategies for negotiating the conflicting claims of common sense. This 'negotiation' is ontology,

a philosophical account of how to explain our implicit ontological commitments. I have urged

that this work is at once descriptive but is also always (more or less) revisionary. That is,

although the philosopher sets out to explain our ontological commitments in the least

controversial way possible, even the strictest adherence to this ideal cannot eliminate the fact that

our ordinary (pre-ontological) commitments cannot simply be sewn together without further

comment—there is no stable commonsense position to be had. The intrinsic conflicts of common

sense require an explanation, an explanation that invariably disturbs our pre-philosophical

commitments. The way those revisions are made—the way philosophers 'negotiate' the

commitments of common sense—just is their stance vis-à-vis realism and idealism. For

philosophers addressing questions of certain scope, this is not a negotiation they may opt out of.[10]

> As my repeated qualifications about philosophical scope indicate, I am happy to
> acknowledge that it is possible for a philosopher's work to have no bearing on questions
> of realism and idealism. An undifferentiated position is entirely possible for a
> philosopher working in a narrow or applied area. For example, a professor of business

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[9] BT, p. 62 and p. 22.

[10] See chapter 2 for my analysis of the relationship between realism, idealism, and the
commitments of common sense.

ethics needn't take a stand on the relationship between the manifest and scientific images of man-in-the-world. Not to put too fine a point on it, however, it is safe to say that Heidegger is no business ethicist or anything of the sort. The 'narrow scope' exemption would not seem to apply to a systematic philosopher educated in the Kantian tradition, addressing the question of being by way of fundamental ontology, who, along the way, regularly finds time to comment on realism and idealism.

Be that as it may, in a recent article, David Cerbone defends the 'epistemologize and eliminate' approach to the problems of realism and idealism that I summarized above, arguing that Heidegger avoids a commitment to either realism or idealism by undermining their shared presuppositions.[11] If realism and idealism are based on shared false premises, the debate between realists and idealists must be considered meaningless. The critical claim is that there is no *topos* for the *topic*—there is nothing to debate—because, again, the Cartesian schema of subject and object that realism and idealism are predicted upon is 'phenomenologically inadequate.'

As I've already discussed, the primary supposition to be refuted is that it makes sense to speak of a 'worldless subject.' This filters the discussion through the lens of global skepticism, asking, in essence, whether it is conceivable that we could all be brains-in-vats—subjects that feel as though they are in a particular world and familiar with it, while they are actually massively in error about the situation. How can we know that we know the world, or, as Cerbone puts it:

Heidegger locates both realism and idealism within epistemology or the theory of knowledge, then what is to be explained is our having knowledge. The central question, framed schematically, is as follows:

(1) How is knowledge of *x* possible[12]

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[11] David Cerbone, "Realism and Truth," in *A Companion to Heidegger,* ch.15.

[12] Cerbone, p.249. He fills in the *x* with 'spatiotemporal objects,' but suggests that this is not necessary. According to him, the same question of realism could just as well be addressed in

Substituting 'spatiotemporal objects' for *x*, he suggests that the question "how is knowledge of spatiotemporal objects possible?" must have a scientific answer involving our perceptual apparatus, from eyeballs to brains, from stimulations of nerve-endings to neuronal firings. Cerbone insists, however, that this is *not* the story philosophers want to hear.[13] Apparently, the scientific story is illegitimate because it *presupposes* a preexisting world and goes on to (merely) explain the *mechanics* of this relation. For the philosopher, however, this already assumes too much. A legitimate answer 'must not assume anything within *x*' (i.e., within the domain of what is to be explained as possibly known). Assuming there is an accessible world of spatiotemporal objects is therefore out of bounds, breaking the most basic rule of the game by taking too much for granted.

Playing by these strict rules exposes a gap between the knower and what is supposedly known, between the subject and the object.[14] After all, how can we legitimately take that last step, from what we may take for granted, knowledge about ourselves, and what we may not,

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relation to numbers, unobservable scientific objects, ethical truths, religious claims and so forth. Cerbone does not distinguish discourse specific questions of realism from the global question that he apparently takes himself to be addressing. He should have, of course, since these are very different questions. Consider, how would overcoming ethical skepticism help answer his question regarding 'worldlessness'? For a discussion of the difference between the general questions of realism and idealism (as ontological strategies) and regional realism or anti-realism, see chapter two above.

[13] Cerbone is simply wrong here. I am sure that I am not the only philosopher that would love to hear how the long story goes, from perception to cognition, from electrons to consciousness. So long as 'the long story' doesn't leave out any of the interesting details, such as how all the normative notions belonging to knowledge fit into the scientific 'long story,' I'm all ears. The doubt he expresses points to the common philosophical suspicion that 'the long story' just dances over the areas that many philosophers are interested in. The issue is not that 'the long story' as such is illegitimate.

[14] Cerbone, p. 250.

knowledge about the world? Cerbone identifies three ways that we may deal with this gap. Realist and idealist explanations play by the strict rules described above while the therapeutic explanation attacks the rules themselves. He summarizes these positions as follows:

- *Realism* "acknowledges the possibility of such a gap. […] For the realist, skepticism is a standing possibility, as it may not be possible to 'reach' the domain in question by means of whatever it is we have in our possession when all our claims to X have been suspended. Skepticism and realism are … two sides of the same coin, since realism concedes and is predicated on, the legitimacy of skepticism's demands."[15] For the realist (in Cerbone's sense) the gap is between what we are willing to claim as the limit of our secure knowledge—sense-data or 'appearances,' perhaps—and the world conceived as a collection of mind independent objects. Once we set the limits of what can be taken as given it seems impossible to explain how we can know anything beyond that. Induction from our "secure knowledge" is the only way we could advance our knowledge, but no induction of this sort is immune from skepticism.[16]

- *Idealism* responds to the threat of a gap "more reassuringly," asserting that "the 'conditions for the possibility' of knowledge of X and the 'conditions for the possibility' of anything falling within the domain of X do not, and indeed cannot, come apart." The price for this, however, is that whatever falls within X is *dependent upon us*. Since, for the idealist, we are restricted in answering questions about how knowledge of X is possible to terms involving

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[15] Cerbone, pp. 250-1.

[16] This last point about induction and skepticism paraphrases Arthur Fine from his article "Natural Ontological Attitude," in *Scientific Realism,* ed. J. Leplin, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984, ch.4.

experience, those objects are said to be dependent on experience for their very objecthood or 'essence.'

- *Therapy,* the view Cerbone associates with Quine and Heidegger, presents a "transcendental argument against the possibility of a certain kind of transcendental explanation." Quine's strategy is to reject the analytic/synthetic distinction and, with that, to reject first philosophy by arguing that we must always work "from within our ordinary and ongoing scientific theory of the world."[17] The case for 'therapy' is as follows.[18] Reality is part of our background of intelligibility. We are always already in the middle of things, never able get 'outside' to secure a foundation for first philosophy. Furthermore, we are not 'trapped inside our minds,' unable to get beyond our experiences, for without denying that all else becomes utterly unintelligible. On pain of incoherence, then, we must reject the question of realism as a pseudo-question since both idealistic and skeptical answers are incomprehensible.

Heidegger's occasional expressions of disdain for skepticism, realism, and idealism lend a degree of plausibility to his placement in the third group. He famously suggests that "the question of whether there is a world at all and whether its being can be proved, makes no sense at all if it is raised by *Dasein* as being-in-the-world; and who else would raise it?"[19] So, to be sure, 'worldlessness' is not an issue Heidegger thinks should trouble us. We are always 'in the middle of things,' and Cerbone is correct that Heidegger does not conceive of our being-in-the-world as founded on a knowledge-relation between a subject and the world. If we follow Heidegger's

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[17] See W.V. Quine's "Epistemology Naturalized" in his collection *Ontological Relativity and Other Essays* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), ch.3. Also cited in Cerbone.

[18] For another transcendental argument against the possibility of skepticism, see, Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality*, chs. 6 and 7.

[19] BT, p. 246-7.

analysis we should not waste our time puzzling over how one thing present-at-hand *inside* ourselves called knowledge can possibly reach all the way *outside* to a world also present-at-hand. Since being-in-the-world is always already 'outside,' this issue is deflated.

At this point, however, my agreement with Cerbone ends. Heidegger's denial of the possibility of worldlessness only results in a better assessment of what questions of realism and idealism are about—and it is more than the Cartesian gap. Brushing aside skepticism based on the fact that Dasein as being-in-the-world must have an 'a priori' state of being, that is always 'earlier' than any presupposition begs the question of how to explain the resulting approach to ontology.[20] The problems of realism and idealism address not whether skepticism about being-in-the-world is warranted, but how to make sense of our broad array of ontological commitments as being-in-the-world. In short, what needs to be addressed is how we explain the relationship between our ontological commitments and the 'always already' of Dasein's being-in-the-world. Are there no realism-relevant questions to be asked about Dasein's a priori 'understanding of being' upon which being—the being of entities—supposedly depend? As I see it, Heidegger's proposals actually up the ante, encouraging rather than overcoming questions about realism and idealism. Cerbone disagrees, summing up his reflections on Heidegger's view as follows:

> Heidegger's basic claim is that the very need to assert a philosophical thesis about the 'status' of entities, to evaluate the respective merits of apparently competing theses, is predicated on the idea that the status of entities is in some way an *issue*, [and that our] access to entities is something which stands in need of explanation.[21]

For Dasein, according to Cerbone, such explanations are unnecessary because Dasein is always already being-in-the-world. But this is truly incredible. If Heidegger's position is anything more

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[20] BT, p. 249.

[21] Cerbone, p. 255.

than metaphysics by hyphenation, then *of course* the status of entities is at issue. It could

hardly be more central. There is no way to raise the question of being and the being of Dasein

without at the same time raising the question of the being of entities.[22] Heidegger fulminates

against the traditional problems of epistemology precisely *because* the status of entities *is* an

issue. His concern is that the modern priority given to epistemological questions *marginalizes*

ontology as the question of the being (i.e., the 'status') of beings.[23] Epistemology should not be

singled out as 'first philosophy' precisely because it leads to confusion about the *status* of world,

about the *status* of knowledge, the *status* of value, about the *status* of Dasein. The broadly

Cartesian approach Heidegger criticizes blinds us to the phenomena of Dasein as being-in-the-

world.[24] Presupposing the traditional framework, we fail to get beyond the idea of the world as a

collection of entities that are occasionally 'invested with value'[25]; presupposing the human being

as a subject, we cannot see the phenomenon of Dasein as the one who always already

understands, for whom being is always an issue. In general, thinking through the prism of the

traditional epistemological problematic impairs our philosophical sense, driving us toward an

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[22] Recall: being is what determines entities as entities. There is no being without an understanding of being. Being depends on an understanding of being, i.e., on Dasein.

[23] On top of this, Cerbone concludes his discussion by suggesting that the interest in Heidegger realism or idealism is due in large part to problems with Heidegger's *exposition* in *Being and Time*. If Heidegger would not have spent *three* paragraphs discussing idealism and only *one* discussing realism, his dismissal of this problematic would have been easier for the likes of me to understand. This view that Heidegger's apparent affinity for idealism is simply the product of hasty or careless writing is definitively refuted by a passage from Heidegger's *Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, a lecture course given just after the publication of *Being and Time*. See, e.g., BP, p. 167. The passage is quoted in full in chapter 5.

[24] Even Kant missed the world in Heidegger's sense. See BT, p. 368.

[25] BT, p. 91.

imagined View From Nowhere. As excellent as it may be to avoid some particular Cartesian missteps, ontological questions remain.

It seems plain that Heidegger's view raises an almost endless series of realism-relevant questions of status and access. For example: *What* is accessed in the 'understanding(s) of being' that necessarily goes along with Dasein as being-in-the-world? How is it possible to claim that being, in Dasein's understanding of being, is transcendental for every entity without thereby claiming that entities are dependent on Dasein for their being? Can this 'ontological truth' be conceived in a way that does not insulate Dasein from things as they are anyway? How are we to understand Heidegger's claim that ordinary ('ontic') truths about the world are only possible on the ground of primordial truth? What does this dependency do to the 'status' of ordinary truths? What is the relationship between these two kinds of truth? These are just some examples of realism-relevant questions that raise issues about the *status* of what is grasped in our understanding of being. Since common sense has no consistent answer to these questions, a realist or idealist philosophical strategy is required to address them. In rejecting this, philosophical therapy appears tantamount to quietism, a simple evasion of philosophy.

If we grant that the ontological strategy of *Being and Time* can be analyzed in terms of realism and idealism, we may still think that Heidegger's occasional disdain of these categories is a function of his attempt to find a place between or below these poles—as a kind of pragmatist perhaps. Maybe there is a realist-minded pragmatism available to Heidegger able to avoid quietism without getting hamstrung by Cartesian skepticism. With all of Heidegger's talk about equipment, tools, and care, the suggestion that he is a kind of pragmatist appears fairly promising. To explore this possibility, the next section will consider two pragmatist approaches to *Being and Time*.

§3 – Pragmatism

Pragmatism's emphasis on action, practical problem-solving, and aversion to metaphysics has won it many adherents, particularly in America. In the world of Anglophone philosophy, pragmatism has reasserted itself in the post-analytic period, at a time when some of the loftiest ambitious of that movement have fizzled. With the collapse of conceptual analysis, 'good old fashioned artificial intelligence,'[26] and so many varieties of physicalism, for example, and with the increasing influence of later Wittgenstein, pragmatism is in fashion. This turn has resulted in important systematic work, with philosophers such as Hilary Putnam, Robert Brandom, and Richard Rorty leading the way, but, like any significant movement, it has also weighed in on the history of philosophy, making things safe for pragmatists, focusing on great works that may contain the seed of pragmatism while lacking the idiom in which to express it, trapped as they were in a Greco-Germanic haze. This pattern certainly holds when it comes to American philosophy's love affair with Wittgenstein, and is increasingly the case for American interpreters of Heidegger. And why not? Recruitment is just as important in philosophy as it is in football; in both cases, the name of the game is to get the biggest guns on your side. With Wittgenstein already in pocket, the ever-increasing interest in Heidegger isn't too surprising.

To be fair, there are some relatively natural ways to tie Heidegger to pragmatism. Hubert Dreyfus has done a great deal to inspire the pragmatist reading of Heidegger by emphasizing the importance of 'coping' and 'what computers can't do.' Of course, unlike Dreyfus, Heidegger doesn't talk incessantly about 'coping' or the challenges of AI. Heidegger does, however,

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[26]'GOFAI' John Haugeland's term for AI oriented by a Cartesian philosophy of mind. See his *Having Thought* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), pp. 301-4 for a succinct discussion of some of the shortcomings of GOFAI.

articulate a way of understanding the significance of things as they are bound up in our ordinary, everyday activities—understanding things as ready-to-hand—and, in this context, does provide an interesting phenomenology of equipment. This is certainly a way in for pragmatists. Moreover, although Heidegger doesn't discuss AI, he does supply a sustained critique of Descartes, whose 'representationalist' or 'mentalist' philosophy of mind became the model for those interested in AI, and so his persistent critique of Descartes can be used as fodder for an account of 'what computers still can't do.'

Although Dreyfus has led the movement to interpret Heidegger as a pragmatist, I won't directly discuss his work in this section. He may have inspired pragmatist readings, but his own view is decidedly realist, and so I'll wait to discuss it until the end of this chapter. For a more direct and complete account of Heidegger's pragmatism I will therefore consider arguments from one of Dreyfus' admirers, Mark Okrent, whose aptly named book, *Heidegger's Pragmatism*, lays out that reading in detail, particularly as it pertains to what Heidegger calls '*understanding*,' and from Richard Rorty, who agrees with many details of Okrent's view, but has a special talent for articulating the broader context and importance of this reading, which he takes to be Heidegger's insistence on the *contingency* of our understanding of being.[27] Since the topic of this dissertation is realism and idealism, i.e., broad ontological strategies, I find Rorty's wider view particularly useful and interesting to consider.

In general, then, there are two layers to pragmatist interpretations of *Being and Time*: the first focuses on an interpretation of understanding, emphasizing the priority of understanding-how over understanding-that, and its significance for ontology; the second focuses on the idea

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[27] Mark Okrent, *Heidegger's Pragmatism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), p.10, and Richard Rorty, "Heidegger, Contingency, and Pragmatism" (in *Essays on Heidegger and Others: Philosophical Papers, Volume 2,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

that our understanding of being is what we have made it, that it is relative to us, responding

to our ways of doing things, to our desires, actions, and beliefs. Both the pragmatism that focuses

on the priority of practical understanding and the pragmatism that focuses on contingency defend

it as a way of addressing the problems of ontology in an anti-metaphysical, naturalistic manner.

We will have to consider whether this attempt at lowering the metaphysical stakes succeeds, both

as to whether pragmatism manages to articulate a metaphysically less controversial view and

whether in trying to do so it is actually able to address the important issues. In addition, in the

context of this project, we obviously must also consider whether it provides a plausible

framework for interpreting *Being and Time*.

§3.1 – Pragmatism and Understanding

How does one go about arguing that Heidegger, of all philosophers, steeped as he was in

scholasticism and Kantianism, turned out to be a pragmatist? According to Mark Okrent, one

begins with what he takes to be the key to understanding *Being and Time*, what he describes as

Heidegger's 'agency centered' account of intentionality.[28] Heidegger's supposedly pragmatic

analysis of intentionality or 'aboutness' is set up as a contrast with 'mentalistic' or belief-

centered accounts. Okrent explains this in the language of 'understanding': intending depends on

understanding, and understanding comes in two basic flavors, understanding-how and

understanding-that. The pragmatist thinks that the former kind of understanding is the key to the

possibility of intentionality (of understanding anything *as* anything), while more traditional

(Cartesian) philosophers supposedly prioritize 'understanding-that.' According to that view, we

accumulate ideas in our minds, and we may then occasionally direct these beliefs at external

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[28] Okrent, p. 7.

realities, taking these things to be something or as something. Our empty intentions can be fulfilled or satisfied when the things we intend are shown to be as we thought they were. In contrast to this, the pragmatist focuses on the *agent*. As they see it:

> There is no apprehending of things without self-understanding. There is no self-understanding apart from practical-understanding. Therefore, there is no possibility of awareness of things other than Dasein apart from the practical-understanding of things.[29]

How do we get from *Being and Time*'s interest in being and existence to the suggestion that 'practical-understanding' is the key idea? For the pragmatist, "to exist … is simply to intend some possibility of oneself as a purpose."[30] Being—or, the intelligibility of things—depends on the existence of Dasein, who, as Dasein, necessarily lives in a meaningful world. Meaning, in turn, depends on Dasein's practical activity.[31] But this practical activity is itself only meaningful if it is intentional or is accompanied by intentionality. The magic ingredient that makes practical activity 'intentional' is practical-understanding, and is therefore central to our understanding of being. To clarify this jumble, I need to explain how the pragmatist sees the relations between this cluster of phenomena—existence, being, Dasein, meaning, practice, intentionality, and understanding—and why a particular kind of understanding, 'understanding-how,' ends up having priority.[32]

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[29] Okrent, p. 40.

[30] Ibid., p. 30.

[31] Ibid., p. 61.

[32] This already indicates one of Okrent's mistakes. 'Understanding' is not one mode of cognizing among others, as his talk of understanding-how and understanding-that seem to suggest.

As a pragmatist, Heidegger supposedly believes that 'meaning is use,' that the meaning of something depends on the way it is properly used.[33] For something to have meaning for Dasein is for it to be interpreted by Dasein in using it. Using something 'interpretatively' does not mean accidentally knocking against this or that thing, but entails a whole host of capacities. We must be able to 'understand' the entire context in which we are operating to reveal the meaning of that which we are using. For example, to use a hammer, we seize hold of it and begin hammering. To use it most appropriately (to fully uncover its meaning), we have to 'understand' the kinds of things that count as hammers and the kinds of things that don't. We have to 'understand' the kinds of things one can do with hammers and the kinds of things that one can't or shouldn't. We 'understand,' for example, that a hammer formed out of cake is not a real hammer and that using a real hammer to cut a cake is wrong. We have to 'understand' that we use hammers to fasten things together with nails, which in turn are used to build things, which are useful for this or that in the life of beings like us. When we use a hammer appropriately, i.e., understandingly, we are interpreting it, revealing its meaning. And this applies equally to language. Assertions are just tools for inference, for pointing out, for exclamation, etc. and we use them meaningfully when we use them appropriately. Just as we don't use a hammer to cut a cake and we don't use the exclamation "fire!" to greet someone.

Meaning emerges in this interpretive action. It is fundamentally a byproduct of real use, i.e., correct use that relates to our purposiveness. Whether using a hammer or an assertion, to use them appropriately we have to know why a person would hammer or talk, what a reasonable purpose is and isn't. According to the pragmatist, to have a purpose (not to be confused with

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[33] Okrent, p. 63.

being usable for a purpose) is just what it is to exist, just what it is to be Dasein.[34] To have a

purpose means to understand ourselves as that "in terms of which various things can appear to us

as serviceable or detrimental."[35]

To be Dasein is to have an understanding of being, which is to say that things are

meaningful for Dasein, which requires purposive 'practical coping' that, in turn, devolves on

having a purpose, as understanding ourselves as the for-the-sake-of-which we are engaged in

coping activities. The pragmatist therefore places a heavy emphasis on self-understanding: "all

understanding is derivative from understanding-how and, thus, ultimately depends on self-

understanding."[36] What is it to be self-understanding on this reading of *Being and Time*? It is to

act teleologically where the agent is the ultimate telos. But don't all kinds of things seem to act

teleologically without anything worth calling self-understanding? The ant carrying the leaf has

an aim—it is going somewhere with its load—but we tend to think that nobody's home, that the

ant is not Dasein. The iron panels on the car oxidize, but the differential responses of iron,

however steady and 'appropriate,' are hardly classifiable as purposive. Differential

responsiveness is different from purposiveness. In the former case, there's no question of

understanding, while bare purposiveness as self-understanding is undermined by the possibility

that the thing that seems to be acting for a purpose might be a zombie or mindless robot.

Recognizing this, Okrent is concerned to differentiate between Daseinish and non-

Daseinish purposiveness. Dasein is different from other things that have teleologically organized

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[34] "To exist, in Heidegger's sense, is simply to intend some possibility of oneself as a purpose" (Okrent, p. 30).

[35] Ibid.

[36] Ibid., p. 73.

patterns of behavior insofar as our behaviors are 'socially structured.'[37] But is that enough to

lead us into the light, to lift us out of zombiehood? Aren't there all kinds of non-Daseinish

practical copers that act in socially guided teleological contexts? There are social structures for

all kinds of organisms, from ants to elephants—there are pecking orders, divisions of labor,

friendships—at least as far as 'practical coping' is concerned. Still, we're never quite sure what

we're dealing with when we engage these teleological social copers. It's quite reasonable to look

at Fido and wonder what's going on in there—anything at all? But while there may be a problem

of other minds, it is certainly not the same as the problem of knowing what it is to be an animal.

Why is this? For starters, we can step back from our socially organized coping and discuss

it—and in doing so seem to be doing more than coping with the equipment of assertion. We can

reflect on what it means to be Dasein, share our purposes, our understanding of the world, what

we take to be *right* and what we take to be *true*. We can bring out the implicit articulation of our

world in way that non-Dasein cannot. In short, we don't normally worry about 'other minds' of

Dasein (as we might about that of animals) because we are 'in-the-world' together. This

possibility of being-in-the-world together suggests that our fundamental understanding of the

world is more than just practical and isn't quite 'theoretical,' but is the opening in which practice

and theory first become possibilities. To be sure, there can be no Dasein without practical

activity and hence 'know-how,' but being purposive is no way sufficient to be Dasein. Even the

strictest 'mentalist' wouldn't want to argue the opposite, that 'understanding-that' is sufficient

for being Dasein, for being like us. The 'mentalist' doesn't deny the importance of practical

activity, but just has an explanation of it rooted in the mind. My point here is only that

emphasizing the importance of know-how for Dasein isn't controversial, but without also

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[37] Ibid., p. 70.

considering our ability to 'know-that,' and how both of these are possible based on an understanding of being within which knowing-how and knowing-that are possible, it is hard to differentiate Dasein from a zombie, from an apparently purposive being where nobody's home.

While Okrent may believe that we are not so different from elephants and ants, and in many respects there is no need to deny that this is true, there remains a decisive difference between Dasein and all 'mindless copers,' namely, Dasein has an understanding of being and therefore a world. Heidegger's idea of 'understanding-how' should not be taken as the root of his account of 'intentionality.' It's certainly part of the story, but it has no conceptual priority, even if for the most part we understand beings in the mode of readiness-to-hand. Indeed, Heidegger broadens the notion of 'intentionality' so much that he no longer relies on the term in *Being and Time*, only indicating that he will explain, eventually, how intentionality is "grounded in the ecstatical unity of Dasein."[38] In *History of the Concept of Time*, a lecture course given in 1925, Heidegger has already expanded the notion of intentionality so much that he suggests it "constitutes the very structure of comportment itself."[39]

> Intentionality is not an ultimate explanation of the psychic but an initial approach toward overcoming the uncritical application of traditionally defined realities such as the psychic, consciousness, continuity of lived experience, reason.[40]

Heidegger's account of intentionality is nothing other than his account of being-in-the-world. It is in uncovering this unitary phenomenon that he challenges these "traditionally defined realities." As we know, being-in-the-world, the structure of comportment, includes

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[38] BT, p. 363, note xxiii.

[39] Martin Heidegger, *History of the Concept of Time* (1925), trans., T. Kisiel, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985, p. 31. Hereafter, *History of the Concept of Time* will be cited as HCT.

[40] HCT, p. 47.

understanding, but is not understanding alone, and certainly not 'practical understanding.'
The basic structure of Dasein's comportment is much broader than this.

However, if we take understanding alone to be Heidegger's new idea of intentionality, it
is then possible for Okrent to ask what kind of understanding first affords Dasein this 'aboutness'
or directedness. Okrent's answer, of course, is that practical intentionality has priority over
theoretical intentionality because the inextricable pair of self-understanding and practical-
understanding founds all understanding. While Being-in-the-world is certainly analyzed in terms
of understanding, it is also inseparable from state-of-mind and discourse. It is only through
understanding articulated by discourse and modulated by state-of-mind that we are in the world
in the relevant sense. Although this articulated and 'mooded' understanding of being includes
understanding-how and understanding-that, it is not reducible to either.

The world is our horizon for understanding anything as anything. The intelligibility of the
world is always articulated for individuals in advance of interactions with particular tools or
entities. This articulated horizon is *a priori* for Dasein and is given to us prior to any possible
experience. This pre-articulation of the world is inseparable from the linguistic articulation of the
world in discourse, inseparable from our historical languages. It is in language that our
understanding of being is pre-given to us.[41] Whether or not we actually assert that the hammer is
for fastening boards, our understanding of it as for this or that depends on the specific
determinacy our world has as discursively articulated.[42] To understand a hammer as a hammer

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[41] Cristina Lafont, *Heidegger, Language, and World-Disclosure*, (trans., G. Harman, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 77.

[42] For example, as Heidegger puts it in HCT: "our comportments, lived experiences taken in the broadest sense, are through and through *expressed* experiences; even if they are not uttered in

requires being able to step back from the activity of hammering to make this determinacy explicit. Being able to make this determinacy explicit requires having a space in which such determinacy can be made explicit. This 'space' is the space of discourse. Understanding and state-of-mind themselves are not possible outside of the particular determinacy available to us as linguistic beings. Saying this doesn't require denying that animals may have their own kind of 'world,' but only that their world would have to be analyzed differently.[43] They are not Dasein. As being-in-the-world, Dasein is more than a sentient entity among entities, for it brings to entities the horizon within which they are freed to be *as* they are.

The pragmatist reading quickly loses sight of these ontological issues and concerns itself with the mechanics of 'understanding-how,' of how we are able to use things like hammers in socially regulated, purposive ways. This leads to a heavy emphasis on what Heidegger calls 'equipment.' Equipment is comprised of 'tools,' which always 'refer' to one another in a holistic context of significance.[44] Using the standard example, a hammer refers to nails, which refer to the boards you make fast, which refer to the structure that keeps you dry, to the weather that may be threatening, etc. Tools are always understood in their relations to one another—as Heidegger emphasizes, there is no such thing as 'an' (isolated piece of) equipment—and, ultimately, in their relationship to *us* as the ultimate 'for-the-sake-of-which' practical activities are undertaken. The kind of being which equipment has is called 'readiness-to-hand' (*Zuhandenheit*). Of course, this

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words, they are nonetheless expressed in a definite articulation by an understanding that I have of them as I simply live in them without regarding them thematically" (p. 48).

[43] Cristina Lafont cites several excellent passages on the worldlessness of animals in her replies to critics in the 2002 *Inquiry* book symposium on her book *Heidegger, Language, and World-disclosure*, p. 235. See Heidegger, *GA* 27 p. 192-3.

[44] See the previous chapter for a background discussion of equipment.

is not the only kind of being that things may have. There are things that use equipment,

called Dasein, and there are things that are not understood purposively and relationally, but just

in their own right. When we understand-that something is such and such, not for our use but just

so that we may take stock of its 'bare facts,' then we are understanding it in its presence-at-hand

(*Vorhandenheit*).

With its emphasis on the priority of understanding-how over understanding-that, the

pragmatist interpretation of *Being and Time* naturally prioritizes readiness-to-hand over presence

at hand. As the story goes, in order to be Dasein we must act for a purpose, having teleologically

ordered lives. In order to achieve this order, we must act. To act we must understand how to do

things, which means that we must understand things in their readiness-to-hand. For Okrent, the

world is comprised of beings ready-to-hand. That which is ready-to-hand is understood in its

functionality as equipment. The world is just a collection of functional-equipmental contexts. As

Okrent puts it:

> 'The world' is the most general and all-encompassing field of functional relations in
> terms of which we practically understand each thing we encounter. The world is, as it
> were, the functionality contexture of functionality contextures, the whole in which
> specific equipmental contexts have their place.[45]

It is out of our world and back into our world that we understand everything. If the world is

defined in terms of the ready-to-hand, then readiness-to-hand has a special status, constituting for

the pragmatist the real being of the world. Understanding anything as present-at-hand depends

upon first understanding things as ready-to-hand. For example, it is only by being able to *use*

assertions, which are *tools* for inference and communication, that we are able to present things in

their presence-at-hand. In this way, understanding-that is supposed to depend on understanding-

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[45] Okrent, p. 43.

how. If we didn't have the language-tool, we couldn't understand the bare facts about

entities.[46] It is only by (always already) understanding the ready-to-hand that we can understand

the present-at-hand as that which is perceivable and causally involved.[47]

As the pragmatist reader of Heidegger divides the world there is Dasein, the agent, the

for-the-sake of which; there is readiness-to-hand, the kind of being that tools have, a kind of

being that depends upon the essential purposiveness of Dasein and fills out the being of the

world; and then there is the independent existence of that which is present-at-hand, that which is

causally involved and perceivable. It is therefore fair to say that the pragmatist reads Heidegger

as suggesting that there are *dependent* and *independent* ways of being. Tools are dependent while

entities in their presence-at-hand are not. We need to have an understanding of how to do things

with tools in order to understand things in their presence-at-hand, but that which is present-at-

hand has autonomy that the ready-to-hand lacks. As Okrent puts it:

> There can't be tools without Dasein, not because there would be no one to make them,
> but because nothing can be a tool except for a purpose. There are [present-at-hand] things
> without Dasein, however, because to be [present-at-hand] is simply to be capable of
> causing change.[48]

Okrent therefore understands that which is present-at-hand to be the Dasein-independent

furniture of the universe, while the ready-to-hand forms something like the Dasein-dependent,

culturally relative phenomena that happen to be meaningful to us.

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[46] Ibid., pp. 77-80.

[47] Ibid., p. 77.

[48] Ibid., p. 80. He uses the term 'extant' to translate '*Vorhanden,*' but I prefer to use the standard translation of '*Vorhanden*' as 'present-at-hand.' For the sake of consistency, I have modified Okrent's passage slightly.

Although it is true that the possibility of anything being understood as ready-to-hand depends on there being something there independent of any understanding, it does not follow that presence-at-hand, as a way of making beings intelligible in an 'objective' way is Dasein independent. *Both* presence-at-hand and readiness-to-hand depend on Dasein since both are ways of bringing determinacy to phenomena. There is, as Heidegger puts it, a kind of 'dimming down' of our purposes and interests in understanding things as present-at-hand, but that is not to be understood as a claim that world-stuff is itself, 'in-itself,' present-at-hand. And drawing a distinction between presence-at-hand and the entities discovered as present-at-hand doesn't help the case, since the idea of a *specific* 'beingless entity' is meaningless. My counter-proposal is not that everything is nothing but an idea in the Mind of Dasein, but only that *all determinacy,* and presence-at-hand is certainly a kind of determinacy, depends on Dasein.[49] This passage captures Okrent's mistake:

> Extantness [*Vorhandenheit,* presence-at-hand] cannot 'be' unless there is an understanding of extantness, nothing can 'be' extant unless there is an understanding of what it is to be in such a way. In general, there is no being without an understanding of the meaning (or truth) being, yet individual determinations of entities do not depend on an understanding of being.[50]

Determinacy is not separable from an understanding of being. Okrent is correct to state that presence-at-hand cannot be without an understanding of being. He is wrong, however, to think of the determinacy embodied in presence-at-hand as subsisting outside of that understanding of being. Realia don't disappear without an understanding of being, but their determinacy as what they were determined to be does. To assert the contrary is to side with the metaphysical

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[49] Therefore I believe that Okrent is wrong when he asserts that: Heidegger " does not hold that there would be no [present-at-hand] beings without [Dasein]. Heidegger is not an idealist" (Okrent, p. 78).

[50] Okrent, p. 109.

realist—against Heidegger—that there is a way that things are in-themselves as understanding-independent Furniture of the Universe. For the metaphysical realist, the ideal is the God's Eye View or View From Nowhere, the imagined grasp of the determinacy of the world outside of any conditions of determinacy. My position, by contrast, is not that there is no truth, no way that things are, but just the way things are depends on the framework for meaning in terms of which we make things intelligible. To simplify, we can say that once we set up the rules objectivity is no special problem or metaphysical mystery, but without a framework, context of meaning, ontological truth, etc., talk of determinacy is just a fantasy (the absolutists' fantasy). And, moreover, as I have urged, is a fantasy with extremely problematic philosophical consequences.[51]

Okrent's understanding of presence-at-hand and readiness-to-hand translates into a reading of Heidegger as a kind of metaphysical realist:

> Would things have natural determinations at all … if there were no Dasein? Well, yes and no… On the one hand, which determinations present-at-hand beings have, among any possible set of determinations, is entirely independent of Dasein and its purposes and practices. On the other hand, that there is a determining of them—their 'being determined'—needs Dasein.[52]

Thinking of the world as a collection of self-identifying entities misses the crucial idea of 'ontological truth' or 'primordial truth' so central to Heidegger's approach. In Heidegger's own words:

> All ontic truth must conform to ontological truth. Ontological truth is the primordial truth about beings, because it discloses in advance what is essential about the being of beings.

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[51] For a discussion of some these problems, see the discussion of metaphysical realism and the absolute conception of the world in the first chapter.

[52] Okrent, p. 108.

> It is this original truth, or as we say, this ontological truth, to which what is ontic, a being and its experience must conform.[53]

To use Heidegger's idiom, Okrent is trying to explain the possibility of ontic truth in the absence of ontological truth. There is no ontic truth—no specific determinations of beings—without ontological/primordial/transcendental truth first opening a space into which truths about beings are possible. In its understanding of being, as primordial truth, Dasein discloses the world. To say that Dasein *discloses* the world does not mean that Dasein is *mirroring* the furniture of the universe, as Okrent would lead you to believe in his talk of "their being determined" needing Dasein but not their specific determinacy. Rather, when Dasein determines certain possibilities for being, disclosing the world in some particular way, Dasein necessarily does not disclose the world to be some other possible way. Now, this is not to say that the way Dasein discloses the world is arbitrary or imaginary, but only that it is just one possible way of making the world intelligible. The determinacy that we reveal in discovering innerworldly phenomena, in uncovering ontic truths, is not, contrary to the beliefs of the metaphysical realist, an eternally abiding set of predetermined facts waiting to be traced out.

For the sake of clarity, I want to emphasize that once we 'supply' a framework for inquiry—ontological truth—we can certainly *learn* about the world (i.e., discover more and more about the way it is as it appears in the particular unconcealment of being in which we operate),

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[53] PIK, p.132. These passages come from a lecture course Heidegger gave on Kant's first critique in 1927-8, just after the publication of *Being and Time*. Although it is certainly true that Heidegger is not always defending his own view in his lecture courses on other philosophers, it is also clear that sometimes he is. Given the resonance these passages have with much of what he writes in *Being and Time*, I take these to be uncontroversial examples of Heidegger using the interpretation of Kant to explain an important basic point about ontology that he takes to be correct.

providing accounts of it that are better or worse.[54] What we never do, however, is approach

the world without a context of intelligibility—the understanding of being—that makes any

determinacy possible in the first place. Again, it is not that the determinacy we impose on the

world is a distortion of it—not at all. It is that without the disclosedness of Dasein, without

ontological truth, the very idea of determinacy is meaningless—our idea of 'being perceivable,'

our ideas of causality, etc. all depend on Dasein. As Heidegger is quick to emphasize, this is not

a lamentable fact about the limits of our access to the world as it is in-itself, but is a way of

explaining how access and objective understanding are possible in the first place. This priority of

the disclosedness of Dasein, of ontological truth, explains the possibility of real knowledge; it

doesn't attenuate it.[55]

As I've already discussed, all the readings of *Being and Time* considered in this project

agree on at least one basic interpretive premise: *Being and Time* is incompatible with

metaphysical realism. Although it may not seem like it based on my comments, this applies to

Okrent's pragmatist reading as much as to the others. For Okrent, Heidegger's rejection of

metaphysical realism is evidenced by his two-tiered ontology: the ontology of the world as it is

anyway, which just is the way it is irrespective of anything that we happen to think about it, and

the practical, Dasein-dependent ontology of our involvement with the world. A two-tiered

ontology already indicates a commitment to pluralism. In addition, there is the intrinsic pluralism

of our practical involvements. That is, if something being what it is depends on how we use it,

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[54] Cristina Lafont is rightly very concerned about whether or not Heidegger's approach to ontology leaves space for learning. Her views will be discussed in detail in chapter 5. See her *Heidegger, Language, and World-Disclosure*.

[55] Here I can only introduce the issues. The last chapter will provide a fuller discussion of them. See chapter 5 below.

and if correct use is guided by a 'community' standard, whether we are physically

manipulating something (using a tool in the most literal sense) or making inferential connections

(using assertion as a tool for inference, for example), there will be an indefinite number of

potentially acceptable interpretations for any thing. If ontology is relative to an understanding of

being that depends on our way of living, ontology is only limited by our possibilities for self-

understanding, however circumscribed these possibilities may be by what others are willing to

accept and what we can do. Since there are an indefinite number of ways that Dasein could

potentially understand itself, our ontological possibilities are also open-ended. According to

Okrent, then, on the one hand, things just are what we (collectively) take them to be, with the

proviso that they must be able to satisfy certain functional roles. On the other hand, however,

ontology is not dependent on us—this is the ontology of the 'meaningless' present-at-hand. This

is a feeble attempt at pluralism, of course, since once there is a determination of the way things

are *anyway* other ways that things 'are' tend to be interpreted as supervening projections on

meaningless world-stuff. Since his variety of supervenience doesn't preserve pluralism,[56]

Okrent's two-tiered ontology slides into metaphysical realism.

　　　Okrent's view has three basic flaws. First and most fundamentally, it fails to reject

metaphysical realism and is entirely compatible with it. Like Searle, who is unquestionably a

kind of metaphysical realist,[57] Okrent is happy to divide our determinations into those that

capture intrinsic properties of the world and those that are projections, mere reflections of our

ways of taking things. For Heidegger, by contrast, all discourses depend on the disclosedness of

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[56] See my discussion of Kim and the problems of supervenience in chapter 1.

[57] Cf., Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality*, esp. pp.149-197. I discuss Searle's position in greater detail in chapter 1.

Dasein, and so *absolute* determinations concerning the intrinsic properties of the world as it is 'in itself' are ruled out in principle. Searle and Okrent, however, have another kind of story to tell. Searle explains how our world is built up from brute facts; Okrent explains how our contextures of significance supervene on things that are 'strictly' capable of being 'understood' in an indefinite number of ways. For both, the bottom line is that, 'strictly speaking,' the world is a collection of mind-independent things to which we may add meaning. The world, as Searle might say, is epistemologically objective (there is discipline, judgments about it can be corrected, agreed upon, etc.) but ontologically subjective (it's being what it is depends on our 'assignment' of function). For both Searle *and* Okrent, our 'lifeworld' is constituted layering assignments of value upon a collection of entities that have ontological determinacy irrespective of what we happen to think about them. The lifeworld is dependent upon Dasein in its being, but the *real* ontology of the world is not. This division of ontology into the Dasein-dependent and Dasein-independent is contrary to the basic tendency of *Being and Time*, for all ontological determinations depend upon the disclosedness of Dasein, its *a priori* understanding of being.

The second major problem I see with Okrent's approach to Heidegger is his distortion of the phenomenology of Dasein. With his emphasis on the priority of understanding-how, he manages to make Dasein into a zombie that mindlessly copes its way through the world in an attempt to satisfy itself as the ultimate 'for-the-sake-of-which.' That's hardly the stuff of horror-flicks but, as an attempt to describe what it is to be Dasein, it's pretty horrible. Another consequence of this distortion of Dasein is that it makes objectivity inexplicable. If taking something as something is just about coping as we are supposed to cope, and since this model of understanding is also applied to the analysis of assertion, then there is little hope of explaining how our claims can actually be said to get things right. Zombie-Dasein doesn't try to adequate its

knowledge to the way things are. Instead, zombie-Dasein just develops skills for coping. It's true, occasionally zombie-Dasein tries to form an objective thought, but such attempts are just a bad zombie habit. The pursuit of objectivity is just one more practice, just one more way of coping—coping with assertions. The zombie-Dasein way may be to describe the pursuit of knowledge as something different from its other practical activities, but that is just a zombie-Dasein myth. Correctness is just what others allow as suitable and appropriate. Nevertheless, despite his problems in accounting for objectivity, Okrent isn't afraid to defend his two-tiered ontology's bold claims about the way things are anyway—a collection of self-identifying objects. This, however, is impossible as an interpretation of Heidegger and inconsistent with his own claims.

Finally, a third objection that I have to Okrent's view is the way he prioritizes understanding-how over understanding-that. While there is a sense in which such a prioritization is correct—for the most part we understand entities in their readiness-to-hand just by using them appropriately—the ubiquity of this way of being does not indicate that it has any ontological priority over presence-at-hand. Asking whether it is the being of that which is understood in understanding-how or understanding-that that constitutes the being of the world, as Okrent does,[58] indicates that different ways of understanding are taken to be ontologically neutral pathways, only some of which lead the subject to knowledge of the world in itself. In its ontological signification, however, understanding doesn't have kinds. Ontically there certainly are different manners in which we can understand or know the world, whether in relation to our aims or independent of them. Ontologically, however, what is essential is that we trace understanding back to its root in the being of Dasein as being-in-the-world. That means,

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[58] Okrent, p. 43.

understanding has to be connected with our basic ability to have a horizon for any kind of understanding, whether practical or theoretical. No particular *type* of understanding has ontological priority, but all devolve upon understanding as an aspect of being-in-the-world, which is also equally constituted by discourse and state-of-mind. Despite all his emphasis on understanding-how, his account turns out to be nothing more than a story about how the lifeworld emerges from our ability to invest things with value in view of our own purposes. Okrent can't shake the idea that only *some* kinds of being, viz. ontological determinacy, are *essentially* Dasein-dependent. Whether a being is discovered as present-at-hand, ready-to-hand, or with Dasein's kind of being, the being of what is discovered depends on the prior projection of being that occurs in Dasein's factical disclosedness.

§3.2 – Pragmatism and Contingency

Although Richard Rorty is sympathetic to Okrent's story about Heidegger, he does not take Heidegger's account of intentionality to be the primary reason Heidegger should be considered a pragmatist. Rather, It's Heidegger's attention to the contingency of our specific understanding of being that makes him attractive to Rorty. As he has it, Heidegger's pragmatism stems from his resistance to all forms of Platonism, which he defines as a devotion to something absolute, as a quest for stable, eternal, and authoritative truths. Pragmatism, by contrast, is defined by its rejection of eternal perspectives and its commitment to solving problems that matter to us here and now.[59] Heidegger, of course, doesn't have much zeal for solving practical problems (not in any conventional way, at least) but, at least according to Rorty, his work nevertheless encourages pragmatism. After all, if the aim of inquiry isn't to get our beliefs to

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[59] Richard Rorty, "Heidegger, Contingency, and Pragmatism," hereafter cited as Rorty HCP.

correspond to an Absolute Truth out there, what's left? Robbed of the possibility of

satisfying that standard, we still might be able to make our situation more to our liking. This is

the pragmatic orientation Heidegger's work fosters: harmonizing with the absolute isn't possible,

so we might as well set out to improve our world. Attempts to do anything more grandiose are

destined to lead to disappointment since they are sure to be undermined by skeptical arguments.

In making these claims, Rorty doesn't bother to conceal the fact that he has already gone down

that road and that he himself is a defeated Platonist looking for a new way forward. Since

Platonism is not a possibility—as delightful the pursuit of its lofty aims may sound—pragmatism

is our best option, and given its humaneness, it's not a bad one at all.

Rorty sees Heidegger as supporting his humanistic relativism through his articulation of a

kind of conceptual pragmatism, what might loosely be called a Kantian pragmatism:

> The forms in which we think, the structures of our inquiries, are malleable. We change them (…) whenever such a change better enables us to fulfill our desires by making things more readily manipulable.[60]

Our categories reflect our practical needs and cultural preconceptions. Importantly, they do not

reflect timeless determinations of how things must appear to us and are not part of an ongoing

attempt to harmonize our understanding with an already determinate reality. That pursuit has

come to nothing, according to Rorty. Although there is no set of categories that dictate how we

must understand our world, we must understand the world in some particular way, and this

understanding depends on us—we frame it and shape it to be meaningful for ourselves.

Recognizing this, the Heideggerian pragmatist understands that there is no possibility of

Absolute Understanding. *All* understanding depends on our understanding of being—it depends

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[60] Rorty HCP, p. 30.

on an ontological context to supply the logical space for ontic truths about entities. Rorty

cites Brandom approvingly to this effect:

> The move from equipment, ready-to-hand, fraught with socially instituted significances, to objective things, present-at-hand, is not one of decontextualization but of *re*contextualization.[61]

Switching from knowing-how… to knowing-that…, from readiness-to-hand to presence-at-hand,

is not a move to 'de-world' our understanding. The object is not, *pace* Okrent and Dreyfus,

rendered meaningless and removed from our worldly context.[62] Not at all. It is true that moving

from an understanding of something as ready-to-hand to understand it as present-at-hand is a

change, and it might even be appropriate to describe this movement as a 'dimming down' of the

relational significance that a particular piece of equipment has, but that absolutely does not mean

that the thing, now considered in its presence-at-hand, is worldless or contextless. As the passage

from Brandom succinctly expresses it, it is not a movement of "decontextualization but one of

*re*contextualization."

This idea of 'contextualization' fits nicely with the way Rorty understands what

Heidegger means by an 'understanding of being.' A translation into the analytic-Wittgensteinian

idiom he's most comfortable using leads him to gloss 'understanding of being' as 'final

vocabulary,' ideas that refer to our most basic conception of things, our ground-level account of

what things are. Our 'final vocabulary' is the point at which we can say no more about the way

things are without simply repeating ourselves, where "our spade is turned" and explanation can

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[61] Rorty HCP, p. 33n. Rorty here quotes Brandom from his article "Heidegger's Categories in *Being and Time*" in a footnote that restates objections he has to Bernard Williams' idea of an absolute conception of the world.

[62] See the discussion of Dreyfus on 'deworlding' below.

go no further. Our understanding of being is likewise an opening, a space within which we are able to consider phenomena, evaluate assertions as to their truth or falsity, or actions as to their appropriateness or inappropriateness, goodness or badness, etc. By contrast, a final vocabulary or understanding of being cannot be so evaluated. As Rorty puts it, "there are criteria of correctness for deciding to use [a sentence like 'the sky is blue'] to make a statement, but there are no criteria of correctness for final vocabularies."[63] A final vocabulary structures knowledge, but, as the ground of potential evaluation, cannot itself be evaluated. Rorty finds an ally in Heidegger because he sees in him another relativist about 'final vocabularies'—the idea that is supposed to drive us to pragmatism.

Another way to put this claim about relativism is in terms of 'contingency.' Rorty is interested in Heidegger's ability to characterize the essential contingency of our understanding of being. The understanding of being that we have—our final vocabulary—responds to our contingent ways of being and is not in the thrall of anything higher like The Truth, God, or Being.[64] At the most fundamental level, conformity to an external standard is an absurdity. We can never step away from the way we understand things to see if our way of understanding them corresponds to things-in-themselves. All we can do is repeat our claims about how things should be understood, checking them in relation to our own norms for validity. As Heidegger might put it, primordial or ontological truth cannot itself be evaluated as to its correctness since it is the very ground of correctness.

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[63] Rorty HCP, p. 38.

[64] "There's only us—being is not a hidden god doing this to us. Recognizing this contingency means accepting that "only as long as Dasein is, is there being…" (Rorty HCP, p. 36).

> The metaphysical thinker thinks that if you can just get the right understanding of being—the one that gets being right—then you are home. Heidegger thinks that the notion of 'the right understanding of being' is a confusion of being with beings.[65]

Such an attempt would be a confusion of being with beings because it is entirely possible to be right in our claims about beings—as Rorty points out in his example, we know when it is correct to say that the sky is blue—but it is not possible to evaluate the context of meaning that we use for the evaluation of those very claims. There isn't a right understanding of being, since all understandings of being come with their own possibilities and limitations. As Rorty would have us understand it, this understanding may shift, but not because it is somehow 'truer,' in the sense being more adequate to something outside of itself, but only because some part of a prior understanding has been pushed aside for practical reasons, reasons relating to our needs and desires (which includes, of course, theoretical needs and desires).

It is worth noting that Rorty does have an objection to Heidegger's view. He believes Heidegger is unable to commit to his own insight. Although he has a deep understanding of the 'finitude' and contingency of an understanding of being, he is nevertheless able (particularly in later works) to muster deep nostalgia for lost (pre-Platonic) understandings of being that he evidently takes to be superior and occasionally even manages to pine for better understandings of being still to come. Rorty believes that Heidegger has no right to such nostalgia or to dreams of a (metaphysically) better future.[66] And, of course, if Heidegger has no right to (metaphysical) nostalgia or optimism, neither do we. We're supposed to learn from all this to embrace our contingency, to be pragmatists. We should not be striving to find The True Understanding of Being, but to recognize that we can only work from within our own understanding of being to

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[65] Rorty HCP, p. 38.

[66] Rorty HCP, p. 40.

solve the problems presented to us, and to push the understanding we're given as far as possible towards meeting our specific needs.

Rorty's approach is almost unique among analytic-minded Heidegger scholars in at least one respect. While others may see the deep relativism implicit in Heidegger's view, they typically run the other way, writing as if they took a blood-oath to stamp out relativism wherever they find it. Rorty, for better or worse, is different. As he sees it, deep relativism is a good thing, an edifying thing, driving us to metaphysical-conceptual pragmatism concerned with getting things done, with improving our situation, and away from a slavish devotion to Forms, Gods, and Absolute Truths beyond our reach.

For Rorty's Heidegger, the purpose of philosophical inquiry is to allow us see our own deep contingency. Although I think Rorty is correct to point this out, and to point it out as something that was important to Heidegger, I don't think this pushes us to the relativism he advocates. Just because there are many possible ways being can be disclosed or understood, many possible contingent 'final vocabularies' that may structure our metaphysics, it doesn't follow that one is as good as the next, as Rorty is too willing to accept. It means that there will be choices—theoretical and practical—that will effect what's possible for us. We can hardly be indifferent to what possibilities are opened up and which closed off, both because we want to know the world as accurately as possible and because we want to get along in it as painlessly as possible. We care about these norms, which certainly give us a basis for considering one 'final vocabulary' superior to another. Moreover, an 'understanding of being' needn't be understood as monolithic. If Rorty is urging us not to misunderstand being as 'Being,' as some all-powerful thing hovering over us, then perhaps we should also avoid thinking of our understanding of being as a rigid framework that is transformed in an all or nothing way. It seems that we are regularly

presented with challenges to our final vocabularies but that the way we decide whether or not to change our understanding isn't at all capricious. We have hermeneutic standards. We are willing to adopt a new framework in the event that it explains, among other things, the limitations of the previous understanding. Our understanding of being, our synthetic a priori understanding, is *defeasible*. We give up and modify these principles for good reasons, none of which have to do with harmonizing with the Absolute. Hermeneutic idealism, which I will discuss in the next chapter, is not breaking its own rules in talking about *learning* amidst the continual change of synthetic a priori principles that found our knowledge.[67] This learning may not have the form the absolutist wishes, it may not be about getting ever-closer to mirroring the furniture of the universe, but neither does it have the form of crude Rortian relativism that takes truth to be nothing more than a compromise.

I considered pragmatist interpretations of *Being and Time* in order to find out (1) whether they are able to articulate a metaphysically deflated view while (2) nevertheless managing to address the key ontological issues, and, finally, (3) whether these readings are plausible interpretations of *Being and Time*. The last point was addressed clearly throughout the section. With respect to (1) and (2), my suggestion has been that insofar as these varieties of Heideggerian pragmatism actually trade on their subtle commitments to metaphysical realism, they certainly do not manage to articulate metaphysically uncontroversial views. Moreover, if they are crypto-metaphysical realists, they are left with the same basic antinomies as ordinary metaphysical realists. That is, whether they are inclined to address them or not, they must confront questions about the conflict of images and the ontological standing of the 'lifeworld.' These forms of pragmatism haven't touched the basic ontological questions, but only explain

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[67] Cf., Cristina Lafont, *Heidegger, Language, and World-disclosure*.

how 'practice' invests things with value. Whether all there is is such 'investing' (Rorty), or whether there is something deeper that has genuine ontological standing prior to these projections (Okrent), all ontological questions are addressed in relation to the subsistent absolute presence-at-hand of reality.

§4 – Realism

In the last section we saw how the committed pragmatist reading of *Being and Time* results in relativism. The less resolute alternative, which we saw just above in the discussion of Okrent's view, attempts to tack a kind of 'realism about science' onto a relativist account of practical understanding. But that position is inconsistent and, bracketing that concern, collapses into a form of metaphysical realism. Since Rorty's relativism is unacceptably one-sided, focusing exclusively on the anti-Platonic aspect of Heidegger's approach to ontology at the expense of his concern with explaining the possibility of science and genuine knowledge, and since the bric-a-brac melding of pragmatism and realism in Okrent's account gives us little to work with, I will now consider two realist interpretations to see if perhaps it is not realism *per se* (of Okrent's view, in particular) that was mistaken, but just the case for it. In what follows, I'll consider Taylor Carmen's argument for what he calls Heidegger's 'ontic realism' (section 4.1) as well as Hubert Dreyfus' case for something he calls Heidegger's 'robust realism' (section 4.2).

§4.1 – 'Ontic Realism'

The first thing to note in discussing realist readings of *Being and Time* is that they do in fact agree with my basic interpretive premise as framed at the end of the last chapter, namely, that the view articulated in Heidegger's work from that period is incompatible with metaphysical

realism.[68] Indeed, Carmen could hardly be more explicit about this. After discussing Hilary

Punam's description of metaphysical realism, the same idea of metaphysical realism I took as my

guide in chapter one, he explains that Heidegger

> …rejects the reductionist thesis that there is just one correct and complete description of the world. Instead he is a thoroughgoing pluralist, and so believes that there are many possible true descriptions of the world and that no particular class of descriptions has any special privilege or authority a priori.[69]

This is an outright rejection of metaphysical realism, the idea that "[t]here is one true complete

description of the way the world is."[70] Since Carmen understands that a satisfactory reading of

Being and Time cannot leave Heidegger as a metaphysical realist, his challenge is to avoid an

interpretation that can be assimilated to that view, that fits what Heidegger actually writes, while

still making a reasonable claim to realism.

In getting the interpretation to fit the text of *Being and Time*, the first challenge for a

realist interpreter is to explain-away what Heidegger actually writes about realism. As Carmen is

well aware, "Heidegger's own explicit remarks in *Being and Time* about what he calls 'realism'

are … pretty uniformly negative."[71] He is here referring to comments such as the following.

> …in realism there is a lack of ontological understanding. Indeed realism tries to explain reality ontically by real connections of interactions between things that are real.[72]

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[68] See footnote 1 above.

[69] Taylor Carmen, *Heidegger's Analytic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 166.

[70] Putnam, *Reason, Truth and History*, p. 49.

[71] Carmen, p. 164.

[72] BT, p. 251.

And my personal favorite, from the lecture course that immediately followed the publication

of *Being and Time*:

> … of realism it cannot even be said that it is untenable, because it has not even pressed forward at all into the dimension of philosophical problems, the level where tenability and untenability are decidable.[73]

This isn't just a way of disparaging a bad hypothesis, but indicates that Heidegger believes a

realist approach to ontology fundamentally misunderstands what is at issue. Heidegger thinks

that realism, in trying to explain *reality* by connections between real things, collapses the

distinction between being and beings, attempting to explain the former exclusively in terms of

the latter. For the realist, fundamental ontology would no longer require an existential analytic of

Dasein. In their estimation, physical science would probably suffice for this purpose.

Carmen obviously must deny that what he means by realism is what Heidegger is

rejecting in passages like the ones just quoted. He thinks that what Heidegger dismisses is

realism conceived as "any reductive naturalistic conception of intelligibility in the absence of a

phenomenological account of hermeneutic conditions."[74] In my opinion, this claim boarders on

the bizarre. I am prepared to grant that Heidegger occasionally thinks of realism in narrow

epistemological terms, as the question of how our internal beliefs can harmonize with the

external world. But I don't recognize Heidegger's understanding of realism in the idea of "any

reductive naturalistic conception of intelligibility in the absence of a phenomenological account

of hermeneutic conditions."[75] Does this mean that a "reductive naturalistic conception of

intelligibility" is acceptable (or is at least no longer up for abuse as a realist view) if presented

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[73] BP, p. 167.

[74] Carmen, p. 164.

[75] Ibid.

with a "phenomenological account of hermeneutic conditions"? What difference would that make on the acceptability of a naturalistic account of intelligibility?

Carmen understands "Heidegger's analytic," i.e., *Being and Time* and the related lecture courses, to provide the missing account, an account of the conditions for our interpretation of anything *as* anything.[76] Although this does have some relation to what Heidegger is doing, he does not do it as a psychological or anthropological investigation, but because Dasein's understanding has ontological significance, because the existential analytic is fundamental ontology. Heidegger's idea is not that we could understand what we need to presuppose in order to interpret anything *as* anything while going on to posit an idea of 'what there is' that is entirely separate from that, as Carmen seems inclined to do. The connection between being and understanding makes the reductive, radically Dasein-independent (i.e., naturalistic) account of reality a non-starter. There is nothing that we could *add* to such an account to make it acceptable. It is unacceptable precisely because naturalism, trying to explain "reality ontically by real connections of interactions between things that are real" displays a "lack of ontological understanding."[77]

The idea that 'hermeneutic conditions'—if one wishes to characterize Heidegger's project this way—are not at the same time the conditions for the possibility of the being of entities is to take an oddly anti-Kantian and, if you will, a 'sideways-on' view of what's going on in *Being and Time*. If we begin with the idea that what there is a collection of self-identifying

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[76] "*Being and Time* is an interpretive description of the conditions of interpretation, that is, the conditions of our ability to understand explicitly *that* and *what* entities, including ourselves, are" (Carmen, p. 2).

[77] BT, p. 251.

entities and then go on to provide an account of our conditions of understanding those things, we are no longer doing 'fundamental ontology,' but something closer to philosophical anthropology or psychology. Fundamental ontology is not just an account of how we are able to take *x* to be *y* in situation *s*,[78] since that would already presume that we have a handle on the 'real stuff' upon which we're layering our meanings, our takings as…. Interpretation isn't a taking as… in a psychological sense, but is a determining as… in an ontological one. The reason the being of Dasein is analyzed in *Being and Time* is to understand how ontological categories are inseparable from the disclosedness of Dasein as being-in-the-world. It is to understand how Dasein is responsible for disclosing ontological truth, the 'primordial truth' that frames what things really are as such. The analysis of Dasein isn't an account of subjective conditions of access, but of the way that the particular space that Dasein as being-in-the-world opens for any kind of knowledge is ontologically significant.

Carmen disagrees, suggesting that Heidegger is an 'ontic realist.'

> Neither Kant nor Husserl nor more recent critics of realism, that is, anticipate what I shall call Heidegger's *ontic realism* in *Being and Time*. By *ontic realism* I mean the claim that occurrent [*Vorhanden,* present-at-hand] entities exist and have a determinate spatiotemporal structure independently of us and our understanding of them.[79]

As he makes plain in this bold claim, he does not think of Heidegger's ontic realism as analogous to Kant's 'empirical realism.' Kant's empirical realism is realism *for us*. That is, it isn't realism about things-in-themselves in some absolute sense, but realism about things as we must understand them. He makes his point by reminding us that for Heidegger, unlike Kant, reality is

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[78] Cf., Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality*.

[79] Carmen, p. 157.

not a category of the understanding.[80] This, however, is patently false. Whatever one may wish to say about what Heidegger calls 'the real' or '*realia,*' reality *is* most certainly 'a category of the understanding,' if one wishes to put it that way, a category that belongs to the disclosedness of Dasein. As Heidegger puts it:

> Being (not entities) is dependent upon the understanding of being; that is to say, reality, (not the real) is dependent on care.[81]

Of course, what stands out in this passage are the parenthetical remarks, and that is precisely what Carmen is clinging to. Unfortunately, these difficult qualifications don't offer much to the realist. Consider Carmen's interpretation:

> Although it makes no sense to talk about being subsisting or obtaining outside or independently of Dasein's understanding of being, Heidegger is very clear that occurrent [*Vorhanden*, present-at-hand] entities, for example nature, can perfectly well *be* independently of us and our understanding of them and their being. Indeed, their independent existence is part of what we understand them as being when we encounter them within our world. His insistence that *being* is internal to Dasein's understanding of being, then, in no way commits Heidegger to transcendental idealism or antirealism about entities.[82]

First, it's not at all clear what he means by this last claim, since what he means by 'transcendental idealism' and 'entities' is unclear. If he means that Heidegger is not committed to the determinacy of entities depending on Dasein, then his claim is false. If it means that Heidegger is not committed to the non-existence of stuff without Dasein, then he's attacking a straw-man, since no one believes that. What does he mean by antirealism? Is it antirealism to say that the being of entities depends on Dasein? There's no straightforward answer to this question,

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[80] Carmen, p. 156, footnote 3.

[81] BT, p. 255. Care, as another way of designating the being of Dasein, hasn't been discussed in any detail. It doesn't change the meaning of the passage to substitute somewhat redundant phrase 'the being of Dasein' for care, if that makes it easier to understand.

[82] Carmen, p. 158.

since, as I noted in chapter two, antirealism needs to be understood as variation on realism, and isn't applicable without further ado to idealists like Heidegger (and this is not to claim that he is a *transcendental* idealist, in the Kantian sense that Carmen attempts to use as his foil). Secondly, and more importantly, the passage cited above displays a misunderstanding about presence-at-hand. Presence-at-hand, *Vorhandenheit*, is a way of being. Being depends on Dasein. Ergo, presence-at-hand cannot be understood as a way of designating the Dasein-independent being of entities. This is just one way that we make beings intelligible. It is not that beings are somehow not the way we think they are, though we can certainly make mistakes, but only that the specific determinacy included in our idea of presence-at-hand is not something that entities have 'in-themselves.' So, while 'the real' may be without the understanding of Dasein, presence-at-hand (what Carmen translates as occurentness) is necessarily linked with the disclosedness of Dasein. Third, the fact that understanding-independence is part of how we understand presence-at-hand doesn't mean that this commitment of common sense is correct. There is certainly *something* to it. As Heidegger has it, *the real* doesn't depend on the being of Dasein, but how exactly this should be interpreted cannot be settled by an appeal to intuition alone, by the fact that part of our understanding of presence-at-hand is precisely not to think of these determinations as 'subjective.' Presence-at-hand is not 'subjective,' but as part of the way Dasein makes beings intelligible, it also does not allow us to leap to the conclusion that without the determinacy Dasein's understanding of being brings to phenomena that that determinacy subsists independently. It is precisely the notion of 'subsistent determinacy,' the metaphysical realist's idea of ontological determinacy, that Heidegger has set out to criticize in his remarks about realism.

Carmen's interpretation is objectionable because his consistent rejection of the idea

that Heidegger is a metaphysical realist committed to the idea of a view from nowhere is in

conflict with his willingness to take a view from nowhere to declare what there is anyway.[83] As

Carmen straightforwardly asserts:

> The fact that every view is a view from somewhere does not, however, entail that it is impossible to know, at least in part, how things are independently of any view from anywhere.[84]

In fact, it does. What he can legitimately say is that the fact that we are viewing something from

some point of view does not mean that that point of view is limited in the sense of being

distorted. I agree with that. But what he is trying to get out of claims like this one, in the attempt

to explain Heidegger's supposed ontic realism, is that we can grasp the specific determinacy of

things apart from our ways of making them meaningful to ourselves, which is what Heidegger

denies in the key passages that distinguish the real from reality, such as the one from *Being and

Time*, section 43, considered above. Carmen may not simply help himself to an understanding-

independent idea of determinacy, since that is precisely what is at issue. In making such a claim

he presupposes the world as a collection of self-identifying-entities, which is exactly what

Heidegger *denies*, and in agreeing that Heidegger is not a metaphysical realist, Carmen should

also deny.

What Carmen calls 'ontic realism' *is* a kind of metaphysical realism. Unsurprisingly, he

runs himself into the same problems metaphysical realists do in attempting to stake a claim to

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[83] Carmen, p. 158.

[84] Ibid., p. 159.

pluralism.[85] His problem is the same as the metaphysical realist's: once there is an account of the way things are anyway, once you have stated of what the 'limit case' of truth is, what is true irrespective of what we happen to think about it, then that truth has priority. Typically there isn't a problem with one truth superceding others a priori, because typically there isn't a standing claim about what there really is anyway. Once a philosopher is willing to make that claim, however, all other putative truths need to accommodate themselves to that one, which leads to the typical realist story about supervenience, compatibilism, ephiphenomena and the rest. Once a privileged explanation is singled out, the autonomous standing of everything else must be justified in relation to it or become a 'mere manner of speaking,' and doing that is at the very least an extremely tall order, as we saw in chapter one. Of course, Carmen denies that this is his view. And he should. It is fraught with problems and it is not Heidegger's. But once he 'steps back' to take a View From Nowhere, to make a claim about the determinacy of entities irrespective of our understanding, of our frameworks of intelligibility, of ontological truth, then he has crossed into the metaphysical realist's territory, and, try as he might, there's no way back to a defense of the 'thoroughgoing pluralism' he claims to find in *Being and Time*.[86]

My objections to Carmen's reading of *Being and Time* call for a few more preliminary comments on Heidegger's distinction between 'the real' and 'reality.' Carmen's move to make this distinction into a defense of realism is understandable enough. As I noted in the discussion of the platitudes of common sense, it is certainly part of common sense that we think of the world as existing beyond our 'beliefs' about it. And once we think of the world as existing irrespective of whether we happen to 'think' of it, it is hard not to take the next (illegitimate) step

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[85] See chapter 1.

[86] Carmen, p. 166.

to infer that the world must be some particular way irrespective of how we happen to think of it. As I read Heidegger (substituting his awkward 'unconcealment of being' for 'belief' and 'thought' in the above claims), he wants to grant the first claim and deny the second. On pain of incoherence, the first claim regarding the thought-independent existence of the universe must be granted—all is not Mind, and fortunately this is not what idealism requires. The second claim about the specific determinacy of beings, however, needn't be inferred from the first. Just because the universe doesn't pop out of existence behinds our backs, doesn't mean that the determinacy we attribute to it is eternally present without the disclosedness of Dasein. The claim is not that our way of disclosing the world is somehow false or not quite adequate to the way the world is, but just that there are many ways the world can be meaningfully determined, and to attribute our particular way of making sense of the world—however excellent it may be—to the world itself, is to misunderstand the significance of Dasein as being-in-the-world and collapses the distinction between being and beings, which may be the most fundamental distinction of Heidegger's work. It may be possible to satisfy the important intuition concerning the mind-independence of the universe by granting the cogency of the idea of furniture of the universe. We pay for this, however, by being forced to address the seemingly insurmountable problems of metaphysical realism. Alternatively, following Heidegger, we may acknowledge the phenomenon of world-disclosure and the distinction between being and beings, deny that the idea of the furniture of the universe makes sense, and use this hermeneutic approach to ontology to make space for a robust pluralism. That pluralism is paid for by accounting for a challenge to an important realist intuition, but, as I have repeatedly urged, this is clearly not our only concern; there are many other commitments of common sense that we are obliged to attend to. If an account of what there is is not to distort our account of who we are, satisfying the metaphysical

realist's dominant intuition leads to a philosophical dead-end. Heidegger's work is worth

considering because he sketched an alternative ontological strategy, a strategy with revisionary

costs, but, in that respect at least, it is no worse off than the realist view advocated by Carmen,

Dreyfus, or any other metaphysical realist.

§4.2 – 'Robust Realism'

      I think it is appropriate to conclude this section on realist-minded readings of *Being and*

Time with a discussion of some of the views of Hubert Dreyfus. For at least the last 25 years, he

has been the most important Heidegger scholar in America. He has influenced thinking about

Heidegger through his lectures, students, testimony before congress about how what he learned

from Heidegger undermines the traditional idea of artificial intelligence so generously subsidized

by the United States government,[87] and, perhaps most importantly, through the 1991 publication

of a study guide on *Being and Time*.[88] However, because he applies the principle of interpretive

charity quite aggressively, reading Heidegger in terms of what he thinks he should have said

almost as often as in terms of what even he thinks Heidegger actually said, it is difficult to

engage his work as a discussion of Heidegger without spending an inordinate amount of time

trying to prize Dreyfus and Heidegger apart.[89] The challenge presented by his ever-evolving

reading of Heidegger, has led me to focus narrowly on a pair of articles that specifically address

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[87] Hubert Dreyfus, *What Computers Still Can't Do* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992).

[88] Dreyfus, *Being-in-the-World*.

[89] Even John Searle noticed that Dreyfus was not writing and lecturing about Heidegger but about a philosopher that might deserve the title "Dreydegger." See dreydegger.org for such gossip and links to related websites.

the question of realism.[90] In these articles, Dreyfus argues for what he calls Heidegger's

'robust realism.' Fortunately, Dreyfus has been fairly consistent on this topic, so I don't think

anything I'm going to say will sound too odd to those familiar with him primarily through his

popular book on *Being and Time*.

Motivating Dreyfus' most explicitly realist readings of Heidegger's early work are his

objections to 'deflationary realist' interpretations. By 'deflationary realist,' Dreyfus is pointing to

a position like the one Cerbone (his student) holds in his therapeutic approach. To recall,

according to this view, idealism and realism are said to be relics of Cartesian subjectivism, and

are not at issue in Heidegger's practical holism. With the annihilation of Cartesianism, the

traditional philosophical categories of realism and idealism are rendered meaningless, and we are

restricted to our ordinary (i.e., non-philosophical, non-metaphysical) ways of talking about

things. For example, if we want to know whether something exists 'mind-independently,' we just

take up the question in a philosophically naïve way.[91] Does the chair exist without our

consideration of it? Of course! Wouldn't it be insane to say otherwise? End of story. The

deflationary realist gets away with this glib approach to ontology because they believe that

metaphysical talk (any talk that tries to talk about the 'being-it-itself' of things, metaphysical

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[90] Dreyfus, "How Heidegger Defends the Possibility of a Correspondence Theory of Truth with Respect to the Entities of Natural Science" and Dreyfus and Spinosa, "Coping with Things-in-Themselves: A Practice-Based Phenomenological Basis of Realism." Both of these articles are reprinted in *Heidegger Reexamined (volume 2): Truth, Realism, and the History of Being*, (eds. H. Dreyfus and M. Wrathall, New York: Routledge, 2002). For further discussion of the latter essay, see the articles by Piers Rawling, Jeff Malpas, T.L.S. Sprigge, Richard Rorty, and Mark Wrathall in *Inquiry*, 45 (1) (1999), where "Coping with Things-in-Themselves" was originally published.

[91] See Putnam, *The Threefold Cord*, "On the importance of being Austin," naivete informed by practical holists argument (detailed below) or a Wittgensteinian-Austinian version of the same argument.

status, etc.) is impossible in principle. Why? Because the deflationary realists take what Dreyfus describes as an anti-Cartesian or Davidsonian view of "human beings as inextricably involved with things and people,"[92] a view that is also called "practical holism," which states that "meaning depends ultimately on the inseparability of practices, things, and mental contents."[93] Based on this holism, the deflationary realist can't sensibly raise philosophical questions about dependence or independence of things from our practices. We can only grasp things in relation to our thoughts and practices; we can only grasp our thoughts in relation to things and practices; and we can only grasp our practices in relation to things and thoughts. None can be understood in sufficient isolation from the other to sensibly ask about their dependence or independence. Practical holism is therefore supposed to take both metaphysical realism and transcendental idealism off the table, leaving a mundane and naïve but principled ordinary language realism in its wake.

Although Dreyfus thinks that this deflationary realist model fits well with what Heidegger has to say about our everyday practical involvement in the world (where we are concerned with our environment, where the hammer is real hammer if it is deemed appropriate to fasten the boards together), he does not think the deflationary approach is adequate as an account of what's going on in scientific understanding. The idea of science is to access "things that are independent of all our practices."[94] According to Dreyfus, therefore, there must be a two-part answer to questions about Heidegger's realism. With regard to the ontological commitments

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[92] Dreyfus, "How Heidegger Defends the Possibility of a Correspondence Theory of Truth with Respect to the Entities of Natural Science," p. 219.

[93] Ibid., p. 220.

[94] Ibid., p. 219.

implicit in practice, our ordinary engaged coping, Heidegger is a deflationary realist, but when it comes to science he is a robust realist, believing that the questions of independence and dependence that the deflationist rules out in principle actually do make sense and that "science can in principle give us access to the functional components of the universe as they are in themselves."[95]

Dreyfus' case for Heidegger's robust realism turns on being able to distinguish 'the world' as the totality of significance from 'the world' as the collection of self-identifying entities. The ability to make this distinction is necessary to make sense of the idea of that which is known in natural science as existing with its particular determinacy independently of the practices that happen to bring it to light. Unlike many others, Dreyfus doesn't claim realism by misunderstanding readiness-to-hand and presence-at-hand. He recognizes that these are modes of being—modes of intelligibility for Dasein—and that it is a category mistake to insist that the ready-to-hand exists in a Dasein-dependent way while that which is present-at-hand exists independently of Dasein. Nevertheless, Dreyfus claims that Heidegger "insists that 'entities are independently of the experiences by which they are disclosed'" (BT, p.228) despite the fact that "this amounts to the seemingly paradoxical claim that we have *practices for making sense of entities as independent of those very practices*."[96]

These practices for making sense of entities independent of our practices are practices for 'deworlding,.' Deworlding occurs in 'breakdown,' during which our ordinary understanding of something is disturbed. Breakdown is often illustrated in terms of the breakdown of equipment: when a tool breaks while being used, when something is the blocking our way to getting

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[95] Ibid.

[96] Ibid., p. 222.

something done, or when something necessary for achieving an end is missing, for example.

In each of these cases, the disturbance can lead us to see the thing that we were using or the things around us, our 'workshop,' as just so much stuff, rendered useless by the disturbance in the flow of our productive activity. Of course, this breakdown can be rather mild, as when we just toss aside the hammer with the loose head and pick up the spare we have on the shelf. For an example of a more complete breakdown Dreyfus looks to the phenomenon of anxiety, when our familiarity with the world fades and things that are typically important to us, that typically just show up as something to be used or to be concerned for in a particular way appear as bare meaningless stuff.[97] In anxiety the significance of our world is diminished and, as a result, our ability to make sense of that which we encounter suffers. Of course, we may be able to go on doing things, faking it, as it were, but the alienation of anxiety nevertheless brings us face to face with the world in its insignificance, in its 'strangeness.'

Dreyfus understands that entities experienced in breakdown are not yet "theoretical entities."[98] To qualify for that status recontextualization is necessary. Although Dreyfus' Heidegger is unclear on how this recontextualization is supposed to occur, it must, since science is obviously "theory-laden."[99] As Dreyfus sees matters, we always begin in our meaningful everyday world out of which we may potentially glimpse the deworlded world in breakdown, something which licenses us to conceive "theoretical entities [as] elements of nature, that is, of a universe that is anterior to and independent of our everyday mode of making sense of things." In

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[97] Dreyfus, p. 223.

[98] Ibid.

[99] Ibid.

short, the phenomenon of breakdown (practical or 'existential') shows that science is

properly understood as a way of cataloguing self-identifying "components of the universe."[100]

      Heidegger's case stalls at this point, according to Dreyfus. He has a story about how we

can see things as part of the universe (as contrasted with the world, the significant 'wherein'

Dasein lives), but no developed story of how these bare things are to be taken up into a realist

science of things-in-themselves. Apparently, Heidegger gets stuck on the idea that in breakdown

we are still making things intelligible as unintelligible (as 'strange' deworlded things-in-

themselves). Dreyfus believes, however, that Heidegger had the resources, even in *Being and*

Time to get over this antirealist hump. What Dreyfus thinks he should have said is that *access* is

essentially Dasein-dependent, but that what we encounter is only contingently dependent. Our

scientific practices should be understood as *access practices*. Heidegger could have done this

using the noncommittal form of reference he had developed called "formal indication." This way

of referring "begins with *contingent* features and ends with *essential* features, if there are any,

only after an investigation."[101] Dreyfus therefore takes Heidegger's talk of formal indication to

be a kind of proto rigid designation *a la* Kripke. In his opinion, Heidegger didn't understand

reference this way, but he could have and should have since it sets up the possibility of a realist

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[100] Ibid., p.224. Dreyfus still wants to reject metaphysical realism, and so still agrees with my basic interpretive premise that *Being and Time* is incompatible with metaphysical realism. He understands metaphysical realism as holding that 1) "the universe has a single order" and 2) "that order and its components exist independently of our minds and ways of coping" (Dreyfus, "How Heidegger Defends the Possibility of a Correspondence Theory of Truth with Respect to the Entities of Natural Science," pp.249-250). He wishes to deny the first of these two claims, since he eventually goes on to defend something he calls *multiple* realism, which is pluralism about the functional order of the things-in-themselves. Considering this proposal would take us far afield and isn't necessary for my purposes, particularly since it depends on the unsuccessful case for Heideggerian robust realism currently under discussion.

[101] Ibid., p. 225.

science that begins by designating entities by the contingent properties we attribute to things in our everyday practices and allows us to go on to discover the essence of these things as they are revealed in their 'deworlded' thinghood. If rigid designation leads to essentialism, and Heidegger has an account of rigid designation, then Heidegger has an account of our ability to see things as they are essentially outside of their dependency on our contingent understandings of being.

It seems obvious, however, that even if Heidegger did have a view of science as clarifying the *essence* of things, that doesn't mean that that 'essence' is not also part of our 'world,' part of our way of making things intelligible, our 'understanding of being.' 'Essence,' at least the sense of the commitment to essentialism entailed by rigid designation, needn't be thought of as a determination of the way things are from a God's Eye View, but can very well be dependent on the disclosedness of Dasein. 'Getting to the way things really are' doesn't mean that the discovery is of the way things are *absolutely*. To say that we've hit upon the essence of something only means that within a certain frame something is singled out in some particular a way, and that this way of singling out that thing is uniquely suitable. The fact that rigid designation may *formally* imply essentialism does not drive us to 'robust realism.' Indeed, it seems that the claim of robust realism based on rigid designation is a *non sequitur*. If science is essentially theory-laden, and all our understanding is dependent upon our practices of making-intelligible, then *more* science, *further* investigation, is never going to break though to an understanding 'things-in-themselves' in the robust realist's sense. This idea of reality-in-itself, which seems to be what Dreyfus is driving at, should be cast aside. Again, this does not amount to the claim that all there is is Mind, but only that what we know is going be taken up by us, disclosed in our understanding of being with its particular fore-conception, fore-having, and fore-

sight. And, again, this absolutely does not imply that we are doomed to distort anything we understand, but only that we should remember what is required for understanding, particularly since the presuppositions of understanding aren't impediments to knowing things as they are but are exactly what makes that understanding possible in the first place.

So, if metaphysical realism is ruled out, is there a kind of realism that can be extracted from *Being and Time*? There is, but not of the kind that either Carmen or Dreyfus suggest. Heidegger may very well be described as an 'ontic realist,' but only because he is at the same time an ontological idealist. Carmen's addition of an account of 'hermeneutic conditions' to a view that is otherwise metaphysically realist results in nothing more than metaphysical realism. Carmen is correct to note that Heidegger provides an account of hermeneutic conditions, but for Heidegger, crucially, these conditions are ontologically significant. That is, as an account of our access to the world they cannot be separated from the being of entities, for it is only in Dasein's disclosedness (our access) that entities have their specific determinacy, their 'what-being.' Dreyfus' attempt to articulate a strong Heideggerian realism also misses this important fact. Even if we have practices for 'dimming down' the practical significance of the world, and even if we formalize these practices in a scientific method, that does not mean that we are able to access the world outside of our understanding of being. The understanding of being, Dasein's disclosedness, supplies the horizon for our understanding of anything as anything. And this is the case whether we are understanding things as present-at-hand or ready-to-hand. The horizon of being does not come from the realia themselves, but from Dasein. For this reason, Heidegger calls the existential analytic of Dasein fundamental ontology. This does not mean that our understanding of phenomena is distorted in the 'mediation' of our disclosedness, but it does mean that understanding things 'in themselves' is still understanding things 'for us.'

CHAPTER 5
IDEALISM, TRUTH, AND PLURALISM

§1 – Introduction

In this chapter, I will describe the basic shape of Heidegger's idealism, how it is linked to his idea of truth, and how a strong form of ontological pluralism follows from this view. Although I will explain why an incommensurability thesis, and so relativism, also follows from Heidegger's idealism, the bulk of the chapter will not focus on this particular, if extremely important, consequence but on describing his wider view accurately while noting why, despite the possibly undesirable implications of his proposal, his interest in ontological truth is well-placed and his commitment to pluralism correct. Heidegger's argument pushes us to take the good with bad, or at least the good with the highly counter-intuitive, insofar as his case for pluralism also supports an incommensurability thesis.[1] In the end, then, Heidegger presents a challenge to two significant groups: on the one hand, he challenges metaphysical realists on the coherence and plausibility of their view, particularly insofar as it leaves no room for ontological pluralism; on the other hand, he challenges those who believe they can avoid metaphysical realism and relativism by supporting a pluralist, yet anti-relativist middle-way. It is far from clear

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[1] We should certainly remember, however, that all 'views,' all paths through our commonsense commitments, have their share of revisionary moments. Many take the good with the bad in endorsing forms of metaphysical realism. Heidegger's position is in this way no different, although the particular ways in which he 'goes revisionary' definitely are. As I see it, the revisionary demands that Heidegger is making are both more tenable in terms of his entire position and more plausible vis-à-vis common sense than are the views of the metaphysical realist. This claim will be supported throughout this chapter, but primarily in sections 4 and 6. On the standing of their respective claims in relation to common sense, see chapters 1 and 2.

that there is any such position, but, even if there is, it is likely to be threatened by a slide back

into metaphysical realism, on one side, or into relativism, on the other.[2]

Backing up a bit, it is worth restating here that by calling Heidegger an idealist I mean

that he is committed to the idea that being, and so the being of entities, depends on the

disclosedness of Dasein. For Heidegger, Dasein is the world-disclosive, world-constituting

condition of possibility for anything being what it is. This, of course, does not mean that Dasein

somehow produces entities or spins them out of its imagination, but only that for actual beings to

be *what* they are Dasein must first impose determinacy by providing a horizon against which

anything can *be* what it is, allowing things to show themselves as what they are in themselves.

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[2] One kind of 'third way' will try to undermine this threat by denying that realism and idealism are exhaustive options. Whether this criticism of realism and idealism points to their supposed endorsement of the subject-object schema or scheme-content dualism, the criticism is the same: both realism and idealism are said to presuppose that we can make sense of an unconceptualized reality, something out there that our ideas either need to fit (metaphysical realism) or organize (idealism) (Donald Davidson, "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme," in *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984, and Mark Sacks, *The World We Found,* p. 159). But if this idea of 'mediation' (by a subject, conceptual scheme, etc.) is given up because we can find no neutral ground for looking at our ideas, languages, meanings, on the one hand, and the world, on the other, then questions relating to both realism and idealism ought to lose their edge. As I see matters, however, if philosophy sets out to analyze, organize, interpret, correct, and explain the commitments of common sense, the pre-philosophical conception of our 'being-in-the-world,' then the suggestion that such intuitive and fundamental questions cannot be asked, that, say, there is no sense to questions about 'the world in itself'—and hence no possible metaphysically realist or idealist resolutions to such questions—appears to be a non-starter (see chapter 2). We cannot therapeutically expunge our basic ideas about the world, for any philosophical trick used to do this will beg the question—who says we cannot reasonably ask about what there is *anyway*—we can only address them, and any way we choose to address these basic ideas will have a cost relative to our pre-philosophical commitments. In this connection, I agree with Mark Sacks' description of staunch 'internalists' (Putnam of *Reason, Truth and History*, Goodman, Quine) as transcendental idealists in denial. I disagree with Sacks, however, that there is another kind of 'ontological internalist,' those defending the views of later Wittgenstein, that aren't properly described in this way. They, too, must address themselves to our pre-philosophical commitments.

Being and Dasein are inseparable for Heidegger and so the being of entities, therefore, cannot precede the existence of Dasein.

This admittedly hazy gloss of the basic commitments of Heidegger's idealism will be clarified in the next section (section 2). Following that, I'll begin to explain Heidegger's idea of truth, focusing on the *locus classicus* for this topic, section 44 of *Being and Time* (section 3). With those topics outlined, it will be possible to explore the most important consequence of Heidegger's interest in ontological truth—pluralism (section 4). Heidegger's view entails pluralism in two different senses: synchronically, as pluralism between discourses, and diachronically, as incommensurability among discourses. As I mentioned, however, the consequence of Heidegger's commitment to a strong incommensurability thesis is relativism: Heidegger has no way to account for our ability to adjudicate between putative ontological truths, for he takes them to be absolutely authoritative from within and immune from criticism from without (section 5). Although I don't think we ought to follow Heidegger's specific proposal for making sense of ontological pluralism, I do believe that his interests in ontological truth and pluralism are correct. These are among the positive consequences of his discovery of the ontological difference (the idea that beings cannot be reduced to being and vice versa). If one follows Heidegger's view at all, it seems impossible to reject this fundamental anti-reductive, anti-naturalist commitment, a commitment that resonates throughout his entire corpus. But, sure enough, that is precisely what therapeutic, pragmatist, and realist interpreters have done using what I take to be an extremely misguided application of the principle of interpretive charity. As I see it, although they may sidestep some problems with Heidegger's view, they only manage to do so by losing track of his basic approach. As I explained in the previous chapter, I find such interpretations to be non-starters, completely missing Heidegger's rather straightforward

commitment to idealism. Their problems, however, are not only exegetical, for they also miss

key systematic insights, namely, that ontological pluralism, something absolutely necessary for

an adequate account of our being-in-the-world, is impossible without 1) engaging the ontological

issues (what therapeutic and pragmatist readers fail to do in trying to get pluralism for free), and

2) refusing to collapse being into beings and vice versa (what realist readers fail to do, making it

impossible to defend ontological pluralism). So, I will conclude by maintaining that,

exegetically, therapeutic, pragmatist, and realist interpreters of Heidegger are way off track, but

also, systematically, that ontological pluralism seems to be essential to any descriptively

adequate account of our being-in-the-world, even if Heidegger's own proposal for achieving it

has what some consider to be troubling relativistic consequences. I conclude by urging that

Heidegger's consistent and relatively simple view stands as a powerful challenge both to those

who would neglect synchronic pluralism, as well as to those who would like to accept it but

without any of its seemingly unavoidable revisionary consequences (section 6).

§2 – Heidegger's Idealism

Having already discussed metaphysical realism at length in the first chapter, we might

begin to understand Heidegger's idealism by contrast. He rejects the basic premise of

metaphysical realism, namely, that the world is a self-structuring or self-identifying collection of

entities.[3] This is to say that Heidegger does not believe that being precedes Dasein's

disclosedness, its ability to make phenomena intelligible as they are in themselves.[4] Dasein does

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[3] On metaphysical realism as a commitment to reality being 'self-structuring' or self-identifying, see Putnam, *The Many Faces of Realism*, p. 43.

[4] BT, p. 105

this by laying out an a priori horizon against which beings can be differentiated, in terms of which we can discover something as, say, a piece of equipment or a thing of nature. Being one thing and not something else requires being identified along certain lines of significance.[5] It is Dasein that projects a totality of significance in terms of which particular entities can be identified as such and such entities. Entities are only what they are within the world, understood in Heidegger's sense as the totality of significance, and, so long as it exists, Dasein is responsible for projecting this totality.[6] This is not a responsibility that Dasein could somehow shirk, of course. Dasein only exists in making this ontological projection. As Dasein, it cannot do otherwise, which is what it means to say that in its being Dasein is that being for whom being is always an issue.[7]

This basic point can help orient us to Heidegger's question of being. In asking about being, Heidegger is considering how it is possible for beings to be what they are, how it is possible for them to have their specific determinacy: does this determinacy emanate from *realia* or is only possible in light of what we might call a 'transcendental' horizon, an a priori understanding of being?

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[5] Cristina Lafont helpfully explains this point by citing one of Quine's maxims that applies equally to Heidegger: there can be "no entity without identity." She continues: "Given that entities are not self-identifying, one has to identify which entities one is talking about in order to be able to distinguish them from others. And one cannot do so unless one has an understanding of what distinguishes these entities from others, that is, an understanding that provides the resources to identify entities as *what* they are, that is, in their *being*" ("Heidegger and the Synthetic A Priori," p. 108).

[6] In other words, as Mark Sacks puts it, all individuation is in some sense "perspectival" (p. 159). There must be some standard in terms of which something can be identified as something rather than nothing.

[7] For example, BT, p. 67.

> In the question which we are to work out, *what is asked about* is being—that which determines entities as entities, that on the basis of which entities are already understood, however we may discuss them in detail. The being of entities is not itself an entity. If we are to understand the problem of being, our first philosophical step consists not … in 'telling a story'—that is to say, in not defining entities as entities by tracing them back in their origin to some other entities, as if being had the character of some possible entity.[8]

Although realists and idealists may be able to agree that being is "that which determines entities as entities," Heidegger parts ways with realists in asserting that "the being of entities is not itself an entity."[9] Realists are committed to the idea that the being of an entity is or is in the entity itself. As Heidegger puts it, realists "tell a story" about how the being of an entity is located in its substance or in some other entities upon which it supervenes. According to Heidegger, by contrast, entities do not exude their own being—the being of entities is not reducible to the entities themselves. Instead, being is tied to understanding: it is "that on the basis of which beings are already *understood*."

The being of entities must *already* be understood before we can begin to tell a genetic story about how some entity is produced causally. That kind of ontic investigation of entities is perfectly appropriate for empirical sciences, but if we want to understand the being of entities as such, if we want to understand the determinacy of entities as such entities, we have to look elsewhere. Although we interrogate entities about their being, what gives them determinacy as the beings they are depends upon the horizon within which they are disclosed, a horizon that cannot come from the things themselves: entities cannot force their own categorization or identification upon us. It is our *prior* understanding of being that first makes entities accessible to us as such entities and it is in this prior understanding that the being of entities must be sought.

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[8] BT, pp. 25-26, Greek omitted. See chapter 3 for additional discussion of this passage.

[9] See chapter 3.

In differentiating being from beings and in claiming that there is only being in an understanding of being, Heidegger sets up ontology as "transcendental science" concerned with the *what* and *how* of Dasein's a priori understanding, as well as its significance. As he explains:

> We must be able to bring out clearly the difference between being and beings in order to make something like being the theme of inquiry. This distinction is not arbitrary; rather, it is the one by which the theme of ontology is and thus of philosophy is first of all attained. It is a distinction which is first and foremost constitutive for ontology. We call it the *ontological difference*—the differentiation between being and beings. Only by making this distinction […] not between one being and another being but between being and beings do we first enter the field of philosophical research. Only by taking this critical stance do we keep our own standing inside the field of philosophy. Therefore, in distinction from the sciences of things that are, of beings, ontology, or philosophy in general, is the critical science, or the science of the inverted world. With this distinction between being and beings and the selection of being as theme we depart in principle from the domain of beings. We surmount it, transcend it. We can also call the science of being as critical science, *transcendental science*.[10]

In identifying ontology with "transcendental science" and a "critical stance" inappropriate to "the sciences of things that are," Heidegger rejects metaphysical realism, which is occupied with showing how the abundance of different types of self-determining beings can have genuine ontological standing together. Metaphysical realism glosses over the ontological difference, reducing being to beings. By contrast, in the Kantian spirit of his work, Heidegger supports the so-called "Copernican revolution," which he takes to mean that "ontic knowledge of beings must be guided in advance by ontological knowledge."[11] Ontology is therefore a "transcendental science" concerned with the *prior* determinacy of being in Dasein's understanding of being. It is a "critical science" that seeks the conditions of possibility for all regional ontologies in the conditions of access to being. To understand this access, we must understand how it is that

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[10] BP, p. 17, deleted Greek marked by ellipses.

[11] PIK, p. 38.

Dasein is world-disclosive and what this world-disclosiveness means for the status of our ontological commitments.[12]

Heidegger ties "transcendental science"—ontology—to the existential analytic of Dasein, suggesting that "there is a way—perhaps even a very special one—in which entities with the character of Dasein are related to the question of being."[13] The priority of Dasein with respect to the question of being, the basic question of ontology, grants Dasein a kind of priority that realists could never accept: Dasein is given *ontological* and not only *ontic* priority. This does not just mean that Dasein is in the world as a present-at-hand thing among other things and happens to have the ability to ask questions. Rather, Dasein is defined by being ontological, by always having prior "ontological knowledge."[14] This "knowledge" is not a free floating possibility that Dasein just happens to be in a position to take advantage of because of its impressive cognitive abilities—it is not just in the right place at the right time with sufficient brain power. Dasein is not simply a neutral portal through which the world is viewed, but it is the being that makes the world discoverable in the first place. As world-disclosive, Dasein is world-constitutive; Dasein's ontological priority stems from the fact that all ontologies take their rise from Dasein's (always prior) understanding of being.[15]

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[12] In using the phrase "world-disclosure" I follow Cristina Lafont. See, for example, *Heidegger, Language, and World-disclosure*.

[13] BT, p. 28.

[14] BT, p. 32.

[15] The priority of understanding is outlined in Heidegger's account of the "fore-structure" of the understanding (BT p. 191). The prior grasp of the whole is what Heidegger calls "fore-having," the particular way we appropriate what is understood is called "fore-sight," and the specific conceptuality we draw upon in understanding anything as anything is called "fore-conception." For more about the priority of understanding, see chapter 3, section 2.4.

Dasein's understanding of being pertains with equal primordiality both to an understanding of something like a 'world', and to an understanding of the being of those entities which become accessible within the world. So whenever an ontology takes for its theme entities whose character of being is other than that of Dasein, it has its own foundation and motivation in Dasein's own ontical structure, in which a pre-ontological understanding of being is comprised as a definite characteristic.

Therefore *fundamental ontology,* from which alone all other ontologies can take their rise, must be sought in the *existential analytic of Dasein*.[16]

Without Dasein there is no world as the totality of significance, and it is only in the world, against that horizon of intelligibility, that entities take on their determinate character, that they are "released" to be what they are in themselves.[17] Within the world we can understand things as what they are: things have significance for us as things present-at-hand with certain causal and temporal properties, as things ready-to-hand with particular uses, as Dasein with its distinctive possibilities, freedom, and so forth. So, in coming to acquire knowledge about any domain of entities, we must have already projected an understanding of the being of those entities and so of how they fit into the world. Before we can know about any particular entities in detail, before we can discover them, they must already be disclosed or laid out for us in their being. For example:

We can comport ourselves toward a being, e.g., what is extant as such, only if we understand in advance what extantness means. Therefore, we must state generally and fundamentally that with the understanding of the tool-character, which from the beginning elucidates all our dealing with tools, it becomes clear that all comportment toward beings carries within it an understanding of the manner and constitution of the being of the beings in question.[18]

Again:

Whether we consider and describe the window as a utilitarian thing, an instrument, or as a pure natural thing, we already understand in a certain way what it means to say

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[16] BT, pp. 33-34.

[17] BP, pp. 70-71.

[18] PIK, p. 16.

"instrument" and "thing." In our natural commerce with the instrument, the tool, the measuring instrument, the vehicular instrument, we understand something like *instrumentality*, and in confrontation with material things we understand something like *thingliness*.[19]

More generally,

A being can be uncovered, whether by way of perception or some other mode of access, only if the being of this being is already disclosed—only if I already understand it. Only then can I ask whether it is actual or not and embark on some procedure to establish the actuality of the being. … The disclosedness (unveiledness) of being founds, that is to say, gives the ground, the foundation, for the possibility of the uncoveredness of the being.[20]

As "the ontico-ontological condition for the possibility of any ontologies,"[21] Dasein discloses the world in accordance with its own facticity—in accordance with its concrete but always prior understanding of being—and it is out of this disclosedness that all discovery arises and back into it that all discovery returns.[22] That is, we provide the grounds for discovering entities, but this discoveredness of entities also feeds back into our understanding of being, reinforcing and shaping our understanding of being. Armed with an implicit, a priori understanding of the identity conditions of beings, of what it takes to be extant, to be ready to hand, to be Dasein, etc. we are able to determine beings in their being; we are able to assign determinacy to real things, to assign reality to *realia*.[23]

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[19] BP, p. 68.

[20] BP, p. 72.

[21] BT, p. 34.

[22] Cf., BT, p. 62, cited below.

[23] Cf., BP, p. 219 where Heidegger discusses appropriating the determinations of an entity *to* the entity itself. On reality and realia see BT, section 43, particularly BT, p. 255.

Being is tied to the understanding of being: there 'is' being only when Dasein exists.[24]

If there is only being so long as Dasein exists, then there can also be *truth* only so long as Dasein exists:

> We meet with a being's being in the understanding of being. It is understanding that first of all opens up or, as we say, discloses or reveals something like being. Being 'is given' only in the specific disclosedness that characterizes the understanding of being. But we call the disclosedness of something truth. That is the proper concept of truth as it already begins to dawn in antiquity. Being is given only if there is disclosure, that is to say, if there is truth. But there is truth only if a being exists which opens up, which discloses, and indeed in such a way that disclosing belongs itself to the mode of being of this being. We ourselves are such a being. The Dasein itself exists in the truth. … Being is given only if truth, hence if the Dasein, exists.[25]

As I'll explain further in the discussion of truth in the next section, according to Heidegger, being, truth, and Dasein are inextricably linked. It is only Dasein that has an understanding of being and can open (disclose) a domain of possible truth. All access to truth depends in principle on the existence of Dasein. It is not just that without Dasein there is no one around to witness 'the truth.' Without Dasein there is no truth to be accessed at all. That is idealism.[26]

In short, Heidegger is an idealist because he argues that beings cannot be as they are, cannot in principle be accessed, without a prior understanding of being. This prior understanding

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[24] See, for example, BT, p. 272 and BP, p. 19.

[25] BP, pp. 18-19.

[26] It is important to emphasize that this idealist repudiation of the reduction of being to beings, is not a reduction of beings to being, to Dasein's understanding of being. That things are actual does not depend on Dasein, while their particular determinacy does. This implies that Heidegger holds on to the idea of the real outside of reality, what Rorty describes as "The World Well Lost" (in *Journal of Philosophy* 69 (1972), 645 –665). But it is not "well lost." Not giving up on the idea of 'the real' surviving all ways that we might care to identify it separates idealism (and Heidegger's particular variety of hermeneutic idealism) from quietism on the one hand and insanity on the other. For an interesting discussion of Richard Rorty and Nelson Goodman on this topic, see Sacks, *The World We Found,* p. 98.

of being means that being 'is' only so long as Dasein exists. This, in turn, means that there is truth only so long as Dasein is. Only when beings are disclosed, when they are determinable as what they are, is it possible for them to be uncovered in their being, i.e., for there to be truths about them, known or unknown. Ontological truth, the truth that pertains to the world-disclosive synthetic a priori knowledge I've been discussing as an always prior understanding of being, the understanding that does not come from experience but pertains to experience making our knowledge of world possible, is what makes it possible to understand entities as the entities they are. It is ontological truth that provides the fundamental horizon for the interpretation of anything as anything, for the differentiation of beings from one another, for the freeing of entities to their being, etc. Exactly how this idealism is justified, what it entails, what it allows, and some of its principal challenges will be considered further in what follows. To begin to do this, I'll turn now to Heidegger's discussion of truth in section 44 of *Being and Time*.

§3 – Truth as Being-Uncovering and Disclosedness

Heidegger's idea of truth is an integral part of his idealism. In discussing truth, Heidegger consistently emphasizes its important connection to being and entities.[27] This link is not just a function of the fact that there can be truths about being (what determines entities as entities) or truths about entities. Rather, truth is associated with entities insofar as the truth itself is said to be "what shows itself." And, with regard to being, philosophy as the "science of being" is also the

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[27] Section 44 begins: "From time immemorial, philosophy has associated truth and being" (BT, p. 256). He proceeds to offer a quick lessons on Parmenides and Aristotle to show that the conceptual connections between being, truth, and entities were already recognized by the ancients.

"science of truth," contemplating "…'entities as entities'—that is, with regard to their being."[28] Truth, according to Heidegger, therefore pertains to the correctness of particular predications, but also to 'what is,' to how and what things are in their being. This rather dark statement boils down to the simple idea that it is not possible to talk about the truth of something without also raising the question of its being. For Heidegger, understanding the being of entities means understanding the a priori projections that stand as a fundamental condition of possibility for it. In this way, the question of truth brings up questions of ontological status, which is precisely the fundamental concern of realism and idealism.

The idea that there is a kind of truth that relates to the correctness of (ordinary or ontic) predication and a kind of truth that pertains to questions of being is not an idiosyncrasy of *Being and Time*. We've already encountered this split in considering metaphysical realists' ideas about truth. Even if the metaphysical realists' commitment to truth as a unique relation of correspondence of propositions to something absolutely Dasein-independent is not something Heidegger could accept, metaphysical realists still explain truth as Heidegger does as "what shows itself," if the equivalence schema may be paraphrased this way, as when we say that, for example, 'snow is white' is true if and only if snow is white, or, in Heidegger's parlance, if the snow 'shows itself' in just this way. But truth is not only what 'shows itself' when assessing propositions but also has an 'ontological' sense, as when the issue is not just whether a particular well-formed statement is correct but of what that correctness itself consists in. This second sense of truth comes into play when the issue is not only the correctness of a statement but also about the ontological standing of the object—this raises questions of what makes something *what* it is and what bearing that has on *how* it is. To address such questions, a different sense of truth is

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[28] BT, p. 256. Note, Heidegger is here citing and freely translating Aristotle.

required because the ordinary understanding of the truth predicate doesn't itself capture the relevant ontological distinction. For instance, if we say that 'Northwestern University exists' or 'It is true that Northwestern University exists,' adding 'really' to the statement doesn't change anything. Either it is true Northwestern exists or it is false. What the metaphysical realist wants to know when they ask about truth in the absolute sense, however, is not whether we can correctly assert that Northwestern exists but whether Northwestern has genuine ontological standing. Yet the questions are asked the same way, and so, for the metaphysical realist, it is therefore both true *and* false that Northwestern exists. In the first case, the ordinary case, of course Northwestern exists—it's a private university in Evanston. In the second case, the metaphysical realist claims that it is not true that Northwestern exists, since institutions have no place among the furniture of the universe. The metaphysical realist allows that truth is ordinarily a function of a kind of agreement in judgment: we know what institutions are and how to judge whether or not they exist. By our familiar standards, then, the fact that Northwestern exists couldn't be clearer. When the question is about absolute or ontological truth, however, the question is whether claims about Northwestern directly correspond to anything that exists irrespective of what we happen to believe. In this sense, the metaphysical realist is tempted to say no, it is not true that Northwestern exists. The issue is truth: in one sense, in the ordinary sense, truth is a kind of indirect correspondence mediated by our subjectivity, in which case it can be allowed (or the metaphysical realist hopes it is allowed) that all kinds of assertions are true despite the fact that the claims do not correspond to what there really is. In the second sense, when the issue is 'absolute' truth, truth concerns what directly corresponds to the way things

really (mind-independently) are.[29] In the second sense, the truth predicate has extra

metaphysical oomph and claims made in this register are somehow supposed to pertain to the

furniture of the universe. Failing to match that, they fail to be true. Even for the metaphysical

realist, therefore, truth is not just what shows itself but is what determines entities as entities, viz.

what entities are in their being. For metaphysical realists, as I've explained, what determines

entities as entities is just more entities. Nevertheless, there must be two distinct levels of truth,

since no metaphysical realist can allow that truth is restricted to cases of 'direct'

correspondence.[30] There must be a way of talking about the truth of 'what shows itself' even if

such truth is only truth in an attenuated sense, as a mere 'manner of speaking.'

It is easy enough for philosophers to neglect what Heidegger calls the "primordial

connection"[31] between being and truth by clinging to the apparent ontological neutrality of the

truth predicate, which may be used in a way that does not seem to entail ontological

commitment. After all, saying that 'it is true that x' does not force us to declare whether talk

about x should be construed realistically or anti-realistically, yet that very neutrality raises the

question of the being of x. That an assertion about something can be correct does not tell us the

whole truth about the phenomenon in question. The inconclusiveness of ordinary truth

determinations with regard to ontological questions pushes philosophers to split truth in two: into

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[29] On direct and indirect correspondence (and for evidence that some philosophers actually do deny the existence of institutions, and much more than that), see Horgan and Portrc, "Abundant Truth in an Austere World," as well as Horgan and Timmons, "Conceptual Relativity and Metaphysical Realism." For further discussion, see chapter 1.

[30] Cf., chapter 1, on how truth cannot be restricted to 'limit cases.'

[31] BT, p. 256.

a property attaching to the correctness of claims ("what shows itself") and a property that designates what entities are in their being ("what determines entities as entities").

Although philosophers may neglect the "primordial connection" between being and truth by hiding behind the apparent ontological neutrality of the truth predicate, our pre-philosophical ideas about truth—our commonsense commitments, if you will—prohibit us from evading the ontological issues. Importantly, our pre-philosophical ideas about truth include the idea that is an *external* concept, transcending our subjective assessment of how things are and our justification for particular claims: truth concerns how things actually stand. An explanation of this is not exhausted by pointing to the equivalence schema, for question of truth is ultimately a question of just what this equivalence amounts to. If we allow that truth is about the way things actually stand, then questions about truth must draw us into questions about ontology—about what it means to say that something actually is some way.

To be sure, it should be emphasized that contrary to our presuppositions or intuitions about it, truth may not be transcendent. It may be that although we have certain intuitions about truth, these intuitions may not pertain to any single coherent notion. Rather than saying that truth is impossible for us or unknowable we may instead opt to *revise* the concept of truth. We may believe we ought to cut truth down to size in order to make it intelligible, to put it within our reach and hopefully extinguish some of ontological questions that surround it. However, even the rejection of truth's transcendence does not sever the link between truth and ontology. To the contrary, such a revisionary 'internalist' conception of truth only *increases* pressure for an account of the ontological commitments involved in truth claims, that is, we would have to explain why, despite appearances, in making truth claims we aren't answerable to objects that completely transcend our subjectivity. A satisfactory discussion of truth, whatever its ultimate

conclusions about its nature, cannot remain silent on the ontological questions pertaining to realism and idealism, which is to say that an account of truth cannot remain silent about the ontological character of what our truths are supposedly about.[32]

Heidegger takes up these general issues in section 44 of *Being and Time*, approaching them by way of some observations about the inadequacy of the traditional idea of truth as correspondence and working his way back to the ontological questions just reviewed. He uses two claims to represent the traditional idea of truth: 1) "the locus of truth is assertion (judgment)" and 2) "the essence of truth lies in the 'agreement' of the judgment with its object."[33] The traditional idea of truth aims, above all, to confirm one particular idea of the correspondence platitude: that truth is the correspondence or agreement of *intellectus* and *res*. But this supposed agreement remains obscure: "*With regard to what*" do these items agree?[34] The relation is supposed to be a kind of equality, but how can *intellectus* and *res* be equal if they are, as Heidegger puts it, "not of the same species"?[35]

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[32] This suggestion that questions of truth cannot be completely isolated from questions of realism and idealism is just another aspect of what I referred to in chapter two as an 'unavoidablity thesis,' that is, that our pre-philosophical commonsense commitments challenge philosophers, regardless of the path they choose to cut though the philosophical landscape, to take a stand on the questions of realism and idealism.

[33] BT, p. 257. For good measure, Heidegger adds that this traditional characterization is typically attributed to Aristotle.

[34] BT, p. 258.

[35] The judgment is a "real psychical process," while what is judged is an "ideal content." It is this content that is supposed to be true or false, but to determine the agreement of the ideal content and the real object these ontologically heterogeneous elements must come together in a relation of agreement. Although some relation plainly "subsists," the correspondence theorist cannot explain *how*. Is the relation between the real and ideal supposed to be real or ideal? The philosophical question is not whether there is truth, it is not whether some kind of agreement occurs, but how it is possible.

To explain how the relation between *intellectus* and *res* is possible, Heidegger

believes that the presupposed separation of the ideal and real, subject and object must be

reconsidered, in what amounts to yet another challenge to the Cartesian subject-object schema.

The best way to do this, he thinks, is by reflecting on what actually occurs when we have

knowledge, when knowledge is demonstrated to be true. Are we finding a way to align

something mental with something actual, an idea with a thing? To use Heidegger's own example,

what happens when someone with their back facing a wall correctly asserts that a picture

hanging on it is askew?[36] What occurs when the person turns around to look at the picture? Quite

simply, their assertion is demonstrated to be true. Its truth is confirmed. But is this confirmation

the ascertainment of an agreement between our idea of the thing and the real thing? Although

something like agreement certainly occurs, what Heidegger denies is that in the original assertion

there is a relation to a representation or image of that which is ultimately under consideration. He

insists that in the assertion there is a direct relation to the picture on the wall "and nothing else."

As he puts it:

> Any interpretation in which something else is here slipped in as what one supposedly has
> in mind in an assertion that merely represents, belies the phenomenal facts of the case as
> to that about which the assertion gets made. Asserting is a way of being towards the thing
> itself that is.[37]

The idea that we produce a 'representation' or 'picture' of a thing in making an assertion about it

does not square with our actual experience of such situations. While positing a layer of

'representations' may help account for other phenomena, such as illusions, hallucinations, or

even the readiness-to-hand of assertions, if we consider what's actually going on, we don't find

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[36] BT, p. 260.

[37] Ibid.

any representations or mental pictures in considering what happens when knowledge is demonstrated to be true. Heidegger's suggestion is that in making the assertion Dasein is *already* a being-towards the real thing, the picture on the wall. In seeing what we are a 'being-towards,' what is demonstrated is just that the thing is what one 'had in mind' in the assertion. What is confirmed is that our being-towards the picture "*uncovers* the entity towards which it is. What gets demonstrated is the being-uncovering of the assertion." The entity which the assertion is about shows itself in its "selfsameness," that is, just as it is uncovered in the assertion. Truth is not the demonstration of an agreement of a representation with its object, of the psychical with the physical, or among the contents of consciousness.[38] Knowledge is demonstrated to be true when the entity itself shows itself to be as it was asserted to be. From the start, assertion is a being-towards entities, which means that truth need not be understood as a comparison of ontologically heterogeneous elements: it is the self-showing of an entity as some particular entity in some particular way. To say that an assertion is true is just to say that it uncovers the entity and "'lets' the entity 'be seen' in its uncoveredness." Truth is therefore a kind of pointing-out (*apophansis*) of something as something rather than a likening of an entity of one kind (such as a representation) to an entity of another kind (the real thing). For Heidegger, therefore, ordinary truth claims fundamentally concern "being-uncovering," not agreement.[39] Truth is not about

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[38] Ibid.

[39] BT, p. 261. This is not to say that Heidegger does not try to satisfy the general platitude concerning correspondence, viz., that truth 'tells it like it is.' Satisfying this platitude and suggesting that truth must be a kind of correspondence are very different things, however. It is therefore misleading to write as Mark Wrathall does of Heidegger endorsing a view of "truth as a sort of correspondence." Heidegger has an account of how and why we mischaracterize truth as a kind of correspondence and how and why there is a *founded* or *derivative* sense of truth as correspondence, but he does not allow that the idea of truth as correspondence or agreement is a satisfactory account of propositional truth, or what he calls 'being-uncovering.' Moreover, noting

subjects aligning their representations with objects; it is about Dasein pointing out phenomena already within its horizon, within its understanding of being, and in doing so uncovering them as they are in terms of the determinacy disclosed in its understanding of being. As Heidegger puts it, assertion does not initially unveil entities but is always "already related to something antecedently given as unveiled."[40] In making truth claims we are not comparing representations to something absolutely separate from us, we are uncovering our world and exhibiting it in its specific determinacy:

> Assertion is the exhibitive letting-be-seen of beings. In the exhibitive appropriation of a being just as it is qua uncovered, and according to the sense of that appropriation, the uncovered entity's real determinativeness which is then under consideration is explicitly appropriated *to* it. We have here once again the peculiar circumstance that the unveiling appropriation of the extant in its being-such is precisely not a subjectivizing but is just the reverse, an appropriating of the uncovered determinations *to* the extant as it is in itself.[41]

To say that we are appropriating determinations *to* the thing as it is in itself means that while on the one hand we are exhibiting something just as it is, letting it be seen, we are also *imposing* determinacy on something. This is not a process of subjectively 'coloring' entities in some arbitrary way, but is the only way that entities can be freed to be what they are. Truth therefore has a dual character: it opens up a domain of entities and points out certain phenomena as being so and so, letting them, in Heidegger's jargon, "show themselves."

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that Heidegger accounts for the correspondence platitude does *nothing* to save him from his deep relativism, which I discuss in sections 4, 5, and 6. For an opposing view, see Mark Wrathall, "Heidegger and Truth as Correspondence," *International Journal of Philosophical Studies*, Vol. 7 (1), 1999, pp. 69-88.

[40] BP, p. 208.

[41] BP, p. 219.

Ernst Tugendhat famously objects that this characterization of truth as being-uncovering misses the specific *critical* sense of truth.[42] Truth, he reminds us, is not just about 'uncovering' things but is about uncovering things in a specific way, namely, *just as they are*. It is precisely in the comparison of our claims to things that they are put to the test. If all assertions are a being-towards that uncovers—if all assertions already unveil—then all assertions would automatically be true! An explanation of falsity could only be given as a kind of quantitative determination, stating how an assertion uncovers, and so is true, but also fails to uncover in some respect, and so is false. Absurdly, false assertions would then be true-false assertions. Tugendhat's criticism, however, neglects that being-uncovering concerns uncovering entities in the "*how* of their uncoveredness." An assertion that is a being-towards something rather than nothing is meaningful in a way that the latter kind of assertion is not, but that does not mean *any* being-towards something is true. Dropping the language of comparison and agreement does not mean that truth is not a matter of identifying things as they are. In being-uncovering we are a being-towards things *how* they are, as *what* they are. We can obviously fail to do this, as when we point out an aspect of the world that shows itself not to be as we claimed—when the picture is not askew, when the cat is not on the mat, when the sun does not orbit the earth, etc. Despite the fact that we are still a being-towards the thing considered, we do not uncover it in its truth, as *what* it is (in its essence) or *how* it is (in its actuality, as extant or not). This failure of uncovering-how is just falsity, not an amalgam of truth and falsity.[43]

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[42] Ernst Tugendhat, "Heidegger's Idea of Truth," in *Critical Heidegger*, ed. C. Mcann, New York: Routledge, 1996, pp. 227-240.

[43] As I'll discuss in the next paragraph, in many places Heidegger does make claims such as the following: "Dasein exists *in truth*, that is, *in the unveiledness of itself* and *the beings* to which it comports itself. Only because as existing it is *essentially* already in truth can it err as such, and

Heidegger is claiming that it is only because Dasein's disclosedness is primordial truth, only because Dasein is essentially "in the truth," that being-uncovering is possible in the first place.[44] Saying that Dasein is essentially 'true' or 'in the truth' does not of course mean that Dasein always gets everything right. The point of identifying Dasein with primordial truth is to indicate the inextricability of being and Dasein. For Heidegger, being 'is' only in an understanding of being. It is only when Dasein exists that beings are freed to be what they are and so can be 'true.' As existing in an understanding of being that is always at the same time an understanding of entities, Dasein is *in the truth*. What is it that Dasein understands when it has an understanding of being? It implicitly understands what it takes to be such and such entities: it understands what it takes to be extant, what it takes to be Dasein, what it takes to be a tool, what it takes to be a living being. All of these things Dasein understands *a priori* and always understands so long as it is. It is this always prior understanding that allows Dasein to disclose the world in which knowledge of particular entities can be acquired, in which we can uncover the particular entities as they are in themselves. So, saying that Dasein is essentially 'in the truth' does not mean that Dasein knows everything. It is, however, to assert that the condition for the possibility of any truth is the disclosedness of Dasein. Entities may be *actual* without Dasein's understanding them, but they will not be *what* they are without Dasein's imposition of conditions

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only for that same reason is there concealment, pretense, and taciturn reserve" (BP, p. 216). However, even though the disclosure of the world is tantamount to being in the truth, this does not mean that all ontic claims that Dasein makes are automatically true. Heidegger's suggestion that so long as we exist we are given a 'true' ontological framework within which we are able to make correct assertions about particular phenomena is *not* the same as claiming that all assertions we make at least partially hit their mark. Even within our pre-given frameworks of truth we can completely fail to point out entities as they are.

[44] BT, p. 263.

of determinacy upon them. For there to be truths entities must be "objectified."[45] In order for particular entities to be objectified as having such and such properties, the domain of entities of which a particular entity is a part must also be objectified or constituted ontologically. Dasein's disclosedness, Dasein's always prior understanding of being, is this world-constituting ground of truth. As the ground of truth it is not something separate from truth, but frames what can possibly be true, how entities can possibly show themselves.

Heidegger's claim is thus that part of understanding what it means to say that something is true means understanding how it is possible for entities to have the particular determinacy that they do. He is arguing that it is only in Dasein's disclosedness that this determinacy is possible and that therefore the 'being-in-itself' of what is uncovered depends on the horizon of Dasein's understanding. Entities themselves cannot dictate how they ought to be differentiated from other entities, as extant, as a tool, as Dasein, and so forth. We must impose these meanings, but imposing these meanings, we are releasing beings to be what they are in themselves. For Heidegger as an idealist there is no further sense to the 'in itself.' There is no absolute disclosedness in terms of which entities structure themselves. Their being is always relative to an understanding of being.

Again, asserting "Dasein is in the truth," that Dasein is essentially world-disclosive, does not mean that so long as Dasein exists anything it cares to point out will be true just because it points it out. While Dasein is essentially 'in the truth,' Dasein does not manage to attend to all the possibilities of that which it uncovers, it does not manage to uncover everything it attends to, it does not manage to discover all that is disclosed in its understanding of being, nor is its

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[45] "Ontic objectification is possible only on the basis and through the ontological, that is, *pre*ontological, projection and opening of the ontological constitution" (PIK, p. 25).

understanding of being the only possible one. Much remains hidden from Dasein in its failure

to uncover entities as what they are, in its failure to do so completely, or in necessarily leaving a

great many things totally undiscovered.[46] Dasein therefore isn't only always already 'in the

truth,' but is also equiprimordially 'in untruth':

> To Dasein's state of being belongs *falling*. Proximally and for the most part Dasein is lost
> in its 'world.' Its understanding, as a projection upon possibilities of being, has diverted
> itself thither. Its absorption in the "they" signifies that it is dominated by the way things
> are publicly interpreted. That which has been uncovered and disclosed stands in a mode
> in which it has been disguised and closed off by idle talk, curiosity, and ambiguity. Being
> towards entities has not been extinguished, but it has been uprooted. Entities have not
> been completely hidden; they are precisely the sort of thing that has been uncovered, but
> at the same time have been disguised. They show themselves, but in the mode of
> semblance. Likewise what has been uncovered sinks back again, hidden and disguised.
> *Because Dasein is essentially falling, its state of being is such that it is in 'untruth.'*[47]

> In its full existential-ontological meaning, the proposition that 'Dasein is in the truth'
> states equiprimordially that 'Dasein is in untruth.' But only in so far as Dasein has been
> disclosed has it also been closed off; and only in so far as entities within-the-world have
> been uncovered along with Dasein, have such entities, as possibly encounterable within
> the world, been covered up (hidden) or disguised.[48]

As essentially 'in the truth' Dasein is given a horizon for what can be encountered and

discovered within the world. The way and extent to which any particular Dasein seizes upon its

opportunities for discovering entities will vary, but everyone must rely for the most part on the

way entities are commonly interpreted and must neglect much of what is within its understanding

of being, i.e., what it may possibly discover within its factical disclosedness. In talking about

entities it has not itself uncovered or leaving entities in their hiddenness, Dasein is not being

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[46] I say that Dasein does this 'necessarily' because being 'in the truth' in one way may exclude
uncovering the truth about a phenomenon in another. I'll explore the relativism implicit in this
idea in sections 4, 5, and 6 below.

[47] BT, p. 264.

[48] BT, p. 265.

accused of a shortcoming. Neglecting possibilities is as essential to Dasein's finite existence

as is seizing upon others, for our possibilities of understanding are often mutually exclusive.

Quite obviously, the world is not transparent to finite, factical Dasein, for whom being in the

truth cannot imply that it could have all truth at its disposal with any finite extension of its

powers.[49]

Heidegger begins his account of truth by showing how the traditional idea of truth as the

agreement of *intellectus* and *res* cannot be explained in its own terms but only as being-

uncovering rooted in the disclosedness of Dasein. To confirm his claim, Heidegger attempts to

show how it supports an explanation of why truth nevertheless comes to be understood as the

present-at-hand relation of things present-at-hand, as the agreement of an assertion-thing with a

real-thing. Showing how his idea of truth can explain the traditional idea gives his view a

hermeneutic advantage: his idea of truth contains an account of how the traditional idea of truth

is possible, but the traditional conception of truth cannot be explained in its own terms. In this

way, Heidegger is interested in at least partially vindicating the traditional idea of truth by

showing how it can only be understood on the basis of more fundamental truth phenomena, i.e.,

being-uncovering and Dasein's disclosedness.[50]

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[49] Of course, a fundamental question about this approach to truth has been sidestepped for the moment. If ontic truth is always relative to an ontological frame, ontological truth, how do we decide which frame of 'truth' to use? How do we decide whether we ought to understand the cosmos in Aristotelian or Einsteinian terms? Doesn't such a decision require a violation of Heidegger's a priorism about truth? Don't we make such decisions by comparing our models with the way things are anyway in order to see which is superior? If we follow Heidegger, however, wouldn't that mean that we were, in Tugendhat's terms, evaluating the truth of a truth? The very idea of such an evaluation makes no sense—truths are just true! I'll return to this fundamental question about our ability to choose ontological frameworks in the next section.

[50] Cf., MFL, p. 125 and BT, p. 262.

Heidegger's story about the emergence of the traditional idea of truth begins with a reminder that as being-in-the-world "discourse" belongs to Dasein essentially, and that it is in discourse that Dasein articulates the intelligibility of its world.[51] This is not an occasional occurrence for Dasein: to say that Dasein understands the world does not mean that it is presented with a undifferentiated mass, but that it has a particular understanding of its significance: significance is *articulated* in an understanding of being, even if that understanding remains for the most part preontological, i.e., it is not itself made a subject of inquiry. Understanding this articulated world, it is possible for Dasein to explicitly appropriate this understanding in assertions, communicating *how* entities are uncovered.[52] In its assertions Dasein maintains a "being-towards the entities discussed."[53] To say that assertions are about something is to say that they contain "the uncoveredness of these entities." The expression and re-expression of these assertions *preserves* this uncoveredness.[54] Expressions, however, are things ready-to-hand that can be used and reused. Since the uncoveredness of entities is preserved in assertions they retain a relation to what the assertions are about. These ready-to-hand expressions allow Dasein to maintain a being-towards entities without coming "face to face" with what the assertions are about, to that which has already been uncovered in some particular way. In using these assertions, Dasein becomes absorbed in what is said and the "expressed as such takes over being-towards those entities that have been uncovered in the

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[51] BT, p. 203.

[52] BT, p. 266.

[53] Ibid.

[54] Ibid.

assertion."[55] While it is sometimes possible to appropriate the entities these expressions are about by demonstrating the assertion, bringing ourselves "face to face" with what the assertion is about, such a demonstration is certainly not necessary for the correct use of statements.

So, assertions may be used as something ready-to-hand and the entities to which the assertion relates, what it is about, are either ready-to-hand or present-at-hand. Consequently, the relation between the assertion and the entities the assertions are about appears to be something present-at-hand,[56] despite the fact that the genuine relation of the assertion to the entities it is about consists in "the fact that the uncoveredness preserved in the assertion is in each case an uncoveredness *of* something."[57] Nevertheless, even if the assertion is fundamentally being-uncovering, the relation of the assertion to the entities appears to be one that is simply present-at-hand, the present-at-hand relation of an assertion to an entity. So, if we don't look into how this relation is possible, the relation 'presents itself' as a present-at-hand relation of things present-at-hand.[58] In our separation from that which the assertions are about, truth appears as a present-at-hand "relationship between things which are present-at-hand (*intellectus* and *res*)."[59] Consequently, "truth as disclosedness and as a being-towards uncovered entities—a being which

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[55] BT, p. 267.

[56] Ibid.

[57] Ibid.

[58] Ibid.

[59] Ibid.

itself uncovers—has become truth as agreement between things present-at-hand within-the-world."[60]

Having started with the traditional idea of truth, tracing it back to its ontological foundations in the disclosedness of Dasein, and then working back from the disclosedness of Dasein to show how truth comes to be understood as a present-at-hand relation of things present-at-hand, Heidegger rounds out his discussion of truth by explicitly rejecting the basic premise of the traditional idea, namely, that assertion is the primary 'locus' of truth. As he explains:

> Assertion is not the primary 'locus' of truth. *On the contrary*, whether as a mode in which uncoveredness is appropriated or as a way of being-in-the-world, assertion is grounded in Dasein's uncovering, or rather in its *disclosedness*. The most primordial 'truth' is the 'locus' of assertion; it is the ontological condition for the possibility that assertions can be either true or false—that they may uncover or cover things up.[61]

It is Dasein's disclosedness that opens up the possibility of propositional truth by disclosing a meaningful world in which entities are intelligible. Within that domain, it is possible to point things out 'how' they are, that is, "in the 'how' of their disclosedness." Assertions can only be true or false within a pre-given meaningful context. Outside of that domain, outside of the world, entities are neither uncovered or covered up, but lack determinacy as such entities. Heidegger's claim is that we must look to Dasein, the being that is always already in the truth and untruth, to understand the domains wherein entities are freed to be *what* they are, and so we must look to Dasein as the condition of possibility of taking anything as anything in an assertion. Since the

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[60] BT, pp. 267-8.

[61] BT, p. 269.

ontological determinacy voiced in any ontic truth is founded in the factical disclosedness of

Dasein, this disclosedness is put forward as "truth in the most primordial sense."[62]

§4 – Ontological Pluralism

Heidegger's idealist approach to ontology (i.e., that there is being only in an

understanding of being) together with his two-tiered conception of truth (i.e., ontic truth, as what

shows itself, founded in ontological truth, as what determines entities as entities) entail a

commitment to two forms of pluralism: 1) synchronic pluralism or pluralism between discourses,

understood as the *irreducibility* of at least some discourses to a prioritized discourse, and 2)

diachronic pluralism or pluralism among seemingly related discourses, understood as the

incommensurability of discourses. Before explaining why these forms of pluralism follow from

Heidegger's view, I'll briefly review and expand upon the conclusions of the last two sections.

Heidegger's idealism grows out of his strong a priorism about being. There is only being

in an understanding of being; our understanding of being necessarily comes prior to experience

and makes it possible, allowing entities to 'show themselves' as they are. Without a prior

understanding of being to frame them in some particular way, entities remain, at least in that

respect, hidden, unable to be as they are. As Heidegger puts it:

> We are able to grasp beings as such, as beings, only if we understand something like
> *being*. If we did not understand, even though at first roughly and without conceptual
> comprehension, what actuality signifies, then the actual would remain hidden from us. If
> we did not understand what reality means, then the real would remain inaccessible. If we
> did not understand what life and vitality signify, then we would not be able to comport
> ourselves toward living beings. If we did not understand what existence and existentiality
> signify, we ourselves would not be able to exist as Dasein. If we did not understand what
> permanence and constancy signify, then constant geometric relations or numerical
> proportions would remain a secret to us. We must understand actuality, reality, vitality,

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[62] BT, p. 265.

existentiality, constancy in order to be able to comport ourselves positively toward specifically actual, real, living, existing, constant beings. We must understand being so that we may be able to be given over to a world that *is*, so that we can exist in it and be our own Dasein itself as a being. We must be able to understand actuality *before* all experience of actual beings. This understanding of actuality or of being in the widest sense as over and against the experience of beings is in a certain sense *earlier* than the experience of beings. To say that the understanding of being precedes all factual experience of beings does not mean that we would first need to have an explicit concept of being in order to experience beings theoretically or practically. We must understand being—being, which may no longer itself be called a being, being, which does not occur as a being among other beings but which nevertheless must be given and in fact is given in the understanding of being.[63]

This prior understanding of what determines different kinds of beings as such—as a natural being, as a tool, as existing Dasein, etc.—is *prior* to experience but is also constitutive of it. It is not magical foreknowledge of particular beings, as if we always already knew about hammers, power sanders, pit bulls, and cell phones, but is an implicit understanding of how beings can be differentiated from one another and woven into our inherited structure of significance, our world. In the Kantian tradition, knowledge that comes prior to experience but extends our knowledge, knowledge that is a priori but not merely analytic, is called *synthetic a priori* knowledge.[64] This synthetic a priori knowledge is also what Heidegger calls *ontological* knowledge.[65] Ontological knowledge is a condition of possibility of *ontic* knowledge, or knowledge about beings.

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[63] BP, p. 11.

[64] "*Beings are in no way accessible without an antecedent understanding of being*. This is to say that beings which encounter us must already be understood in advance of their ontological constitution. This understanding of the being of beings, this synthetic knowledge *a priori*, is crucial for every experience of beings" (PIK, p. 38). This is not magical foreknowledge of, say, what it takes for cell phone to be a cell phone, but an inherited understanding of possibilities that allows us to fit entities into our practical, theoretical, and personal contexts. From Heidegger's perspective, we are thrown into an understanding of being, out of which we interpret the world. We are not given the world with a magical foreknowledge of everything, but we are given a context of possibility, within which we can work out the way things really are.

[65] Ibid.

Ontologically, we always already have an understanding of our world; ontically, we interpret entities in terms of this horizon and come to know them as they show themselves in their particularity. If there is ontic and ontological knowledge, there must also be something like ontic and ontological truth:

> Apparentness of beings (ontic truth) revolves around the unveiledness of the constitution of the being of beings (ontological truth); at no time, however, can ontic knowledge itself conform 'to' the objects because, without the ontological, it cannot even have a possible 'to what.' [66]

There can be no 'to what' of ontic truth without ontological truth because without it there would be no world, no framework of significance within which we could develop our interpretations of and acquire ontic knowledge about beings. Ontic truths characterize beings as being some particular way. Things are asserted, thought, believed, feared (etc.) to be *real,* to be *alive,* to be *useful*, to be *Dasein*, to be *present*. To have propositional attitudes towards something, to take something as some particular thing, we must already understand what it takes to be something of that sort or entities as such entities could not show up for us in the first place.[67] The bottom line is just this: entities are not self-structuring or self-identifying. Dasein's metaphysical projections allow us to individuate beings in their being. The realia alone cannot tell us how they should be identified.

Heidegger's prioritization of ontological truth, his claim that it founds ontic truth, does not of course imply that we could somehow find ourselves before a grid into which we

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[66] Martin Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics* (1929), trans., R. Taft, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990, pp. 8-9. Hereafter, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics* will be cited as KPM.

[67] As he also explains in PIK: "All ontic truth must conform to ontological truth. Ontological truth is the primordial truth about beings, because it discloses in advance what is essential about the being of beings. … It is this original truth, or as we say, the ontological truth, to which what is ontic, a being and its experience must conform" (p. 132).

subsequently place the entities we perceive or that we are overlaying our subjective ideas about things over the things themselves.[68] Rather, growing into a language, into a culture, we are thereby *given* a world, a world already constituted in its determinacy in which things in themselves are accessible in their being. We always already find ourselves in the midst of 'the things themselves,' in the world; we are always already "thrown" into it.[69] So long as we exist we project our understanding of the world, we cast it before ourselves, and it is always out of and back into this understanding of the world that we understand all intraworldly entities, including ourselves.[70] Ontological truth, although a priori, is therefore also historical and contingent (as Heidegger puts it, "disclosedness is essentially factical"[71]). And, although factical, ontological truth is also nevertheless authoritative, dictating ontic possibilities. The knowledge we have about our world may expand and the ontological frames within which we acquire knowledge may change, but this change and expansion always take place out of and back into the world in which we find ourselves. We never transcend ontological truth insofar as Dasein is never "set before an open country of a 'world-in-itself' so that it just beholds what it encounters."[72] Ontological truth cannot be transcended because it is itself Dasein's transcendence.

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[68] "The significance-relationships which determine the structure of the world are not a network of forms which a worldless subject has laid over some kind of material" (BT, p. 417).

[69] For further discussion of world in Heidegger's sense, see chapter 3.

[70] "So far as the Dasein exists a world is cast-forth with the Dasein's being. To exist means, among other things, to cast-forth a world [*sich Welt vorher-werfen*], and in fact in such a way that with the thrownness of this projection, with the factical existence of a Dasein, extent entities are always already uncovered" (BP, p. 168).

[71] BT, p. 264.

[72] BT, p. 213.

Because of the way Heidegger structures the relation between being and beings in the ontological difference, there will be truths about entities and truths about what makes those truths possible in the first place. As I've said, these latter truths do not concern the causal production of entities, but the ontological framing of some kinds of entities in a metaphysical projection. Because there are these two distinct levels of inquiry, what we might distinguish as positive and philosophical or transcendental levels of inquiry, truth "must *bifurcate* into the unveiledness of being [ontological truth] and openness of beings [ontic truth]. If ontological knowledge unveils the horizon, then its truth lies precisely in the act of letting the being be encountered within the horizon."[73]

This proposal is easiest to explore in Heidegger's treatment of scientific knowledge and truth.[74] As in all other domains, ontological truth precedes ontic truth in scientific inquiry. A projective understanding of the beings in a given area—an objectification of some domain of entities—goes before any possible ontic knowledge about particular phenomena. As Heidegger explains:

> The genesis of science originates in the objectification of a *realm* of beings, that is, in the development of an understanding of the constitution of the *being* of the respective beings. In the development of this understanding of being, those concepts emerge which circumscribe what is, for instance, historical reality as such, or what basically distinguishes a being as a living being, i.e., the *basic concepts* of the respective sciences. With the development of the basic concepts the respective basis and ground of a particular science and its realm becomes circumscribed.[75]

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[73] KPM, p. 87, brackets and emphasis added.

[74] Lafont makes this suggestion in "Heidegger and The Synthetic A Priori."

[75] PIK, p. 20.

> Ontic objectification is possible only on the basis and through the ontological, that is *pre*ontological, projection and opening of the ontological constitution.[76]

The basic concepts of a realm of beings aren't dictated by the beings themselves but are projected for them so they can show themselves as the beings that they are. As Heidegger constantly emphasizes, this prior projection of being, of ontological truth, is *pre*ontological; projections of being are not theoretical eruptions out of nothing. It is always out of a prior understanding of being that another understanding of being is projected. Scientific projections may be the most self-conscious and explicit of our projections, but what is essential in those projections needn't be clear to those making them, even to those decisively altering the way the world can be understood. In this vein, for example, Heidegger argues that what was decisive in the development of modern natural science was not its self-conscious use of experimentation, observation, and calculation, or all of them together:

> What is crucial in this genesis lies rather in the fact that Galileo gave a direction to natural sciences by asking (when not literally, at least intentionally) how nature as such must be viewed and determined in advance, such that the facts of *nature* can become accessible to the observation of facts in general. How must nature be determined and thought in advance, so that the entirety of this being as such can become accessible to calculative knowledge in a fundamental way? … Nature must be *projected* in advance unto its mathematical constitution. Galileo's and Kepler's basic achievement consisted in the explicit enactment of the mathematical projection of nature. … The projection or opening up of nature is disclosing in advance that in terms of which nature as nature should be understood.[77]

The ontological truth about nature—as Heidegger has it, its mathematical constitution, that it is intelligible in terms of mathematical physics—foreruns any ontic truths that we may have about nature as nature in this sense. This prior projection opens up a way of experiencing nature, making it accessible to observation, experiment, calculation, etc. According to Heidegger,

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[76] Ibid., p. 25.

[77] PIK, pp. 21-2.

therefore, it was not careful scrutiny of data that first brought about the revolution of modern

scientific thinking, it was a new understanding of nature, a new projection of nature that made

that particular kind of scrutiny possible. Without the prior mathematical projection of nature

there would be no facts out of which a case for mathematical physics could be built because, as

Heidegger puts it, "there is no such thing as pure facts and … facts can only be grasped and

experimented with when the realm of nature as such is circumscribed."[78] The being of entities is

fixed *a priori*, making facts about beings within that domain accessible, making our particular

experience of entities as such entities possible.[79]

Just to be clear, arguing that a priori projections of being make our experience of entities

as such entities possible does *not* imply that philosophy determines what beings really are, that

philosophy somehow opens the world for scientific research. Sciences are concerned with ontic

truth, with the facts already accessible to us in the world as disclosed. Philosophy is an attempt to

understand the world disclosures that give us access to entities as such entities in the first place

and so is concerned with *transcendental* or *ontological* truth. Although it is concerned with what

makes ontic truth possible, it does not itself make ontic truth possible. Heidegger's occasional

aggrandizement philosophy notwithstanding, projections of being are not projections made by

philosophers. At most, philosophers attempt to decipher the *pre*-philosophical projections that

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[78] PIK, p. 22.

[79] "In the sciences of beings something is fixed about the objects before they are given to us. This fixing which is *a priori* and free from experience—occurs prior to all experience—makes possible that these objects be given to us as what they are. These *a priori* fixings are *prior* to all experience and are valid *for* all experience, i.e., they make experience possible" (PIK, p. 32).

shape our world.[80] In articulating what is essential for a world-disclosure, philosophers may

occasionally explicitly articulate groundbreaking projections of being. While that is a significant

contribution to ontology, the positive sciences and positive knowledge in general could remain

perfectly unaware of the ontological foundations of their knowledge and it wouldn't impair or

diminish their ontic (empirical) knowledge in the least. If scientists were to become interested in

the ontological foundations of their sciences they would be moving into philosophy, not

enriching their sciences.[81] To drive this point home, Heidegger suggests rather hyperbolically

that philosophy could even be detrimental to "the sciences of things that are" insofar as grappling

with the question of being may lead scientists to understand that their science isn't

absolute—although it may certainly be true!—and that their particular science is only one way

that the world may be disclosed, only one possible way of articulating the basic truths of the

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[80] This, I take it, is what is going on in Heidegger's analysis of Newton's second law of movement or in the Kant's analysis of geometry: in each case, the task of philosophy is to recognize and describe how these truths—the foundational truths of Newtonian physical science, the truths of geometry—have a special status as synthetic a priori truths, as ontological truths. Philosophers aren't responsible for the production of ontological truths, and those that produce what eventually come to be recognized as ontological truths don't thereby become philosophers or produce philosophical knowledge. This is, however, just a side comment on a huge topic that extends far beyond the scope of my dissertation, namely, on Heidegger's view of the relationship between philosophy and the sciences. My intention here is just to avoid giving the impression that, somehow, Newton's laws, for example, are philosophical knowledge or that philosophical knowledge is itself world-disclosive.

[81] "The positive posting of any being includes within itself an a priori knowledge and an a priori understanding of the being's being, although the positive experience of such a being knows nothing of this understanding and is incapable of bringing what is understood by it into the form of a concept. The constitution of the being of beings is accessible only to a totally different science: philosophy as the science of being" (BP, p. 52). Addressing questions of being means stepping outside of ontic sciences. Scientists can obviously also become philosophers.

region of reality that holds their interest.[82] Heidegger lays the ground for a *descriptive*

metaphysics, but allows that descriptive metaphysics may nevertheless be *revisionary*, not

because philosophers qua philosophers can modify the being of beings or because he thinks that

philosophy has something urgent to teach scientists, but because a phenomenologically adequate

description of our being-in-the-world will often contradict, undermine, and reorganize our

ordinary assumptions about how it is possible for us to understand the world as we do.[83]

Now, to return to the main issue in this section, we are prepared to consider how

Heidegger's view implies pluralism, both synchronically, insofar discourses need not be

reducible to one another, and diachronically, insofar as sequential metaphysical projections

concerning what seem to be the same phenomena need not be commensurable either as

corrections or developments of an earlier understanding. Although these different forms of

pluralism present different issues, they are both rooted in Heidegger's anti-absolutism about

truth. Truth must be less than absolute because, for Heidegger, an ontic truth can only be as

authoritative as the framework that makes it possible. If the framework founding ontic truth is

essentially contingent and variable, the ontic truths articulated in terms of it must be less than

absolute. Ontic truths will be completely authoritative (i.e., 'absolute') *for us*, i.e., for those

within a particular metaphysical projection, but, abstracting from our ontic commitments,

following Heidegger here means believing that if our understanding of being were different, then

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[82] "It is too uncomfortable to sit on a powder keg, knowing that basic concepts [of a science] are just well-worn opinions" (BP, p. 54).

[83] This is obviously a reference to P. F. Strawson's famous distinction between descriptive and revisionary metaphysics from *Individuals: An Essay in Descriptive Metaphysics* (New York: Anchor Books, 1963). I'm using these terms for my own purposes and I am not here concerned with Strawson's intent.

the seemingly stable (ontic) truths that structure our experience of the world we live in would also be different. With a different set of ontological truths, there will be different ontic truths as well, for *what* entities there are depend essentially upon the identity conditions supplied by the metaphysical projection of ontological truth. If the world were disclosed with different identity conditions, we would be concerned with different entities, and hence our ontic truths would be different, if no less correct. To explain the implications of Heidegger's rejection of the absoluteness of truth, I'll consider each type of pluralism in turn, beginning with synchronic pluralism.

Synchronic pluralism is just another name for the familiar idea that relative to each other, distinct truths about something do not necessarily cancel each other out. That is, synchronic pluralism means there can be *irreducible* truths about a phenomenon. Pluralists of this sort do not feel compelled to explain which truth about something is really true and which is merely a manner of speaking. Being true is good enough. This seems to be the spirit of the following passage:

> Insofar as Dasein exists, i.e., insofar as a being-in-the-world is existent, beings (nature) have also already been overleapt, and beings thus possess the possibility of manifesting themselves in themselves. Insofar as Dasein exists, objects have already also become accessible to Dasein, though the mode of possible objectivity by which the objects are grasped is completely left open and variable; there are different stages of possibility by which things themselves [*Dinge selbst*] are discoverable in the way they are in themselves [*endeckbar in ihrem An-sich sein*].
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> There are diverse stages—and one cannot say that, for example, physics has the genuine knowledge of the solar sphere, in contrast to our natural grasp of the sun.[84]

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[84] MFL, p. 166 and p. 167. Or, from *Being and Time*: "A pathway which is long 'Objectively' can be much shorter than one which is 'Objectively' shorter but which is perhaps 'hard going' and comes before us as interminably long. … Though we may know these distances exactly, this knowledge still remains blind; it does not have the function of discovering the environment circumspectively and bringing it close; this knowledge is used only in and for a concernful being which does not measure stretches—a being towards the world that 'matters' to one.

Dasein 'overleaps' beings so that they may become accessible, but the ways that beings can be

properly objectified are not absolutely restricted but are 'open and variable.' This variability

allows the phenomenon to show itself in itself in many ways, allowing for the discovery of

different truths about it. The passage thus emphasizes Heidegger's commitment to ontological

pluralism, explaining that 'objectification' isn't just a way of thinking about things that really are

some other way. So, although our first-personal grasp of the sun is different from the way it is

understood in scientific or physical terms, both ways of getting at the truth about the sun are

genuine—both truths are really true—pointing it out, uncovering it, just as it is in itself.[85]

Heidegger's mention of stages does seem to suggest that these different objectifications

progressively uncover deeper and deeper truths about the world, but what he means by stages is

something rather different. The issue is order of access and not, as it were, depth of access, for

both scientific truths and first-personal or manifest truths are ontic truths, i.e., how things show

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When one is oriented beforehand towards 'Nature' and 'Objectively' measured distances of
Things, one is inclined to pass off such estimates and interpretations as 'subjective.' Yet this
'subjectivity' perhaps uncovers the 'Reality' of the world at its most Real; it has nothing to do
with 'subjective' arbitrariness or subjectivitistic 'ways of taking' an entity which 'in itself' is
otherwise" (p. 141).

[85] On synchronic pluralism, consider also: "The essence of ground [i.e., disclosedness –HK]
differentiates itself into diverse sorts of 'grounds' (e.g., the four causes), not because there are
different beings, but because the metaphysical essence of Dasein as transcending has the
possibility of first establishing world-access for diverse beings. And because Dasein transcends
itself, Dasein is groundable for its own self-understanding along different possible directions in
different ways, but never in a single way. As a being, factical Dasein has different possibilities
for ontic understanding and knowing (historical, biological, psychological, cosmological). But
the manifoldness of possible grounding, the variety of possible understandings of Dasein, must
indeed be interpreted in itself still as manifoldness, and as a coherent manifoldness. It must be
shown how the essence of Dasein as factical Dasein demands, not only with regard to itself but
in the whole breadth of its possible transcendence, a variety of ways of inquiring, knowing,
grounding, and proving" (MFL, p. 214, square brackets added).

themselves against a given horizon, and no more. Since we are always already practically engaged with our environment, we must always already be concerned with things as they show themselves in their readiness-to-hand. Our initial grasp of the world is not theoretical, and we must pass through stages of understanding to reach, for example, a theoretical or mathematical understanding of nature. That, however, does not undermine (or favor) the way we understand phenomena in other stages or in other theoretical modes even if we may have to pass through other 'stages' to reach them.

While synchronic pluralism means that we may have many different and irreducible truth-apt discourses about the same phenomenon at the same time, the idea of diachronic pluralism is that discourses about some phenomenon that we may take to be developing progressively are actually just changing, with different, unrelated sets of truths associated with each way of casting the phenomenon. For some discourses this claim is relatively easy to take. In those discourses that we may be happy to construe 'anti-realistically,' we allow that past 'projections of being' responsible for objectifying phenomena disclose the truth about some range of phenomena as well as our current understanding does. So, for example, although we may not share an ethics with ancient Egyptians, we may not want to say that their ethical frame is less true than our own, but only that it isn't ours and that there is no real possibility of actually adopting it.[86] Clearly, some may wish to claim that our ethical framework is absolutely superior to that of the ancient Egyptians, but the denial of this kind of diachronic pluralism, of the incommensurability of our discourses, is not prima facie implausible. If the ethics example grinds, consider aesthetics or humor, for the point here is only that we are quite comfortable

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[86] Bernard Williams forcefully argues for this type of view in "Relativism and Reflection," chapter 9 of his *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*.

construing at least some disciplined discourses as non-progressive. There is no neutral basis

for deciding which of the discourses is the true one, while relative to itself each discourse allows

us to make objective determinations about the nature of some phenomenon.

Heidegger, of course, makes a much stronger claim than that just some non-realist

discourses that seem to be about the same thing ought to be understood as changing non-

progressively. As I discussed earlier, he must reject the basis for the familiar distinction between

realistic and anti-realistic discourses as a distinction *within* realism that concerns which

discourses track the way things are anyway. Against this, he must insist that all meaningful (viz.,

actually world-disclosive) discourses are non-absolute diachronically as well as synchronically.

For Heidegger, diachronic pluralism pertains to physics as well as ethics, chemistry as well as

aesthetics.

We can see this more clearly if we consider Heidegger's claims about the strict relativity

of truth to Dasein's metaphysical projections. As existing, Dasein is essentially world-disclosive:

it has always already projected ontological truth, it is 'in the truth.' Against all kinds of realism,

Heidegger is suggesting that truth depends *essentially* on Dasein, which means not just that truth

depends on the articulation of sentences, something Dasein is uniquely able to do, but depends

on Dasein for the very determinacy of entities as the particular kinds of entities that they are. As

discussed above, Heidegger's claim is that assertions are not the locus of truth, but that

ontological truth, as Dasein's disclosedness, is the locus of assertion. It is only with Dasein that

there is a world, and so it is only with Dasein that there is any truth, that there are any facts. He is

trying to clarify this essential dependence of truth on Dasein in his well-known conclusion to the

first division of *Being and Time*:

> Dasein, as constituted by disclosedness, is essentially in the truth. Disclosedness is a kind of being which is essential to Dasein. *'There is' truth only in so far as Dasein i s and so long as Dasein i s*. Entities are uncovered only *when* Dasein *is*; and only so long as Dasein *is*, are they disclosed. Newton's laws, the principle of contradiction, any truth whatever—these are only true as long as Dasein *is*. Before there was any Dasein, there was no truth; nor will there be any after Dasein is no more. For in such a case truth as disclosedness, uncovering, and uncoveredness, *cannot* be. Before Newton's laws were discovered, they were not 'true'; it does not follow that they were false, or even that they would become false if ontically no discoveredness were any longer possible. Just as little does this 'restriction' imply that the being-true of 'truths' has in any way been diminished.
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> To say that before Newton his laws were neither true nor false, cannot signify that before him there were no such entities as have been uncovered and pointed out by those laws. Through Newton the laws became true and with them, entities became accessible in themselves to Dasein. Once entities have been uncovered, they show themselves precisely as entities which beforehand already were. Such uncovering is the kind of being which belongs to 'truth.'[87]

Heidegger takes two perspectives in this passage, considering truth, being, and entities in connection with the existence of Dasein and without the existence of Dasein. So long as Dasein exists, it is disclosed. As disclosed, Dasein opens the world as that 'wherein' entities can show themselves as what they are and are displayed in their being relative to Dasein's prior understanding of being. This prior understanding is what makes all ontic truth possible. Without this horizon, before or after Dasein exists, there will not be an understanding of being and so entities 'are,' as it were, 'worldless' and lack the specific ontological determinacy opened up by Dasein's being-in-the-world. Against metaphysical realism, Heidegger therefore insists that "truth is not something extant, but is indeed a *possible* determination of the being of the extant so far as the extant entity is uncovered."[88] An ontological truth is only one possible way that the world can be disclosed—truth is just a *possible* determination of entities, not a necessary one.

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[87] BT, p. 269.

[88] BP, p. 222, emphasis added.

Entities are uncovered only so long as Dasein is disclosed and so the truth of entities is fixed

in a particular way only so long as Dasein projects being in the way that makes that particular

determinacy possible.[89]

According to Heidegger's story, for example, the truths of Newtonian physics only come

into being with the ontological framework of mathematical physics that Newton supplies. Before

Newton (and others) 'projected' this framework, Newton's truths were not true. Nor will

Newton's truths be true once the framework for this kind of mathematical physics is no longer

part of our understanding of being, which could last as long as Dasein does or end much sooner

than that. In general, then, truths are dependent upon a priori metaphysical projections and can

only be evaluated in terms of those projections. Ontic truth claims are thus always relative to

their underlying projections of being and so cannot be properly evaluated in terms of another

projection. Because of this, truth claims of one metaphysical projection are strictly speaking

incommensurable with the truth claims of another. The truth claims that belong to different

projections of being are not competing truth claims but are irreconcilable truth claims, only

meaningful against the background projection that makes each of them possible.[90]

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[89] It is worth repeating that this dependency of truth on Dasein, on the disclosedness of ontological truth, is not meant to suggest that entities somehow pop into being when Dasein exists. This would be a reduction of beings to being, which is just as mistaken as the metaphysical realists reduction of being to beings. Actual things are actual without and independently of Dasein: when the world is disclosed, entities are uncoverable as the entities they already were. This, however does not mean that the determinacy of entities precedes the disclosedness of Dasein or is separable from Dasein's particular metaphysical projections.

[90] For further discussion of Heidegger's claims here, see chapter three, section 2.5. Here, my intention is just to illustrate Heidegger's commitment to the relativity of ontic truth to ontological frameworks. According to this view, the identity conditions for the entities required for Newton's account of nature were supplied by a 'mathematical projection of nature.' Without that prior projection, ontic claims about particular physical phenomena would not be possible. Because the identity conditions required for a Newtonian understanding of nature are so different

That an incommensurability thesis is implied by Heidegger's view is easier to see if we consider some claims he makes about the history of science a few years after the publication of *Being and Time*. In *What is a Thing?,* Heidegger explains how he takes Aristotle and Newton to have *different* conceptions of nature and that their claims are therefore not comparable by any common standard. According to Heidegger, we simply cannot declare one view to be false and the other correct. In writing first of Aristotle's idea of nature and then of Newton's, he explains:

> The concept of nature in general changes. Nature is no longer the *inner* principle out of which the motion of the body follows; rather, nature is the mode of the variety of changing relative positions of bodies, the manner in which they are present in space and time, which themselves are domains of possible positional orders and determinations of order and have no special traits anywhere.[91]

In getting from Aristotle's idea of nature to Newton's mathematical conception, the former isn't shown to be inadequate but nature itself is said to be projected anew:

> the mathematical is … a project [*Entwurf*] of thingness which, as it were, skips over the things. The project first opens up a domain where things—i.e., facts—show themselves. In this projection there is posited that which things are taken as, what and how they are to be evaluated beforehand. … [T]he mathematical project is the anticipation of the essence of things, of bodies; thus the basic blueprint [*Grundriss*] of the structure of everything and its relation to every other thing is sketched in advance. … This basic plan [*Grundriss*] at the same time provides the measure for laying out the realm … . Now nature is no longer an inner capacity of a body, determining its form of motion and place. Nature is not the realm of the uniform space-time context of motion … in which alone bodies can be bodies as a part of it and anchored in it. Natural bodies are now only what they *show* themselves as, within this projected realm. Things now show themselves only in the relations of places and time points and in the measures of mass and working forces. How they show themselves is prefigured in the project. … Because the project [*Entwurf*]

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from the identity conditions needed to account for the ontological commitments of, say, an Aristotelian conception of nature, the two conceptions of nature are not comparable. We can discuss them one after another, but, strictly speaking, since they use an entirely different range of identity conditions to determine what there really is, the truth of one does not entail the falsity of the other.

[91] Martin Heidegger, *What is a Thing?* (1935-36), trans. W. Barton and V. Deutsch, New York: Harper & Row, 1967, p. 88.

establishes a uniformity of all bodies according to relations of space, time, and motion, it also makes possible and requires a universal uniform measure as an essential determinant of things, i.e., numerical measurement. … The new form of modern science did not arise because mathematics became an essential determinant. Rather, that mathematics, and a particular kind of mathematics, could come into play and had come into play is consequence of the mathematical project.[92]

In this passage, Heidegger again talks of ontic truth as what 'shows itself' in exactly the same way he did in section 44 of *Being and Time*: what shows itself, ontic truth, depends on that which determines beings as beings, ontological truth as a metaphysical projection. In this example, Heidegger describes the ontological truth pertaining to a Newtonian idea of nature, which is also to say that he describes a new projection of nature, a new constitution of nature that displaces and does not build upon or disprove what came before it. From the perspective of the later ontological truth, the earlier one certainly seems false, but this judgment must be made from within a particular understanding of being, one that conceives nature, for example, in a way different from the apparently competing idea being judged. The older idea of nature might be said to be false, it may seem false, insofar as it doesn't conform to the standards of the later projection of nature, but it is not absolutely false, because there is no such standard by which to measure world-disclosures. There is no underlying absolute standard. There are only ontological truths that are used as frameworks for the evaluation of other claims to truth. Applying the later standard to the earlier claims results in Whiggish judgments, at best.

It is clear, then, that key consequence of Heidegger's ontological pluralism is relativism. From within his view, there is no way to explain different disclosures of being as progressive

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[92] Heidegger, *What is a Thing?*, pp. 92-4. Although Heidegger's account of the history of science may grow more detailed in the 1930s, it is fundamentally no different than the way he discusses the topic in the late 1920s. See, for example, BP, p. 321 and PIK, pp. 20-25 on Galileo and the foundation of modern science.

developments of our understanding of the world, since the authority of each metaphysical

projection is strictly limited to the world-disclosure of which it is a part. Each world-disclosure

sets up the possibility of some range of ontic truths—as Heidegger describes in discussing the

way nature is disclosed by Aristotle and Newton, for example—but those ontic truths cannot

carry over into another world disclosure because the very phenomena captured by such truths are

not a part of any other authoritative world-disclosure that they might be compared with. Again,

since each world disclosure projects different identity conditions for phenomena, the truths of

each world-disclosure are restricted to the particular world disclosure that makes them

accessible.

It is worth emphasizing that Heidegger's incommensurability thesis commits him to

relativism, not subjectivism. Truth is stable and 'absolute' within a metaphysical projection, and

so is obviously not a function of Dasein's personal preferences. Dasein cannot simply decide

what truth is: the projections of being that Dasein is thrown into fix the way the world is

disclosed. Against a given disclosure of being phenomena can be uncovered with complete

objectively. The problem, of course, is that the objectively uncovered truths are only true relative

to the prevailing projection of being. Heidegger's relativism is therefore a relativism about

projections of being, about world-disclosures, not about ontic truths within world-disclosures.

This relativism about world-disclosures is problematic enough, to be sure. Heidegger has no

resources to explain why we might prefer one world-disclosure over another: each is absolutely

authoritative from within and unquestionable from without.[93] This is a relativism of what Cristina

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[93] Cf. Cristina Lafont, "Replies" in *Inquiry* 45, 2002, p. 231.

Lafont properly calls 'quasi-transcendental' world-disclosures.[94] These world-disclosures are at once historical occurrences—disclosedness is, after all, essentially factical—but also have the authority traditionally ascribed to synthetic a priori principles, that is, they are absolutely authoritative over the domain in which they apply. This relativism of world-disclosures comes, therefore, from their peculiar status as both ontic and ontological, as both occurrences within the world and world-constituting disclosures of being.

§5 – On Adjudicating World-Disclosures

There is a simple but serious objection to Heidegger's view: he has no place for an explanation of how it is possible for Dasein to make a rational choice about giving up one ontological framework for another that may provide better access to the same phenomenon. From his perspective, our metaphysical projections appear almost at random, with each disclosure of being authoritative over the time or region in which it holds.[95] The idea that we are caught up in a fateful series of metaphysical projections, each incommensurable with what came before and with what will come after, fails to appreciate the simple fact that a world-disclosure or metaphysical projection may be meaningful, that is, it may lay out a framework for interpreting the world in a relatively coherent manner, while nevertheless being unacceptable: things may not actually be the way it would show them to be. In such cases, when we come to

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[94] See, for example, Lafont, *Heidegger, Language, and World-disclosure,* p.18.

[95] Of course, Heidegger later develops a rather elaborate story about the destiny of our understanding of being in the West, arguing that the series of world-disclosures unfolds in a determinate order. But, during this period at least, there is no principled basis for his story about a fixed order of epochal world-disclosures, where each successive understanding of being marks further decadence and decline. There are just ontic truths founded in Dasein's changing factical disclosedness.

see that a new framework might better account for some range of phenomena than does another, we are also coming to see that a framework we took to be a virtually unquestionable foundation of our understanding is actually false. The old framework is meaningful, but it is no longer (and never really was) a framework of truth. In short, Heidegger needs a way of explaining how 'ontological truth' can be defeasible and not just displaceable.

It is beyond question that we make decisions about which world-disclosive frameworks to adopt and which to discard and do so for good reasons. Think, for example, about the ways in which our understanding of our environment has changed in the past decades, where theories like plate tectonics and climate change have become organizing ideas for sciences, revolutionizing the way we see the 'nature,' despite being unthinkable just decades ago. It is simply not possible to say that a 'metaphysical projection' that shows the continents to be fixed landmasses is somehow true, but not true for us, and that, say, each projection of being meant something different by 'continent.' It is simply false. We are no longer geo-centrists, we are no longer Aristotelians, we no longer understand health in terms of the four-humors, we no longer believe that our fates can be calculated by the relative positioning of stars and planets in conjunction with our date and time of birth! Certainly, anyone can put together a list of world-organizing ideas that once seemed unassailable but now appear false. An adequate approach to ontology must be able to account for this falsity and our ability to at least occasionally choose new, better frameworks for disclosing the world, explaining the shortcomings of prior world-disclosures.

Heidegger would have us believe that such an objection is meaningless, that it is a superficial appeal to common sense. How could there be something like the absolute adjudication of world-disclosures I seem to be demanding if the world is not itself absolute, if the world is not itself a self-structuring collection of self-identifying entities? This rejection of

realism and commitment to the internal relation between Dasein's understanding of being

and ontology forces him to stick to an internal perspective in all questions of ontology, where no

adjudication across metaphysical projections is possible—each disclosure is absolutely

authoritative. Quite simply, from within a projection of being, the world appears the way its

metaphysical projections dictate. The idea that we could really compare world-disclosures (as

opposed to the mere appearance of a comparison) is supposed to be meaningless because each

world-disclosure discloses the world differently, making different entities discoverable. Giving

up Aristotelian physics doesn't mean disproving it, so much as it means giving up its way of

understanding nature. That old world disclosure, that old ontological truth, is off limits to us,

though we may strain to think ourselves back inside of it. And in doing this it may *seem* as if we

can make a judgment about the falsity of a previous world-disclosure. But this, for Heidegger,

must be an illusion. Seeing our way around a world-disclosure is not the same as having it as our

own. In the end, we still must understand that past projection from within our own understanding

of being. Whiggish confidence that our current projection of nature is true and theirs is false begs

the question against the alien understanding: after all, what exactly is meant by 'nature' (etc.) in

each case?

Heidegger's unapologetic rejection of the possibility of a progressive adoption of better

rather than just different world-disclosures confirms his commitment to a strong

incommensurability thesis and therefore, also, to relativism.[96] Looking back to the first chapter,

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[96] For example, Heidegger is fond of pointing out that "progress exists only in the realm of what is unimportant" (PIK, p. 1, see also MFL, p. 51), meaning that progress is an *ontic* and not an ontological phenomenon. In ontology our understanding of being becomes theoretically explicit; in laying bare a framework for truth there are no grounds for declaring that framework to be good or bad, better or worse than another, there is just the framework. We have an understanding of being that is perfectly suited to our ontical truths because our ontical truths are only

we should remember that Heidegger is not alone in struggling with questions about adjudicating ontological frameworks. Metaphysical realists, for example, reject ontological pluralism in their quest for the one true framework that discloses the furniture of the universe. Both seem mistaken: we cannot say that there is only one true framework, since there are clearly irreducible truths about the same phenomena, but neither can we allow that all actual frameworks are 'true' relative to themselves, as Heidegger seems willing to accept.

All this raises another simple question: why should Heidegger be read as an idealist if reading him this way leads straight to relativism? The obvious answer is that we should read Heidegger as an idealist because he is an idealist, which is true whether or not we wish to adopt his conclusions. More importantly, however, reading Heidegger as an idealist opens our eyes to his discovery of the ontological difference and the important problematics of world-disclosure and ontological truth. After reviewing my principal exegetical conclusions, I'll say a few more words about the positive systematic lessons of Heidegger's program, which first present themselves as challenges to those that would either adopt a (metaphysical) realist approach to ontology, and so deny pluralism, or to those who defend pluralism, but also reject relativism. On Heidegger's analysis, our ability to give an ontological account of synchronic and diachronic pluralism are rooted in the same place: anti-absolutism about ontological truth.

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discoverable within that particular disclosure of being. Relative to itself, our disclosure of being is perfectly adequate. From the perspective of others, each disclosure of being must be opaque to the others, though it may seem true or false in particular details.

§6 – Conclusion

Despite the diversity of its forms, all idealisms share a commitment to the general (and not just regional) interdependence of reality and thought. What is dependent, on who or what, how, to what extent, why, etc., varies, but all are committed to this basic interdependency. Heidegger is no different. Heidegger's idealism is Kantian in spirit, growing out of his acceptance of Kant's so-called Copernican revolution, giving priority to ontological understanding over ontic knowledge or, in other words, understanding of being over knowledge of entities.[97] Before we can have knowledge of reality, according to Heidegger, we must already have an implicit a priori understanding of something we might loosely call its categorical structure. This is the content of our a priori understanding of being, for the understanding of being is always an understanding of the being of entities. Understanding entities in advance just means understanding what it takes for entities to be such and such entities. Dasein, the being that always already has an understanding of being, has always already disclosed a range of possibilities. The ontological structure of reality, therefore, must be sought in an investigation of Dasein's disclosedness. Since all ontologies take their rise from Dasein, Heidegger calls this investigation into the being of Dasein fundamental ontology. Now, saying that ontological determinations flow from Dasein, that Dasein is the source of all ontologies, is not to say that the world is somehow a figment of Dasein's imagination. Not at all. Such a claim would be at best an implausible reduction of beings to being, and that is certainly not Heidegger's suggestion. He neither wants to reduce beings to being nor being to beings. It is only out of their interdependency in Dasein that there is anything like the world, that anything like reality is

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[97] PIK, p. 38.

possible. Heidegger is an idealist, not crazy. Dasein does not produce *realia*, but only

supplies the ontological horizons in terms of which *realia* can show themselves as what they are.

Dasein makes it possible for *realia* to be worldly, releasing them to their being, releasing them to

be what they are.

The idealist edge of Heidegger's interpretation of the ontological difference comes

through loud and clear in some of the best known passages of *Being and Time*, as when he

asserts that "reality is ontologically grounded in the being of Dasein" or that "being (not entities)

is dependent upon the understanding of being; that is to say, reality (not the real) is dependent

upon care [viz., the being of Dasein]" or in his claim that "being (not entities) is something

which 'there is' only in so far as truth is. And truth *is* only in so far as and as long as Dasein is.

Being and truth 'are' equiprimordially."[98] As I've discussed, Heidegger's thought cycles around

these essential connections between being, ontological truth, and Dasein. Realist interpretations

of Heidegger's work must break these connections to explain how what determines entities as

entities is independent of Dasein, while deflationary interpretations must neglect the phenomena

of ontological truth and world-disclosure entirely.

I have argued, therefore, that realist, pragmatist and therapeutic interpreters of

Heidegger's work misunderstand his basic approach to ontology, and so also the basic issues that

he is grappling with. Their current popularity notwithstanding, they are not plausible approaches

to the interpretation of Heidegger's central claims.[99] To review, realist interpreters of

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[98] BT, p. 255 and 272, square brackets added.

[99] Of course, this doesn't force me to deny that these interpreters can enlist Heidegger to say all kinds of interesting things about particular things such as the phenomenology of our practical involvements, death, technology, etc. For a detailed discussion of each of the three views I mention in this paragraph, see chapter 4.

Heidegger's work miss what is perhaps his most basic claim, namely, that being cannot be reduced to beings, i.e., that the being of entities is not a part, component, or product of the beings themselves. This, according to Heidegger, displays a "lack of ontological understanding" insofar as it tries "to explain reality ontically by real connections of interaction between things that are real."[100] Realism has no interest in avoiding this reduction. To the contrary, it is its pride and joy. Without making any claims whatsoever about the general tenability of realism, it is perfectly clear on these grounds that Heidegger is not a realist of any sort; he takes the metaphysical realist's principal idea of a self-determining world in itself to be a meaningless one.[101]

Pragmatist interpretations neglect the central ontological questions (or just assume that they are resolved in a realist manner) in order to focus on the interesting, if peripheral, details of Heidegger's analysis of readiness-to-hand. It's true, in the order of access, we encounter things as equipment before reflecting on them as 'something just present-at-hand and no more,' but that does not mean that Heidegger thought the key to ontology is reflection on mindless coping. The mere fact the he thought considering how we 'cope' may teach us about our a priori ontological projections does not transform Heidegger into a pragmatist. Pragmatism is a way of understanding experience that eschews ontically useless ontological reflection. Yet, while ontological reflection may be an anathema to pragmatism, it is Heidegger's primary concern. Philosophy is ontology, it is "transcendental science," not an anthropological investigation into our ability to complete a task without having to undergo cognitive processes related to what we're taking as what for what purposes. As Heidegger puts it:

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[100] BT, p. 251.

[101] Consider, for example, BP, p. 167, quoted in full below.

> The existential analytic of everydayness does not want to describe how we use a knife and fork. It should show that and how all association with beings, even where it appears as if there were just beings, already presupposes the transcendence of Dasein—namely, being-in-the-world. With it, *projection* of the being of the being in general, although concealed and for the most part indeterminate, *takes place* … .[102]

Understanding our being-in-the-world is about understanding our a priori grasp of ontological truth, our transcendence in our a priori understanding of being—prior to experience, prior to any 'practice.' For Heidegger, at least, it is clear that a metaphysical projection is *already presupposed* in all practical activity and is not first constituted though it. His concern is explaining the possibility and meaning of our essential transcendence and is in no way centered around our ability to understand our environment in dealing with it, for that is only one mode of transcendence and shouldn't be misunderstood as somehow more genuine or fundamental than others.

Finally, but perhaps above all, Heidegger is not a therapeutic philosopher searching for a way to overcome ontological or metaphysical questions. Indeed, Heidegger *identifies* philosophy with ontology, indicating that its primary interest is in being, what determines entities as entities, and not just with entities themselves. Therapeutic philosophers are taken by the alluring deflationary idea that distinctively metaphysical or ontological questions are meaningless, and so that philosophy is about showing other philosophers the errors of their metaphysical ways—philosophy itself is to blame for the problems of philosophy. If we translate their concerns into Heidegger's jargon, their core commitment would be that only ontic claims can be meaningful. This, however, is certainly not the view of the philosopher trying to reawaken the forgotten question of being. The fact that Heidegger shares a distaste for epistemology with

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[102] KPM, p. 165.

therapeutic philosophers is no excuse for their fundamental misunderstanding of his project.

It seems clear that Heidegger's replacement of the subject-object schema structuring traditional epistemological questions with Dasein as being-in-the-world raises as many metaphysical issues as it renders meaningless.[103] Heidegger's move may be philosophically fruitful in a number of ways, but it certainly isn't anti-metaphysical.

Despite the many problems with the interpretive approaches I've reviewed, it still may seem odd to criticize these interpreters for getting Heidegger wrong when getting him right means being wrong—or, more precisely, defending a highly contentious and counter-intuitive form of relativism. Considering this situation, wouldn't it be more appropriate to describe their interpretations not as wrong but as characterized by a liberal application of the principle of charity, as just doing what's necessary in order to make Heidegger's view plausible? If we have to turn Heidegger into a realist, pragmatist, or resolute anti-metaphysician to make his claims come out true, shouldn't we do it? Well, if that were the case, if we were already quite clear about the way things ought to turn out, it's hard to understand why we would talk about Heidegger at all, at least as anything other than as an example of what philosophy was like in a bygone era. Things, fortunately, aren't quite that bad for Heidegger and, obviously, aren't quite that good for us. In my view, then, it is important to interpret Heidegger correctly in order to allow his approach to ontology to stand as a challenge to those who believe that either a rejection of metaphysical realism or the acceptance of a 'reasonable' pluralism can be had on the cheap.

As I've argued, Heidegger's approach to ontology, his insistence that there is only being in an understanding of being—in a word, his idealism—is an unequivocal rejection of all forms

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[103] See chapter 4, section 2.

of metaphysical realism, or, as he might put it, of the possibility of reducing being to beings.

Heidegger thinks of metaphysical realism as a fundamental misunderstanding of ontology, as the

incoherent fantasy of an uninterpreted interpreted world, of a world that imposes identity

conditions on itself. By contrast, he holds that it is Dasein that supplies identity conditions in

disclosing the world, not as a way of adding something like 'subjective coloring' to that which is

really there, but as a way of letting entities show themselves as they are. Entities are not self-

disclosing, but are only disclosed, given determinacy, in an understanding of being. It is only

then that they can show themselves, it is only then that there can be truths about them that may or

may not be discovered, it is only then that they can meaningfully be said to have any particular

being 'in themselves.'

I've suggested that this idealist rejection of metaphysical realism opens the door to

pluralism. Heidegger's position allows that our many ways of world-disclosure can be true

together without canceling each other out just because the being of the world is not something

that emanates from realia: being depends essentially on understanding. There are many ways that

we can correctly disclose beings in their being, for correctness—truth—isn't about matching our

representations to an absolute substance, but is about uncovering beings as they are, but always

in accordance with our always prior factical disclosedness. That said, Heidegger's position,

although decidedly idealist, shouldn't be seen as anything other than an attempt to be realistic

about our ontological commitments and what they require, and to do so without trying to be, as

he puts it, "more realistic than things themselves." [104]

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[104] BP, p. 175.

Heidegger is able to open the door to ontological pluralism because ontological determinacy—ontological truth—depends essentially on Dasein's disclosedness. The diversity of our metaphysical projections allow beings to show themselves as they are, and to do so in many different ways. Our various projections of being determine the 'what-being,' the 'whatness,' the 'essence' of that which is then discoverable within those horizons. Because the truth about beings, their uncoveredness as they are, is always relative to the underlying understanding of being, putative truths cannot be compared across disclosures of being. They do not share an interpretive horizon: from the perspective of one metaphysical projection, the claims made in terms of another would be, strictly speaking, meaningless.[105] Claims coming from two different metaphysical projections are thus said to be incommensurable. To recall Heidegger's favorite example, both Aristotle and Newton are considering the same general phenomenon i.e., what's 'out there' ontically independent of us, but since they each supply radically different metaphysical projections, it is *not* possible to claim that Newton corrects Aristotle, but only that Newton projects nature anew, disclosing nature as it is in itself, but doing so no more or less than Aristotle did.[106]

The point here is just this: opening the door to pluralism, Heidegger opens it wide. Since his pluralism is rooted in his rejection of absolutism about truth, he has no basis for distinguishing between synchronic and diachronic forms. As I've explained, that latter form of pluralism is more commonly known as relativism. Reductive realists and unabashed relativists notwithstanding, most philosophers would like to vindicate synchronic pluralism while blocking

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[105] See section 5.

[106] See section 4 above for a discussion and citations.

the possibility of diachronic pluralism.[107] Heidegger therefore comes in for criticism for failing to distinguish between the two. But how does the anti-metaphysical realist, anti-relativist propose that this ought to be done? Synchronic pluralism is a product of the rejection of metaphysical realism and a commitment to the idea that there can be mutually irreducible truths about the same phenomena. To the chagrin of the anti-relativist pluralist, this is precisely what's needed for diachronic pluralism, nothing more or less. Whether irreducible ontological determinations of the same phenomenon are made at one moment in time or over time is not relevant to what makes them true determinations, and this is the case even if their temporal difference is the key to the particular significance of each and their acceptability in relation to common sense.

Heidegger refuses to draw a line between these forms of pluralism, refusing to assert dogmatically that synchronic pluralism is in, because it is a kind of pluralism that fits nicely with common sense, but that diachronic pluralism is out, because it does not accord with our self-image as beings that are coming ever closer to knowing about the way things are *anyway*. Of course, because his rejection of metaphysical realism is built around the incoherence of that very self-image and its underlying assumptions about ontology, Heidegger is not as concerned as we might like him to be about this counter-intuitive result. But even if he would have voiced such a concern, he had no way to make the relevant distinction. Whether or not we do is a question that I can't begin to address here. More modestly, my intention is only to consider why Heidegger's relativist result exerts a stronger pull than we might initially think.

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[107] Why? Failing to do so forces a dramatic revision of fundamental pre-philosophical commitments, such as the idea that world-organizing ideas can turn out to be *false*. So, for example, the truth of astrology was not simply 'displaced,' it is not simply not true for us. We must be able to explain the erstwhile 'ontological truths' of astrology as falsehoods. We don't want to accept a 'pluralist' interpretation of the move from astrology to modern cosmology.

It is possible to summarize what's at stake by looking at Heidegger's view as a series of challenges, beginning with his challenge to metaphysical realism. Among other things, metaphysical realism does not allow for pluralism, either synchronic or diachronic. If one decides to bite that anti-pluralist bullet and to buy into metaphysical realism, then there's not much more to say. However, if the intention is to explain our commonsense commitment to pluralism, Heidegger presents another challenge, insisting that the question of pluralism be addressed at the appropriate ontological level. Ontically, there are all manner of claims to truth, claims that can be evaluated in terms of appropriate contextual standards. The philosophical question of pluralism only arises when we ask about the *status* of such truths in relation to one another, and not just about our ability to make sense of them individually. In other words, the question of pluralism is a question about ontology, a question of what it means to say that something (really) is this or that. The question of ontological pluralism is about what determines entities as entities so that it is possible for an entity to really be, 'in itself,' more than one way.

Continuing down this pluralist path, Heidegger presents yet another challenge. On the one hand, it is possible to join him in defending his consistent ontological pluralism, the view that includes both synchronic and diachronic pluralism, which, as I've indicated many times now, entails an incommensurability thesis and so relativism. If, on the other hand, diachronic pluralism is rejected because of its most significant consequence, one is obliged to provide an account of the relevant distinction between synchronic and diachronic pluralism. Though there may be a way to do this—again, whether or not there is I do not presume to decide here—I am happy to say that there is no easy way, no way that will not flirt with either falling back into metaphysical realism, on one side, or relativism, on the other.

As intuitive and desirable a philosophical result as synchronic pluralism may be, Heidegger reminds us that we cannot have it for free: metaphysical realists attempt to do this with their idea of 'indirect correspondence,' therapeutic philosophers try to do this by 'overcoming metaphysics,' while pragmatists try to do this by blocking questions of ontology, and so of relativism, with talk of 'what works.' Heidegger's idealism pays a steep price for its principled ontological pluralism, as we've seen. But he pays this price in the service of some of our most important pre-philosophical commitments, despite the fact that doing so puts him at odds with others. Heidegger's idealism is thus revisionary, but isn't so gratuitously. The broad challenges Heidegger's idealism provides should be taken seriously and do not deserve to be written off just because they are rooted in a form of idealism, for, as Heidegger puts it: "It is not an already settled matter whether idealism does not in the end pose the questions of philosophy more fundamentally, more radically than any realism ever can."[108]

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[108] The quote is drawn from the following passage: "…to this very day I am unaware of any infallible decision according which idealism is false, just as little as I am aware of one that makes realism true. We may not make into the criterion of truth what is the fashion and bias of the time, a solution belonging to some faction or other. Instead, we have to ask what this idealism—which is today feared like the foul fiend incarnate—is really searching for. It is not an already settled matter whether idealism does not in the end pose the problems of philosophy more fundamentally, more radically than realism ever can. But perhaps also it is not tenable in the form in which it has obtained up to now, whereas of realism it cannot even be said that it is untenable, because it has not even pressed forward at all into the dimension of philosophical problems, the level where tenability and untenability are decidable. To declare something to be idealism may, in contemporary philosophy be a very dexterous partisan political stroke in outlawing it, but it is not a real ground of proof. Viewed with minute exactitude, the anxiety that prevails today in the face of idealism is an anxiety in the face of philosophy…" (BP, p. 167).

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