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HEIDEGGER'S CATEGORIES IN *BEING AND TIME*

1. Introduction

In Division One of *Being and Time* Heidegger presents a novel categorization of what there is, and an original account of the project of ontology and consequently of the nature and genesis of those ontological categories. He officially recognizes two categories of Being: *Zuhandensein* (readiness-to-hand) and *Vorhandensein* (presence-at-hand). *Vorhandene* things are roughly the objective, person-independent, causally interacting subjects of natural scientific inquiry. *Zuhandene* things are those which a neo-Kantian would describe as having been imbued with human values and significances. In addition to these categories, there is human Being, or *Dasein*, in whose structure the origins of the two thing-ish categories are to be found. This essay concerns itself with three of Heidegger's conceptual innovations: his conceiving of ontology in terms of self-adjudicating anthropological categories, as summed up in the slogan that "fundamental ontology is the regional ontology of *Dasein*," his corresponding anti-traditional assertion of the ontological priority of the domain of the *Zuhandensein* to that of the *Vorhandensein*, which latter is seen as rooted in or precipitated out of that more basic (Heidegger says "primordial") world of human significances, and the non-Cartesian account of awareness and classificatory consciousness as social and practical.

Section I presents an interpretation of Heidegger's notion of fundamental ontology, and its relation to the "vulgar" ontology practiced by previous philosophers. Section II introduces *Zuhandendensein*—the world of equipment, each element of which is experienced *as* having some practically constituted role or significance. Section III offers a reading of *Mit-Dasein*, the social mode of Being which institutes the world of equipment. Finally, Section IV discusses the move from a world of equipment, about which there are no facts over and above how things are *taken* to be by all the bits of *Dasein* involved, to a realm of things which have properties not exhausted by their possible roles in *Dasein*'s practical dealings.¹

I

What is most striking thing about Heidegger's account of categories is his distinction between "vulgar" ontology and "fundamental" ontology, and

the co-ordinate claim that fundamental ontology is the regional ontology of Dasein (the kind of Being we have). Vulgar ontology is the cataloguing of the furniture of the universe. Fundamental ontology is said to be deeper and more difficult than the vulgar variety, requiring the investigation of the significance of ontological categorization. For vulgar ontology, in its most careful versions, whether we consider Leibniz, Hegel, Frege, or Quine, a specification of such general kinds takes the form of a specification of *criteria of identity* and *individuation* for entities of those kinds. As an ontologist in this tradition, Descartes inaugurated the modern era with a bold reincarnation of a Platonic idea: things are to be distinguished according to criteria of identity and individuation couched in terms of *epistemic* privilege. In particular, he invented a new kind of thing, according to the scheme: an event or object is *mental* (or subjective) just in case it is whatever it is taken to be by some individual.² The rest of the (nondivine) universe he relegated to the physical or objective realm. These were things which are what they are regardless of how any individual takes them to be.³ The contribution of the nineteenth century to this scheme was Hegel's notion (see Section III) of a third category of *social* entities. What is at issue here is the domain of social *appropriateness* in which, as in etiquette, social practice is the highest court of appeal. Thus a group or community can be thought of as having the same sort of criterial dominion or authority over, and hence, privileged access to, social things that individuals have over subjective things.

Before describing how Heidegger develops this idea into a detailed model of social practice and significance in *Being and Time*, let's consider some consequences which adding such an ontological category to the Cartesian two-sorted ontology can have. In particular, we can ask the question of fundamental ontology: What is the ontological status of the distinction of entities into three kinds (subjective, social, and objective) based on the source of criterial authority for them? In particular, is the division of things into subjective, social, and objective a subjective distinction (as Berkeley would have it), a social distinction, or an objective one?⁴ The conceptual status of such a question is unusual enough to warrant the citation of a few more familiar examples which exhibit the same structure.

First, consider the distinction between differences of *quality* and differences of *quantity*. Is this difference, we may ask, a qualitative or a quantitative one? Engels notoriously takes himself to have transformed the philosophical tradition by suggesting the latter response in place of the former. Whatever merit that suggestion may have, the issue it seeks to respond to seems to be perfectly intelligible.

Another example can be observed in the medieval notions of "*distinctio rationis*" and "*distinctio realis*." The distinction between form and matter is only a distinction of reason, for we can never have one without the other.

Only by, e.g., rationally considering the relations a bronze cube stands in to a bronze sphere and a marble cube can we "separate" its being bronze from its being a cube. Between a piece of bronze and a piece of marble, on the other hand, there exists a real distinction, for these can be nonmetaphorically separated without reliance on rational abstraction by comparison. But now we must ask, as did the scholastics, whether the distinction between rational and real distinctions is itself a rational or a real distinction. Although issues of great moment for the debate about the ontological and epistemological status of universals turn on the answer to this question, our concern is with the structure of the question rather than with the plausibility of various answers to it.

A final example should make clear the phenomenon being pointed out. The U.S. constitution gives the three broad branches of the Federal government distinct responsibilities and jurisdictions. As part of the relations of authority and responsibility which exist between the branches (the 'checks and balances' which regulate their interaction), the judiciary is given the authority and responsibility to interpret the proper region of authority and responsibility of *each* branch, itself included. In matters of constitutional import, we may say, the judiciary is given the authority to draw the boundaries between its own authority and that of the executive and legislative branches.

It is not easy to describe the structure which these examples share. In each case a family of concepts pertaining to identity and individuation is examined, and the root of the identity and individuation of those concepts is found to reside in one of them. (In the last example, instead of a concept with an extension including various things, we have a social institution with a jurisdiction including various things.) In each case the question can be raised whether one of those concepts (institutions) is *self-adjudging* in the sense that it applies to the sort of identity and individuation which distinguishes it from the other concepts or institutions in that family. To raise this second-order sort of question about a scheme of ontological categories is to engage in fundamental ontology. And Heidegger's claim that fundamental ontology is the regional ontology of Dasein is the claim that Dasein-in-the-world-of-the-ready-to-hand is ontologically self-adjudging in this sense. Not only is the distinction between the ontological categories of the ready-to-hand and the present-at-hand intelligible only in terms of the sort of Being that Dasein has, but the difference between Dasein's sort of being and readiness-to- and presentness-at-hand must itself be understood in terms of Dasein. It is this central feature of his early work which led the later Heidegger to dismiss *Being and Time* as "merely anthropological."

The ontological primacy of the social can be justified by appeal to a more specific thesis, pragmatism concerning *authority*. This is the claim that all matters of authority or privilege, in particular *epistemic* authority, are

matters of social practice, and not objective matters of fact.⁵ The pragmatist about authority will take the criterial distinctions between ontological categories to be social in nature, for those categories are distinguished precisely by the locus of criterial authority over them. The category of the social must then be seen as self-adjudging, and hence as ontologically basic, so the broader claim of the ontological priority of social categories follows from the narrower doctrine concerning the social nature of authority. In what follows it will be argued that Heidegger develops precisely this line of thought in Division One of *Being and Time*.

II

According to Heidegger, Dasein finds itself always amidst an already existing world of equipment, consisting of significant things each of which is experienced *as* something. The readiness-to-hand of a piece of equipment consists in its having a certain significance. This significance in turn consists in its appropriateness for various practical roles and its inappropriateness for others.

But the 'indicating' of the sign and the 'hammering' of the hammer are not properties [*Eigenschaften*] of entities . . . Anything ready-to-hand is, at worst, appropriate [*Geignet*] for some purposes and inappropriate for others. (p. 114)

Properties, by contrast, are what characterize the present-at-hand independently of human practical ends—what would be taken to be true of objects before human beings “attach significances” to them on the neo-Kantian picture Heidegger wishes to invert. Heidegger’s problem in the first part of *Being and Time* is to explain how such a category of objective Being could be constructed or abstracted out of the primitive system of appropriatenesses and significances which makes up the world in which we always already find ourselves.

How are we to understand this category of the ready-to-hand? To inhabit a *world* is to *take* each thing in that world *as* something. A piece of equipment is something experienced *as* something. Several points about this ‘as’-structure must be appreciated in order to understand the ready-to-hand as the kind of Being or significance a thing exhibits by being taken *as* something. First, the something₁s which are taken as something₂s must be understood as themselves things which are ready-to-hand as ways of taking still other pieces of equipment. “In interpreting we do not, so to speak, throw a ‘signification’ over some naked thing which is present-at-hand, we do not stick a value on it.”⁶ The something₁s which are given with respect to one set of takings must themselves have been socially constituted. Second, it must be understood how

thoroughly non-Cartesian and unsubjective is Heidegger's notion of the classificatory activity in virtue of which things show themselves *as* something₂s. The world of the ready-to-hand is what we can be aware of, *as* we are or would be aware of it. For Heidegger, as for others, there is no awareness or experience without classification. But the "awareness" which is the appropriation of some bit of equipment *as* having a certain significance is a public behavioral matter of how the thing is treated or responded to, not a mental act. For Heidegger the confused notion of the subjective arises when the category of the present-at-hand has been achieved, as that co-ordinate mental realm which must be invoked when one mistakenly takes the present-at-hand as ontologically primary, and looks for something to *add* to it to explain the everyday world of the ready-to-hand. If this anti-subjectivism is overlooked, the use of the notion of classification to bridge the gap between Heidegger's 'as'-structure and traditional notions of consciousness will be misleading. Finally, it must be noted that modeling understanding on taking-as is a device for interpreting the text, not a rendering of its terminology. Officially, discussions of 'as'-structure' are restricted to the level of interpretation (which develops out of understanding) where something is noticed *as* a hammer not when it is hammered with (as the model of understanding would have it) but only when it is discarded as inappropriate for, or searched for as required by some practical project. The broader usage has an exegetical point, however, and the specific differences between understanding and interpretation can be accommodated within it, as we shall see. The positive account of treating or taking *as* has three features. First, takings are public performances which accord with social practices. Second, such performances are individuated as and by *responses*. Third, the responsive dispositions which constitute the social practices are related to one another so as to satisfy a strong systematicity condition. We examine these points below.

Where do the sorts or kinds or characters which are the something₂s according to which something₁s are classified come from? Any concrete object or event is similar to any other in an infinite number of respects, and dissimilar to it in an infinite number of others. For a respect of similarity is just a shared possible partial description, and these can be gerrymandered as we like. The practical discrimination of objects and performances into those appropriate for or according to some practice and those not is precisely the recognition of *some* of these infinitely numerous abstractly generable respects of similarity as having a special privilege over the rest. Heidegger should be interpreted in accord with the pragmatist thesis about authority, as taking this privilege to consist in its social recognition, that is, as a matter of how some community does or would respond to things. Something₂s are response-types, and classifying something₁ as a particular something₂ is simply

responding to it with a performance of that type. Equipment is originally introduced in Section 15 as consisting of *pragmata*, “that which one has to do with in one’s concerned dealings.” The ready-to-hand is generically characterized by serviceability [*Dienlichkeit*]:

Serviceability . . . is not an appropriateness of some entity; it is rather the condition (so far as Being is in question) which makes it possible for the character of such an entity to be defined by its appropriatenesses. (p. 115, H 83)

“Serviceability” is thus the potential which objects have to be caught up in the practices which institute specific respects of appropriateness. For something₁ to be so caught up is for it to be *involved*.

The Being of an entity within the world is its involvement [*Bewandtnis*]. (p. 116, H 84)

Such involvement in turn comprises a system of references or assignments.

To say that the Being of the ready-to-hand has the structure of reference or assignment [*Verweisung*] means that it has in itself the character of *having been assigned or referred*. (p. 115, H 84)

The appropriatenesses which are the significance of a particular entity exist in virtue of such reference or assignment. Referring or assigning is instituting relations among equipment (pen, ink, paper, etc.) and clearly is something that is *done*, though we must not assume for that reason that it is something any one of us can do, or even that it is something the whole community can do (except in a derivative sense), rather than something done by the community’s practices as constitutive of those practices⁷ These assignments exist in virtue of the responsive dispositions which are appropriate in a community.

A further doctrine is that

An entity is discovered when it is assigned or referred to something, and referred as that entity which it is. (p. 115, H 84)

Discovering an entity is taking it *as* something (the non-Cartesian notion of awareness as behavioral classification). Referring or assigning is to be understood not only as instituting the social appropriatenesses which are the significances of objects and performances, but also as making possible the appropriation of such significances by those who discover objects in terms of them. ‘Appropriation’ [*zueignung*] is Heidegger’s nonsubjective epistemic activity. To discover something ready-to-hand, to appropriate it, is to take it *as* something, to respond to it in a certain way. In one of his rare examples, after telling us that signs can be taken as paradigmatic of equipment in general, Heidegger says that

the kind of behaving (Being) which corresponds to the sign [a turn-signal arrow] is either to "give way" or stand still with respect to the car with the arrow. (p. 110, H 79)

Here it is precisely how it is appropriate to respond to the turn-signal in a context that makes it the bit of equipment it is. To take it *as* such a signal (discover it as such) is just to respond to it with the appropriate behavior.

The systematicity requirement may be put broadly by the claim that

Taken strictly, there "is" no such thing as *an* equipment. To the Being of any equipment there always belongs a totality of equipment, in which it can be the equipment that it is. (p. 97, H 68)

Anything ready-to-hand is so only in virtue of the role it plays in a "referential totality of significance or involvements."

As the Being of something ready-to-hand, an involvement is itself discovered only on the basis of the prior discovery of a totality of involvements. (p. 118, H 85)

In terms of what relations are such roles to be understood, and how must they fit together to form the appropriate kind of totality? Heidegger gives his answer in Section 18 "Involvement and Significance—the Worldhood of the World." Although the account offered there deploys an unfamiliar set of technical terms, its basic characteristics may be straightforwardly set out. The bearers of the social significances making up readiness-to-hand are of two kinds: objects and performances. Objects and performances are what can be constitutively judged to be (in the sense of being responded to as) appropriate or not according to the social practices which are the medium of social significance. Heidegger calls those practices "in-order-to's" [*das Um-zu*]. Fastening one board to another by driving a nail would be an example. An object can be caught up in such a practice either by being used in the practice, or by being produced in that practice. In the former case, Heidegger calls the object (for example a hammer or a nail, used in the different senses of 'employed' and 'consumed' respectively) the "with-which" [*das Womit*] of the practice, and in the latter case he calls the object which is produced the "towards-which" [*das Wozu*]. The assignments of objects are the relations between them instituted by relations between the practices in which they are involved in these two ways. The role of an object (its involvement) is determined by those practices in which it is appropriately used, and those practices in which it can appropriately be produced.

Particular performances are called "in whiches" [*das Wobei*]. A social practice may be thought of as a class of possible performances, that is as a performance *type*. Such an in-order-to consists, namely, of just those performances which are or would be (taken to be) appropriate according to it. For

something to be (ready-to-hand as) a hammer is for it to be appropriate to respond to it with a performance of the hammering type, i.e., to hammer with it. It is performances of using and producing objects which make up the social practices in virtue of which those objects acquire their involvements and significances. Social object-types are then instituted by social practical types of the performances in which they are appropriately used or produced. In the world of the ready-to-hand, in which things are whatever they are (or would be) responded to *as*, then, the individuation of objects (by their roles as with- and towards-which) is determined by the individuation of social practices. Object types are instituted by performance types. So where do the appropriateness equivalence classes of performances, which are the social practices, come from?

As with objects, performance tokens exhibit infinite numbers of objective respects of similarity and dissimilarity. The privilege which one type or co-appropriateness class of performances exhibits as a practice can only have its source in its social recognition, that is, in how the type-privileged (co-typical) performance tokens would be treated or taken, or more generally responded to by the community in question. The performances comprised by a social practice are of the same type in that there is some other responsive performance type (something₂) such that each of the tokens of the instituted performance type (something₁) is, according to the community whose recognitions are constitutive in this domain, appropriately responded to by some performance belonging to the instituting type. A performance is recognized as being of the type by being responded to as such. For instance, what makes a certain class of performances all instances of the type *constructings of tribally appropriate dwelling huts* is that each of those possible performances would be appropriately responded to by a performance of the type *tribe members treating the produced object as a dwelling*—that is *being prepared to dwell in it under suitable circumstances*. Whenever what is produced by one practice is used by another, the using practice plays the role of responsive recognition performance type (rrpt) with respect to the producing practice. The role of a social performance type in a “totality of involvements” is specified by saying what performance type is its rrpt. and what performance type it is an rrpt for.

The requirement of systematicity or of the autonomy of significance may then be stated in two parts. First, with respect to objects, every object-type appropriately produced by one social practice must be appropriately useable in or by some other practice. The converse need not hold, for Heidegger says several times that *natural* objects are ready-to-hand as objects useable in human practice, but not requiring to be produced by it.⁸ Second, with respect to performances, every performance type which is an rrpt for some

performance type must have some other performance type as its own *rrpt*. Again the converse need not hold, since we can respond to natural events. To specify the role of an object in such a system is to specify those practices with respect to which it functions as towards-which, and those with respect to which it functions as a with-which. To specify the role of a performance (in-which) is to specify the practice, that is the performance type to which it belongs. And to specify such an in-order-to is to specify its *rrpt* and what it functions as an *rrpt* of. Doing so determines all of the assignment relations and involvements which hold between socially significant objects as such, as well as the instituting responsive relations defining social performance types. The non-Cartesian epistemic notion of appropriation of significance or discovery of the ready-to-hand is also given a natural social-behavioral reading on this account. For to grasp the involvement of an object is to achieve practical mastery of its various assignments. And such mastery consists simply in being able to act (use, produce, and respond) appropriately according to the practices which institute those involvements. To respond to an object or performance which is appropriate according to a practice *as* appropriate according to that practice, that is, to respond appropriately to it, is to discover it as what it is, as ready-to-hand for what it is ready-to-hand for. Such practical capacities can be described without invoking anything subjective on the part of the practitioners. The inhabitant of a Heideggerian world is aware of it as composed of significant equipment, caught up in various social practices and classified by the involvements those practices institute. But this awareness is practical, social, and behavioral, consisting entirely in the exhibition of differential responsive dispositions according appropriately with those of the community.

The account suggested of the nature of the referential totality of significance within which we encounter the ready-to-hand explains the concept of the worldhood of the world in at least one straightforward sense. For the remarks above can be expressed in a first-order quantificational language. Such a language would need two different sorts of individual constants, to stand for object types and performance types, and three different predicates (corresponding to the three sorts of "assignment or reference" distinguished above): $U(o, p)$, interpreted as saying that object o is used in practice p , $P(p, o)$, interpreted as saying that object o is produced by practice p , and $R(p, p')$, interpreted as saying that p' is the *rrpt* of p . It is easy to see that the two halves of the systematicity condition can be expressed as quantificational sentences in such a language. It is equally easy to see how the model theory for such a language might go. Theories in the specified language that include the sentences codifying the systematicity conditions would be interpreted by model structures which consisted of domains of object and performance types

(represented as sets of tokens) and relations between them of using, producing, and responding. A Heideggerean world is such a structure satisfying in the usual sense a first-order theory of the sort described which contains the systematicity conditions.⁹ At the end of Section 18 Heidegger summarizes the structure he discerns:

The 'for-the-sake-of-which' signifies an 'in-order-to'; this in turn a 'towards-this'; the latter, an 'in-which' of letting something be involved; and that in turn the 'with-which'. These relationships are bound up with one another as a primordial totality; they are what they are *as* signifying The relational totality of this signifying we call 'significance'. (p. 120, H 87)

This passage emphasizes the systematic structure of social significance and retraces the relations of use and response described above. It mentions the further technical expression 'for-the-sake-of-which' [*das Worumwillen*] which marks the point of contact of the categorial structure with the existential concerns of Division Two and so cannot be discussed here. A practical 'in-order-to' gives a point to performances of some type by providing a use for the 'towards-this' (a particular 'towards-which') produced by such performances. Those performances are 'in-which's' individuated as types by their overall role or involvement in use of 'with-which's' as means or production of 'towards-which's', as those 'towards-which's' are individuated by their involvement not only in being produced by performances of a certain kind from raw materials of a certain kind, but also by their involvement in a further practice (an 'in-order-to' whose performances are themselves 'in-which's') which makes use of them. The communities whose responsive cognitive practices generate these structures of social significance will be considered next.

III

We have interpreted worldhood as that referential totality which constitutes significance. In Being-familiar with this significance and previously understanding it, Dasein lets what is ready-to-hand be encountered as discovered in its involvement. In Dasein's Being, the context of references or assignments which significance implies is tied up with Dasein's own-most Being (p. 160, H 123)

Nothing like a full account of Dasein's kind of Being can be essayed here; that's the topic of the whole of *Being and Time*. On the other hand, something must be said about the constitution of the community in whose dispositions (for appropriate responsive recognitions or takings) significance originates. Happily, the features of Dasein's kind of Being which must be understood if the precipitation of the present-at-hand out of the ready-to-hand is to be intelligible can be explained with the materials already available.

The first point, of course, is that Dasein's Being is *social* in nature:

So far as Dasein *is* at all, it has Being-with-one-another as its kind of Being (p. 163 H 125)

Not only is Being toward Others an autonomous, irreducible relationship, as Being-with, is one which, with Dasein's Being, already is. (p. 162 H 125)

Dasein in itself is essentially Being-with (p. 156, H 120)

Next, Dasein's sociality is essential to the practical activity which constitutes worldly significance:

Dasein-with remains existentially constitutive for Being-in-the-world. (p. 157, H 121, compare also p. 163 H 125)

Third, it is only in the context of such Dasein-with that individuals can be spoken of.

In Being with and towards Others, there is thus a relationship of Being [Seinsverhältnis] from Dasein to Dasein. But it might be said that this relationship is already constitutive for one's own Dasein. (p. 162 H 124)

In terms of the 'they' [das Man] and as the 'they', I am given proximally to myself (p. 167 H 129)

These doctrines can be understood according to the Hegelian model of the synthesis of social substance by mutual recognition. To belong to a community, according to this model, is to be recognized as so belonging by all those one recognizes as so belonging. Hegel's idea was that community constitutive recognition is transitive *de jure*—that one must recognize those who are recognized by those one recognizes. The reflexive self-recognition that makes one an Hegelian individual will then follow if one can establish *de facto* symmetry, that is achieve recognition by those one recognizes. To be entitled to recognize or regard oneself as an excellent chess-player one must be entitled to be regarded as such by those one so regards.

Of course, for an account along these lines to be helpful in interpreting Heidegger, recognition must not be taken to be a mental act, but as with awareness and classification must be given a social behavioral reading in terms of communal responsive dispositions. What sort of response (rrpt) is taking or recognizing someone *as* one of us, a member of *our* community? Clues are to be found in two passages:

In that with which we concern ourselves environmentally, the Others are encountered as what they are; they *are* what they do. (p. 163, H 126)

What is it that other community members *as* such do? They take objects and performances *as* ready-to-hand with respect to various practices *by* using them and responding to them in various ways. How does such behavior constitute the practioners *as* other members of one's own community?

By 'Others' we do not mean everyone else but me—those against whom the 'I' stands out. They are rather those from whom for the most part one does *not* distinguish oneself—those among whom one is too. (p. 154, H 118)

Not everyone is a communal Other, but only those one recognizes or responds to as such. To respond to them as such is not to distinguish them from oneself. But in what regard? The previous passage said that the Others are what they do, so it is their doings which one does not distinguish from one's own. And this is to say that one treats their *responses* and dispositions as one's own. What they take to be appropriate performances and usings and producings of equipment, one also takes as such. To give one's own responses no special status or priority in this way is to treat the kinds they institute as social. It is to take the authority over appropriateness boundaries to reside in the community, which is constituted by that very recognition.¹⁰

The suggestion is that my recognizing someone as a co-community member is responding to him in a certain way. That way is for me to respond to his responses as having the same authority to institute kinds and appropriateness equivalence classes that my own responses have. In particular, my recognitions of others *and myself* as members of the community have no special authority. My recognitions of myself as community member count only if they are taken to count by those I take to be community members. Their so taking my recognitions is in turn simply a matter of their recognizing me, that is treating my responses as equally authoritative as theirs in determining appropriatenesses. The community, *Mitdasein*, then differs from the ready-to-hand in that its members are constituted not only by being recognized or responded to in a certain way, but also by their *recognizings* and responses as *recognizers*.

Being-together-with in the sense of forming a recognitive community is accordingly the existential basis of the consilience of practice which constitutes the category of the ready-to-hand and hence, as we shall see, the category of the present-at-hand as well. The distinction between the existential and the categorial terminologically marks that between *recognizers*, and the merely *recognizeds* which do not have the kind of Being of one of us. The practical agreement of recognizing each other's *recognizings* can be called 'communication' "in a sense which is ontologically broad":

'Communication' in which one makes an assertion—giving information, for instance—is a special case of the communication which is grasped in principle existentially. In this more general kind of communicating the Articulation of Being-with one another understandingly is constituted. Through it a co-state-of-mind [*Mitbfindlichkeit*] gets 'shared', and so does the understanding of Being-with. (p. 205 H 162)

In the next section we investigate the genesis of the category of the present-at-hand out of the sort of understanding which consists in shared recognitive practice permitting communication about a world of equipment each bit of which is whatever it is recognized-by-us as.

IV

The claim to be developed in this section is that the category of the present-at-hand consists of ready-to-hand things which are appropriately responded to by a certain kind of performance, *qua* things that can *only* be appropriately responded to by such a performance. That categorially constitutive kind of responsive recognition performance type is *assertion*. Since Heidegger holds that “assertion is derived from interpretation, and is a special case of it,”¹¹ the story must begin with the notion of interpretation (*Auslegung*).

Interpretation is a co-ordinate notion to that understanding which consists in the practical mastery of a totality of significations or assignments required if one is to live in a world at all. For “. . . we never perceive equipment that is ready-to-hand without already understanding and interpreting it.”¹² Four features of interpretation must be recognized. First, interpreting characterizes practical activity.

Interpretation is carried out primordially not in a theoretical statement but in an action of circumspectful concern . . . [e.g.] laying aside the unsuitable tool . . .” (p. 200, H 157)

Second, interpreting involves making something one’s own. Interpretation is described as “the working-out and appropriation of an understanding.”¹³

In understanding their lurks the possibility of interpretation—that is of *appropriating* what is understood. (p. 203, H 161. See also p. 191, H 150)

Taking something as something was the form of the act of understanding, that discovery of a bit of equipment which also disclosed a totality of equipmental involvements. What is it practically to appropriate such an understanding?

The answer is offered by a pair of passages, worth citing at length, which for the third point introduce the crucial *conditional* structure of interpretation, out of which the possibility of inference and hence assertion develops.

Circumspection operates in the involvement-relationships of the context of equipment which is ready-to-hand. What is essential is that one should have a primary understanding of the totality of involvements In one’s current using

and manipulating, the concerned circumspection . . . *brings* the ready-to-hand *closer* to Dasein, and does so by *interpreting* what has been sighted. The specific way of bringing the object of concern closer we call *deliberating* [*Ueberlegung*]. The schema particular to this is the 'if . . . then . . .'; if this or that, for instance, is to be produced, put to use, or averted, then some ways, means, circumstances or opportunities will be needed. (p. 410, H 359)

Interpretation classifies according to personal ends or projects, and hence appropriates. What new element is indicated by the invocation of the 'if . . . then . . .' as what is in this way brought closer to oneself?

But if deliberation is to be able to operate in the scheme of the 'if . . . then . . .', concern must already have 'surveyed' a context of involvements and have an understanding of it. That which is considered with an 'if' must already be understood *as something or other* . . . The schema 'something-as-something' has already been sketched out beforehand in the structure of one's pre-predicative understanding. (p. 411, H 359)

Understanding appropriates equipment. It is exercised in taking something as something, e.g., as a hammer. Interpretation at the level of deliberation adds to this use and appropriation of equipment, the use and appropriation of equipmental *understanding* of particular involvements. One can not only take something as a hammer, but can take a hammer as one of the tools required for a certain practical project. What is appropriated is then the conditional serviceabilities of things. One uses and produces conditional understandings of the significance of particular something_s as something_s.

The fourth point is that this non-Cartesian cognitive notion of interpretation as the personal practical appropriation of a conditional appropriateness or equipmental involvement brings us closer to the notion of linguistic assertion.

. . . in the significance itself, with which Dasein is always familiar, there lurks the ontological condition which makes it possible for Dasein, as something which understands and interprets, to disclose such things as 'significations'; upon these, in turn, is founded the Being of words and of language. (p. 121, H 87)

'Significations' are the conditional appropriatenesses into which the totality of significations can be "dissolved or broken up."¹⁴ What makes the transition to language possible is that one can come to respond differentially to (and hence disclose practically) not just things and performances but the significations which are their conditional dependencies. Deliberation develops towards asserting when what is surveyed from the point of view of a practical end is a field of 'if . . . then . . .'s, each of which may then itself be used or laid aside, just as with first-order equipment. Deliberation accomplishes a special kind of abstraction, requiring responsive recognition of the serviceabilities of equipment, rather than merely of the equipment itself.

The key to the precipitation of the present-at-hand out of the ready-to-hand lies in assertion:

The levelling of the primordial 'as' of circumspective interpretation [the "existential-hermeneutical 'as'"] to the 'as' with which presence-at-hand is given a definite character [the "apophantical 'as'"] is the specialty of assertion. Only so does it obtain the possibility of exhibiting something in such a way that we just look at it. (p. 201, H 158)

The articulation leading to the discovery of the present-at-hand begins in the 'if . . . then . . .' of interpretation of the ready-to-hand. What matters is "what is awaited"¹⁵ in the 'then . . .' part. In the basic case of interpreting something merely ready-to-hand, what is 'awaited' is the useability or producibility of some actual or envisaged object or performance—that is, the projection of a practical possibility. In presence-at-hand, the primary consequence of an 'if (something as something) . . .' is the appropriability of some *claim* or assertion. The difference between responding to something as present-at-hand and as merely ready-to-hand is that things which are present-at-hand are appropriately responded to as such only by producing a particular kind of performance, namely assertions. The 'then' is still something ready-to-hand when we thematize (i.e., respond to something as present-at-hand), but it is an assertion, a very special kind of equipment.

The question is then

By what existential-ontological modification does assertion arise from circumspective interpretation? (p. 200, H 157)

The answer in brief is that assertions are equipment appropriately used for *inference*. Assertion is the topic of Section 33, which offers three 'significations' of assertion. The central one of these is that "assertion means communication."

As something-communicated, that which has been put forward in the assertion is something that Others can 'share' with the person making the assertion . . . That which is put forward in the assertion is something which can be passed along in further retelling. (p. 197, H 155)

What is expressed becomes, as it were, something ready-to-hand within-the-world which can be taken up and spoken again. (p. 266, H 224)

Asserting thus has the significance of issuing a *re*-assertion license to other community members. The assertion is produced as something useable by others.

The other two features by which assertion is introduced are "pointing-out" some subject of assertion, and "giving it a definite character" by predicating something of it. What is shared, in other words, is the taking of something as something. Where before taking something as something

(pointing it out and characterizing it) was something one could only *do*, now it becomes something one can *say*. What was implicit in performance now becomes an explicitly producible and usable bit of equipment, which one can appropriate and make available for others to appropriate. The pointing-out of a subject is socially transitive across authorized re-assertions, and so guarantees communication in the sense of securing a common topic.

Even when Dasein speaks over again what someone else has said, it comes into a Being-towards the very entities which have been discussed. (p. 266 H 224)

Such social preservation of a common subject-matter is a necessary condition for the possibility of agreement and disagreement of assertion, as opposed to mere change of topic.

Predication, as explicitly communicable characterization, further extends the authorizing dimension of asserting. For predicates come in inferential families: *if* what is pointed out is appropriately characterizable by one speaker as red, *then* it is appropriately characterizable by another as colored. The practical conditional appropriatenesses of assertion which make up such families of predicates guarantee that an asserting licenses more than just re-assertion, licensing others to draw conclusions beyond what was originally claimed. As members of inferential families, the predicates used to characterize objects in assertions codify the conditional significances responded to as such already in deliberation. It is in virtue of the socially appropriate inferential consequences of an asserting that it conveys information, authorizing a specific set of performances (including other assertions) which would have been inappropriate without such authorization. The taking of something₁ as something₂ of pre-predicative understanding becomes explicitly usable and sharable once linguistic terms are available as equipment for publically pointing out something₁s, and predicates codifying as inferential significances the conditional serviceabilities discerned by deliberative interpretation are available as equipment expressing explicitly the involvements implicit in the something₂s things were taken as.

Understanding asserting as authorizing reassertion and inference specifies the appropriate *use* to which assertions, as bits of equipment, may appropriately be put. The cognitive responsive performance type of any asserting-type will be the set of assertions which it may appropriately be seen as licensing, namely those which follow from it according to the inferential practices of the community. But this is only half the story. What about the appropriate circumstances of *production* of this new sort of ready-to-hand equipment? Corresponding to the dimension of authority governing the use of assertions as equipment-for-inference is a dimension of responsibility governing their production. For in producing an assertion one does not simply

authorize others to use it inferentially, one also undertakes the responsibility to justify one's claim.

Assertion communicates entities in the 'how' of their uncoveredness If however, these entities are to be appropriated explicitly with respect to their uncoveredness, this amounts to saying that the assertion is to be *demonstrated* as one that uncovers. The assertion expressed is something ready-to-hand. (p. 267, H 224, emphasis added)

As ready-to-hand, assertings are subject to social appropriatenesses of production as well as use. These concern when one is entitled to commit oneself to the claim, or in Heidegger's terminology, 'appropriate' it, so that the inference and reassertion license is in force.

It is therefore essential that Dasein should explicitly appropriate what has already been uncovered, defend it against semblance and disguise, and assure itself of its uncoveredness again and again. (p. 265, H 222)

The responsibility to justify or defend one's claims undertaken as a matter of course in their appropriate production is essential to the special sort of communication which emerges with assertion. For even when Dasein speaks over again what someone else has said, though it comes into relation to the things pointed out and uncovered "it has been exempted from having to uncover them again, primordially, and it holds that it has thus been exempted."¹⁶ That is, he who relies on the authority of a previous speaker in reassertion is absolved of the responsibility to justify his claim which he would otherwise have undertaken by his performance of producing that assertion. His reliance upon the authority of the first assertor just is his acquisition of the right to defer justificatory responsibility for his own assertion to the original speaker. The response which socially constitutes taking someone to have appropriately made an assertion (fulfilled or be able to fulfill his justificatory responsibility) is to treat his assertion as genuinely authoritative as licensing others, that is, to recognize as appropriate any deferrals of justificatory responsibility for that claim and its consequences to the original assertor by those relying upon that authority. It is in this way that the dimensions of responsibility and authority, of appropriate production and use, are related so as to constitute assertions as equipment-for-communicating.¹⁷

This sketch of Heidegger's notion of assertion puts us in a position to understand the category of the present-at-hand. The crucial point to understand here is that 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 *recontextualization*. Asserting and the practices of giving and asking for reasons which make it possible are themselves a special sort of practical activity. Responding to something by making an as-

sersion about it is treating it *as* present-at-hand. Presence-at-hand is constituted by special appropriatenesses of response.

In characterizing the change-over from manipulating and using and so forth which are circumspective in a 'practical' way, to 'theoretical' exploration, it would be easy to suggest that merely looking at entities is something which emerges when concern *holds back* from any kind of manipulation . . . But this is by no means the way in which the 'theoretical' attitude of science is reached. On the contrary, the tarrying which is discontinued when one manipulates can take on the character of a more precise kind of circumspection . . . (p. 409, H 357–58)

Claims, equipment for asserting, represent "more precise" interpretive responses because in them the significations which are merely implicit in ordinary equipment become explicit or "thematized," accessible to claims and inferences and hence to demands for justification. Treating something as present-at-hand is not ignoring its social significance, but attending to a special sort of significance it can have, namely significance for the correctness of assertions about it. Corresponding to a new social mode of response, asserting, there is a new kind of Being, presence-at-hand, constitutively uncovered by that response.

Thematizing objectifies. It does not first 'posit' the entities, but frees them so that one can interrogate them and determine their character 'objectively'. Being which objectifies and which is alongside the present-at-hand within-the-world is characterized by a *distinctive kind of making-present*. (p. 414, H 363)

The present-at-hand may thus be defined as what is ready-to-hand as a with-which for the practice of assertion, that is, as what is responded to as such only by making a claim about it. We have seen what kind of a performance assertings are. What is the relation between what is responded to as ready-to-hand for assertion and what is pointed out as present-at-hand in the assertion? Heidegger explains this in terms of a transformation:

The entity which is held in our fore-having—for instance the hammer—is proximally ready-to-hand as equipment. If this entity becomes the 'object' of an assertion, then as soon as we begin this assertion, there is already a change-over in the fore-having. Something *ready-to-hand with which* we have to do or perform something turns into something '*about which*' the assertion that points it out is made. Our fore-sight is aimed at something present-at-hand in what is ready-to-hand . . . Within this discovery of presence-at-hand, which is at the same time a covering-up of readiness-to-hand, something present-at-hand which we encounter is given a definite character in its Being-present-at-hand-in-such-and-such-a-manner. Only now are we given access to *properties* or the like . . . This levelling of the primordial 'as' of circumspective interpretation to the 'as' with which presence-at-hand is given a definite character is the specialty of assertion. Only so does it obtain the possibility of exhibiting something in such a way that we just look at it. (p. 200, H 158)

The present-at-hand is first discovered *in* something already ready-to-hand which we are related to by being practically involved with it. It is then possible to adopt a special stance, shifting from the original practical context to that of assertion. The referentiality of the relation to the original piece of equipment is inherited by assertions about the object discovered in it. Dealing with the object in such a context, where practical significance is restricted to significance for inference, is attributing properties to something present-at-hand pointed out in the assertions about it.

One question remains. In what sense does responding to something by making an assertion about it count as treating it as having objective properties? What sort of independence of the social appropriatenesses of use and production constitutive of the ready-to-hand is attributed to the present-at-hand when we understand its defining recognitive responsive performance type to be asserting? Equipment as such is always equipment serviceable for the pursuit of some practical end. Significance flows from the practically orienting projects to the 'with-which's and 'towards-which's whose involvements are their roles in instrumental practices. The objectivity of the present-at-hand consists in the indifference of the appropriatenesses of assertion to the practical ends motivating assertors. Taking something as a hammer is taking it as appropriate for hammering. When the property of heaviness is discerned in the present-at-hand object which was ready-to-hand as a hammer, a claim is made whose appropriateness is not a matter of serviceability for or obstruction of any particular practical ends or projects. The justifiability and hence appropriateness of such a claim is not a matter of answering to some practical need.

The autonomy of justification and inference with respect to the pursuit of practical projects is the source of the autonomy of the properties of the present-at-hand with respect to the appropriatenesses of practice. It is this autonomy that is invoked when it is said that the truth of assertions answers to the things pointed out in assertion. Authority is a social matter, and in the game of asserting and giving and asking for reasons authority over the appropriateness of claims has been socially withdrawn from the sphere of usefulness for practical ends.

The claim that the objectivity of the present-at-hand consists in its insulation by assertion from *Dasein's* practical activity can be given a strong or a weak reading, and it is important to distinguish these. On the strong reading, the present-at-hand would be entirely irrelevant to practical concerns. On this account, the only appropriate response to something present-at-hand is an assertion, the only use which can be made of assertion is inference, and inference is restricted to *theoretical* inference, that is inference whose conclusion is another assertion. Assertions are seen as irrelevant to practice, as mere representations of an independent reality indifferent to

practical projects. This practical indifference is then inherited by the present-at-hand, since it can only be the subject of such assertions. This idea is present in Heidegger. It is not presence-at-hand however, but what he calls the doctrine of *pure* presence-at-hand (or, sometimes, 'Reality').

['Reality'] in its traditional signification stands for Being in the sense of pure presence-at-hand of Things . . . [But] *all* the modes of Being of entities within-the-world are founded ontologically upon the worldhood of the world and accordingly the phenomenon of Being-in-the-world. From this arises the insight that among the modes of Being of entities within-the-world, Reality has no priority, and that Reality is a kind of Being which cannot even characterize anything like the world or Dasein in a way which is ontologically appropriate. (p. 211, H 254)

Presence-at-hand corresponds to a weaker reading of the insulation assertional practices provide between the objects present-at-hand and practical projects. For although it is correct to see assertions as the only appropriate responses to the present-at-hand as such, and although the only use that can appropriately be made of assertions is inference, it is simply a mistake to think of all inference as theoretical inference. There is also practical inference, whose premises are assertions and whose conclusion is a practical performance which is not an assertion but, in virtue of its genesis as the result of such deliberation, an action. Assertions about the present-at-hand can be practically relevant. We can use information about the merely present-at-hand properties of things, such as the heaviness of the hammer. Without the possibility of language exists through non-assertional performance, theoretical or intralinguistic inference would lose much or all of its point.¹⁸

If it is then incorrect to see the present-at-hand as completely irrelevant to practical pursuits, as in pure presence-at-hand, what *is* meant by its objectivity? Just this. The *only* way in which the present-at-hand can affect Dasein's projects is by being the subject of an assertion which ultimately plays some role in practical inference. It is not that the present-at-hand is irrelevant to non-assertional practice, it is that its relevance is *indirect*. Assertions are the only interface between the present-at-hand and the rest of our practice. The mistake of the doctrine of pure presence is to see no interface at all.¹⁹ The genuine difference between the present-at-hand (which can be thought of in an extended sense as ready-to-hand for the practices of assertion and inference) and what is ready-to-hand is that one can only make practical use of assertions about the present-at-hand, never of what is present-at-hand itself. Its assertional proxies are serviceable equipment, but the present-at-hand itself is not. Only as represented in assertions can the present-at-hand partake of the equipmental totality of significance which is the world within which Dasein lives and moves and has its Being. Discovery of the present-at-hand is an authentic possibility of Dasein's Being, instantiated by all human com-

munities ever discovered. Pure presence-at-hand is a philosophers' misunderstanding of the significance of the category of presence-at-hand, and a Bad Idea.

The categorial nature of the present-at-hand, no less than that of the ready-to-hand (or for that matter the existential nature of Dasein itself as *Mitdasein*) is constituted by its being appropriately responded to in a certain way, in this case by assertions. In this fact resides Heidegger's ontological pragmatism, and the self-adjudicating nature of *Mitdasein-in-the-world*. Heidegger sees social behavior as generating both the category of equipment ready-to-hand within a world, and the category of objectively present-at-hand things responded to as independent of the practical concerns of any community. In virtue of the social genesis of criterial authority (the self-adjudication of the social, given pragmatism about authority), fundamental ontology (the study of the origin and nature of the fundamental categories of things) is the study of the nature of social Being—social practices and practitioners. Only because Dasein as socially constituted and constituting masters communal practices classifying things according to kinds which are whatever they are taken to be

can Dasein also understand and conceptualize such characteristics of Being as independence, the 'in-itself', and Reality in general. Only because of this are 'independent' entities, as encountered within-the-world, accessible to circumspection. (p. 251, H 207)

* * *

We have been concerned with three conceptual innovations presented in *Being and Time*. One of these is Heidegger's hierarchy of non-Cartesian cognitive notions. At its base is understanding—the disclosure of a totality of social significance and the discovery within it of individual pieces of equipment by mastery of communal responsive practices. At the next level is deliberative interpretation by appropriation of the conditional significances implicit in the understanding of the ready-to-hand. Finally there is the discursive appropriation of the present-at-hand through assertion of sentences which in virtue of their social inference potentials explicitly thematize the significations one becomes aware of in interpretation. Second, we have seen how the category of presence-at-hand arises within and yet is distinct from the more fundamental category of readiness-to-hand. Third, in terms of the first two points it is clear that the ready-to-hand is first among equals among the categories because of the self-adjudicating nature of the social (*Mitdasein* in a world which is a totality of practical significance). Understanding in this way the basic ontological structure of Heidegger's account in Division One is the necessary preparation for understanding both his account of the in-

dividuation of Dasein and the institution of temporality by the personal appropriation of projects in Division Two, and his profound reading of that tradition of philosophy which has left us in such a mistaken position that "in general our understanding of Being is such that every entity is understood in the first instance as present-at-hand."²⁰

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NOTES

1. The general orientation of this essay owes much to John Haugeland, particularly to his account of transcendental constitution as and by social institution, in "Heidegger on Being a Person", *Noûs*, March 1982. I would also like to thank my fellow staff members and the seminar participants at the Council for Philosophic Studies 1980 Summer Institute, "Phenomenology and Existentialism: Continental and Analytic Perspectives on Intentionality," for their responses to an earlier version of the ideas presented here.

2. See Rorty's "Incorrigibility as the Mark of the Mental," *Journal of Philosophy* vol. 67, no. 12 (June 25, 1970).

3. Of course Descartes held other views about the substances to which these categories applied as well. He filled in the abstract ontological categorization of epistemic kinds with specifications, e.g., of the objective realm as having its essence exhausted by geometric extension, and of the epistemic subject whose incorrigible "takings" define the mental as itself identical with the sum of mental things it is aware of. The current concern is with the ontological framework rather than with Descartes' theories about the entities it categorized.

4. In "Freedom and Constraint by Norms" (*APQ*, April, 1977) I investigate the sort of norm inherent in the appropriatenesses instituted by social practices. I took it to be significant that the social/objective distinction can be seen as the origin of the value/fact distinction, and that both naturalists, who want to reduce one category to the other, and non-naturalists, who do not, presumed that it was an *objective* distinction between facts and values which was at issue. I explore the consequences of treating the social/objective, and hence the value/fact, distinction as itself social rather than objective, that is, as a matter of how the community responds to various things, not how they are independently and in themselves.

5. As Rorty has argued (*Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979) on the plausibility of such a claim rest Sellars's and Quine's twin attacks on the two varieties of unjustified justifiers ("privileged representations") which foundationalists, particularly positivistic ones, had relied on as the foundations of our inferential structures. Thus Quine dismantled the picture of *language* as a source of authority immune to social revision ("intrinsic credibility," "self evidence," etc.) for some sentences thought to be *ture-in-virtue-of-meaning*, and Sellars performed the same service for the picture of the mind as a source of supposedly socially impervious privilege for "reports" of thoughts and sensations.

6. p. 190, H 150.

7. Cf. the "*sich verweisenden Verstehen*" of p. 119.
8. See, e.g., p. 100, H 70.
9. Such a model must be used with caution, however. Heidegger is concerned that the structures so taken as worlds involve *concrete* relations of use, production, and response, rather than simply structurally analogous relations. He says

The context of assignments or references, which, as significance, is constitutive for worldhood, can be taken formally in the sense of a system of Relations. But one must note that in such formalizations the phenomena get levelled off so much that their real phenomenal content may be lost . . . the phenomenal content of these "relations" and "relata"—the "in-order-to", the "for-the-sake-of," and the "with-which" of an involvement—is such that they resist any sort of mathematical functionalization. (pp. 1 21–122 H 88)

10. This view represents a normative version of the 'conformism' discussed by Haugeland (op. cit.), without what I take to be the ontologically irrelevant account of its ontic genesis which he offers.
11. P. 203, H 160.
12. P. 190, H 150.
13. P. 275, H 231.
14. P. 204, H 161.
15. P. 411, H 360.
16. P. 266, H 224, following the passage on speaking-over quoted above.
17. I have presented the details of an account of asserting along these lines in "Asserting," forthcoming in *Noûs*.
18. Here 'theoretical' inference refers to language-language moves, by contrast to 'practical' inference involving language-exit moves (in Sellars's sense). In a different sense 'theoretical' claims are those which can *only* be arrived at inferentially, and not as non-inferential reports. Discussion of the relevance to the understanding of presence-at-hand of claims which are theoretical this sense is beyond the scope of this essay.
19. The semantics of the points of view generated by such 'interfaces'—where a set of claims can make a difference to practical deliberations only insofar as it makes a difference to some other set of claims which then affects the deliberations—is discussed in my "Points of View and Practical Reasoning," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, June 1982.
20. P. 268, H 225.