

Heidegger's Metaphysics of Material Beings

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I. Introduction

Heidegger famously draws a distinction between the *present-at-hand* and the *ready-to-hand*, also sometimes known as the distinction between *occurents* and *equipment*. Some entities are ready-to-hand: they are tools, objects of use, cultural products, things of value and significance. Examples include hammers, doorknobs, books, can-openers, and pinball machines. Some entities are present-at-hand: among them are the objects of scientific inquiry, which have properties that can be characterized by mathematical physics.

I will argue that Heidegger's distinction between the ready-to-hand and the present-at-hand is a *metaphysical* distinction: nothing that is ready-to-hand is numerically identical with anything that is present-at-hand.

In order to avoid begging any questions at the start, I'll introduce some neutral technical terminology. Call those entities other than persons that persons can encounter within the world *material beings*. Some material beings are tables, H²O molecules, chairs, electrons, and gumball machines. Say that a material being is a *work* just in case (i) it comes into existence only in virtue of the activities of some person or persons, (ii) it could not have existed had that specific activity in virtue of which it came into being not been performed, (iii) it essentially bears some value-property or other.¹ Works, in short, are modally dependent on the behavior of persons. Let us say that a material being is an *inert* just in case it could exist and have the same intrinsic features even if there had never been any persons, and that it could exist even if it failed to exemplify any value-features. Inerts are modally independent of the existence or activities of human persons.

The distinction between works and inerts is a *metaphysical* distinction. It is an open question whether there are any works or inerts. But it is certain that nothing is (or could be) both a work and an inert.²

¹ I intend to be very liberal about what counts as a value-property so that *beauty*, *serviceability*, *affordability*, *usability*, and so forth are value-properties. Now when I say that in order to be a work, an entity must essentially bear some value property or other, I do not mean that, for every x , x is a work only if there is some value-property P such that x essentially has P . Instead, I mean this: for every x , x is a work only if x is essentially such that there is some value-property that x has.

² It is also an open question whether every material being is either an inert or a work. Probably there are other possibilities. For example, Heidegger seems to treat living organisms as having a distinct mode of being, *life*, but warns us that the mode of being of Dasein is not to be understood as life plus something else [BT: 75]. Works of art are also not comfortably treated as simply another case of the ready-to-hand as

Consider a can-opener. We know that it is a can-opener only in virtue of human practices. This is obvious and uncontroversial. The claim that a can-opener is a work is neither obvious nor uncontroversial. A Cartesian who holds that the essential feature of the can-opener is that it is extended will deny that the can-opener is a work in this sense. Instead, she will hold that, although as it stands this mass of metal and plastic is a can-opener, this very same mass of matter used to exist before it became a can-opener, could have existed without ever having been a can-opener or even without bearing any interesting relationship to human activities, and most likely will exist without being a can-opener. On this view, can-openers are not *essentially* can-openers. They are not works. On this view, they are, to use the technical terminology introduced moments ago, inerts.

I claim that, if we restrict our focus to only material objects, the distinction between present-at-hand entities and ready-to-hand entities just is the distinction between what I am calling inerts and works.³ I'll call this interpretation of Heidegger's metaphysics of material beings *the two domains view*. On the two domains view, a ready-to-hand entity is never numerically identical with a present-at-hand entity.

If the two domains view is correct, we face the following interesting questions. First, does Heidegger believe that there are works? I answer "yes." Second, does Heidegger believe that there are inerts? Again, I answer "yes." Third, what philosophically significant relationships does Heidegger believe obtain between the inerts and the works? I claim that Heidegger holds that there is a kind of metaphysical dependence of works on inerts – necessarily, there are works only if there are inerts – but there is a kind of epistemic dependence of inerts on works – we can know that inerts exist and know that inerts have certain features only because we are already able to manipulate and cope with works.

Let us turn to an opposing interpretation of the distinction between present-at-hand and ready-to-hand, which I'll call *the one domain view*. John Richardson provides a particularly clear statement of the one-domain view:

Now roughly, present-at-hand objects are those determinate and isolable entities of the sort treated by science. Or as I shall usually put it, an entity is treated *as* present-at-hand when it is viewed by us as determinate and isolable in this way. For it is important to bear in mind about Heidegger's distinction that what we would ordinarily consider the *same* entity may nevertheless fall into both classes; that is, it may be either ready-to-hand or present-at-hand, depending upon the attitude in which it is encountered. . . . To show that my usage is strictly correct, a more complex story would have to be told, explaining in what sense 'the same entity' can have both modes of Being, and so fall under both of these types. Without this story, my way of presenting these points must remain a simplifying short-hand, adopted for convenience. [Richardson 1986, p. 48]

well, although the distinction between works of art and other cultural artifacts is not explored in depth until in later works of Heidegger.

³ As an anonymous referee noted, other kinds of entities, such as psychological states, meanings, and 'ideal validities' are sometimes called present-at-hand by Heidegger, but none of these entities is comfortably identified with a material object. For this reason, I set them aside and focus solely on those that are. I thank this referee for pressing me on this point.

In a similar vein, Edgar Boedeker writes:

Presence-to-hand is neither a super-property nor a formal structure common to everything existent. Instead, it is one of the several ways in which we can *encounter* entities. It is to be contrasted, for example, with “readiness-at-hand” (*Zuhandenheit*), in which we encounter entities in terms of their usefulness (or uselessness) to our practical projects. Crucially, because presence-to-hand and readiness-to-hand are just different *ways of encountering* what Heidegger calls “intra-worldly entities” – a term coextensive with “physical objects” – they are *not* different kinds of *entities*. For the same entity, a hammer, for example – could in principle be encountered in different ways of being: once as a present-to-hand object weighing two kilograms, and another time as a ready-to-hand item of equipment useful for hammering. [Boedeker 2005, p.159]

And finally, Abraham Mansbach:

Heidegger divides the world into things and human beings. . . . Heidegger avoids using the word “object” to describe entities in the world, which, in its Cartesian sense, conceives of things as lying inert and mute. For Heidegger, entities within the world are tools, equipment that is manipulable and useful for some purpose. Things thus encountered are entities “ready-to-hand”. To regard things as independent of their use and function is to see them as “present-at-hand”, but this is only possible when Dasein’s practical dealings with such tools run up against an obstacle or a difficulty. Under such conditions, things cease to be ready-to-hand and appear as present-at-hand. [Mansbach 2002, pp. 44-46]⁴

I take it that these three authors hold pretty much the same position on the distinction.⁵ On the *one domain view*, the distinction between present-at-hand entities and ready-to-hand entities does not coincide with the distinction between inert entities and works, since, on the one domain view, one and the same entity can be present-at-hand in one encounter or experience but ready-to-hand in another. There is one domain of material beings, which can be encountered in different ways or under different guises. The hammer that appears *as* a tool when used by a craftsman is numerically identical with the chunk of wood and metal that appears *as* a chunk of wood and metal when viewed by the chemist.

⁴ William Blattner has pointed out to me that both Boedeker and Mansbach mistakenly assimilate the notion of an intra-worldly entity to the notion of a physical object. Individual Daseins are in the world, and hence intra-worldly, but they are not straightforwardly physical objects in the way that present-at-hand and ready-to-hand things are, and they certainly are not tools.

⁵ Similar remarks can be found in Friedman (2000) p. 48 & 55, Gelven (1970) pp. 55-57, Guignon (1983) p. 155, Harries (1978) pp. 70-71, Moran (2000b) pp. 233-234, Mulhall (1996) pp. 53-59, Olfason (1987) pp. 38-43, Steiner (1980) pp. 89-90, and Thiele (1995) pp. 48-50. I think it is safe to say that there is widespread support for the one domain view.

The one domain view is silent on the conditions under which, e.g., a hammer persists through time and possible change. For example, the one domain view is consistent with the claim that every material object is an inert, although this doesn't seem to be a terribly good reading of Heidegger. A more plausible version of a one domain view has Heidegger abandoning what I've called inerts. This seems to be the view of Guignon (1983), who writes on page 99, "Since what an entity is is determined by its place in the practices of the Anyone, even the "brute objects" discovered by Husserl's "theoretical man" are contextualized in a framework of interests and goals of the public world and can therefore have no absolute existence independent of those interests." This remark is echoed on page 115, where Guignon writes, "Seen from the model of Being-in-the-world, what it is to be an entity is bound up with Dasein's goals and interest in handling equipment in its everyday situation." If Guignon has correctly interpreted Heidegger, there is no room for inerts in Heidegger's philosophy.⁶

The one domain view seems initially plausible. And its metaphysics was one Heidegger himself considered. In the beginning sections of the *History of the Concept of Time*, in which Heidegger provides a careful and sympathetic overview of the phenomenological doctrines of Husserl, Heidegger provides a phenomenological description of an ordinary physical object that is certainly in line with the position of the one domain view:

What is perceived in this 'natural' perception we shall designate simply as a thing of the environing world, or simply the *environmental thing*. I can dwell upon this perception and further describe what I find in it, the chair itself and can say: it is so heavy, so colored, so high, and so wide; it can be pushed from one place to another; if I lift it and let it go, it falls; it can be chopped into pieces with a hatchet; if ignited, it burns. Here again we have plain statements in which I speak of the perceived itself and not of representations or sensations of the chair. But now it is a matter of other determinations of the chair than those we begin with. What we have just said of the perceived can be said of any piece of wood whatsoever. What we have elicited in the chair does not define it as a chair. Something is indeed asserted about the chair, not qua chair-thing, but rather as a thing of nature, as *natural thing*. The fact that what is perceived is a chair is now of no account. *The perceived is an environmental thing, but it is also a natural thing*. For this distinction, we have in our language very fine distinctions in the way in which language itself forms its meanings and expressions. We say, "I am giving roses." I can also say, "I am giving flowers," but not "I am giving plants." Botany, on the other hand, does not analyze flowers, but rather plants. The distinction between plant and flower, both of which can be said of the same rose, is the distinction between natural and environmental thing. The rose as flower is and environmental thing, the rose as plant is a natural thing. The perceived in itself is both. When we consider that these two thing-structures—environmental thing and natural thing—apply to one and the same chair, one

⁶ The remarks made by Olafson (1987) pp. 48-51 strike me as congenial to Guignon's position. See also Dreyfus & Haugeland (1978) pp. 225-228 & 235, which appears to contain a statement of a one domain view coupled with the denial of inerts.

obvious difficulty arises: how are we to understand the relationship of these two structures of a thing? ... I can still go further into what is found in perceiving, this natural thing here. By applying an appropriate form of research to it, I can show that, as natural thing, something like materiality and extension belong to it.... Thus once again I have elicited something found in this thing itself, but now it is no longer in the perceived (chair) as environmental thing or natural thing. Now I am concerned with *thingness* as such. These [extension, mobility] are structures which constitute the thingness of the thing, structural moments of the natural thing itself, contents which can be read out from the given itself. [HCT: 38-39]

This is the sort of passage that would provide substantial evidence for the one domain view if it (or something much like it) were located in *Being and Time*, or at the very least in the later sections of the *History of the Concept of Time* in which it is more clear that Heidegger is speaking with his own voice.⁷

My primary objective is to show that the metaphysics of material objects in *Being and Time* is best interpreted in accordance with the two domains view. Although the one domain view is probably the dominant view among scholars of Heidegger, the two domain view is not entirely without its advocates. However, with the notable exception of Cerbone (1999), who defends a view similar to the one I prefer, I have been unable to discover a published argument for the two domains view.⁸ And, as shown in what

⁷ In the passage just quoted, Heidegger is providing a very faithful account of a Husserlian phenomenological description of an ordinary object. Moran (2000a, p. 62) contains an interesting discussion of this sort of description, although Moran does not discuss this particular passage here. Moran (2000b, pp. 232-233) also contains a discussion of this passage that presupposes that it is written in Heidegger's own voice.

⁸ For example, Haugeland (1982) provides a clear and careful exposition of the basic kinds of entities that the Heidegger of *Being and Time* recognizes. Haugeland (2000) also contains a clear and nice statement of what I am calling the two domains view. However, Haugeland neither argues for the two domains view or *against* the one domain view; instead he presents interesting, and sustained *application* of the metaphysics presupposed by the two domains view.

Carman (2003) appears sympathetic with the metaphysics of the two domains view, and indicates this in passages like the following, taken from page 4, "No conclusion about the hermeneutic conditions of human understanding directly implies any metaphysical thesis concerning the ontological status of the entities we interpret – for example, whether or in what ways they depend on us and our practices or attitudes. Some do, some do not. It is plausible, for example, to insist that things defined by their usefulness are what they are only within some domain of human practices, whereas mere natural objects and natural kinds exist independently of us." See also Carman (2003), pages 13 and 180-181. But nowhere in Carman (2003) is there a sustained defense of the two domains view.

William Blattner (1999) appears to be undecided between the one domain view and the two domains view. On page 219, he writes, "... one simply could not have this spoon in one's hand unless one has this hunk of wood in one's hand as well. (Does this entail that the spoon is really just a hunk of wood that Dasein interprets as having a certain function? In fact, Heidegger claims exactly the opposite....) But once the spoon has degenerated into ex-spoon and further into mere hunk of wood, *there is no longer a spoon there, just something that is occurrent.*"

follows, I think the case is for the two domains view is far stronger than is suggested by Cerbone.

That said it is obvious that there is much controversy about the details of Heidegger's project in *Being and Time*. Some of the arguments I offer for the two domains view depend on understanding certain components of Heidegger's project in specific ways. Interpretations of even small aspects of a historical figure's thought almost invariably turn on interpretations of other aspects of that thinker's thought, and so I anticipate resistance at every possible juncture, even though each position I occupy is a reasonable place to rest. So I cannot promise a "knock-down" argument in favor of the two domains view. What I do promise is an interpretation of Heidegger's metaphysics of material beings that is clearly stated, philosophically and textually motivated, and hangs together as a coherent whole.

I will now present three arguments for the two domain view.

II. The Argument from Leibniz's Law

Leibniz's Law states that x is numerically identical with y if and only if x and y have the same properties. Heidegger ascribes incompatible properties to the ready-to-hand and the present-at-hand. So either Heidegger's view is inconsistent, or the properties are ascribed to distinct entities. (Or Leibniz's Law is false or for some reason inapplicable; I set these purported options aside.)

In *Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, after a lengthy discussion in which Heidegger is explicit that natural entities in the broad sense alluded to above could exist independently of any Dasein, or being in a world (in the ontological sense), Heidegger writes:

Intrawordliness belongs to the being of the extant, of nature, *not* as a determination of its being, but as a *possible* determination, and one that is necessary for the possibility of the uncoverability of nature. To exist means to be in a world. Being-in-the-world is an essential structure of the Dasein's being;

This description of what occurs is consistent with the metaphysics of both the one domain view and the two domains view. We simply need more information: was there, prior to the breakdown, a mere hunk of wood there as well as the spoon, which was not numerically identical with the spoon? (This is what the friend of the two domains view will say.) Is the thing that is not a spoon after the breakdown numerically identical with the thing that was a spoon? On page 227, Blattner writes, "We saw that Dasein shifts from understanding things as available to understanding them as occurrents during the "change-over."" Are the things that we understood as available *the same things* as those that we now understand as occurrent? Blattner does not answer these questions.

This is *not* because Blattner does not see that there is a real issue here. Far from it! On page 239, footnote #14, Blattner writes about a very similar case, "The issue is actually a bit more complicated than this, since everything hangs on whether one thinks that the hammer is the very same entity as (numerically identical with) the hunk of metal and wood out of which it is made. If the two items are numerically identical, then the hammer does survive the demise of Dasein, though not *as* a hammer." (In this context, it is worth noting that in an earlier piece, Blattner seems even more sympathetic with a two domains view. See Blattner 1992, pp. 126, footnote #20. But he does not explain what makes him sympathetic.)

intrawordliness, being within the world... does not belong to nature's being. [BP 168-169]

Nature can also be when no Dasein exists. [BP: 170]

Natural entities are metaphysically independent of human practices. Heidegger continues:

There are beings, however, to whose being intraworldliness belongs in a certain way. Such beings are all those we call *historical* entities... all the things that the human being... creates, shapes, and cultivates: all his culture and his works. Beings of this kind are *only*, or, more exactly, arise only and come into being only *as* intraworldly. Culture *is* not in the way that nature is. On the other hand, we must say that once works of culture, even the most primitive tool, have come into the world, they are still capable of being when no historical Dasein any longer exists. There is a remarkable relationship here, which we can only briefly indicate, in that every historical being, in the sense of world history—works of culture—stands with regard to its coming-to-be and under quite different ontological conditions than with regard to its decay and possible perishing. [BP: 169]

Cultural works, which are ready-to-hand entities, differ with respect to their kind of being from extant, i.e., present-at-hand, entities. This is why Heidegger says that, "Culture *is* not in the way that nature is." Because of this difference with respect to their kind of being, there is a corresponding difference with respect to their essential features. Natural entities have intraworldliness only contingently, only because there are Daseins whose activities are partially constitutive of the world in Heidegger's primary sense. Natural entities could just as well exist without being in a world. Cultural entities are not like this. They are essentially in a world.

W.V.O. Quine (1969) famously said "no entity without identity." This slogan is really an injunction: Quine thought that you shouldn't posit a kind of entity without being clear about when you have one or more of that sort of entity. In short, posit a kind of entity only when you are clear about the "conditions of individuation" for that kind of entity. Quine, presumably, would have rejoiced at the passage above in which Heidegger talks about the persistence conditions of works of culture, and as well as this latter passage also from *Basic Problems of Phenomenology*:

Equipment is encountered always within an equipmental contexture. Each single piece of equipment carries this contexture along with it, and it is *this* equipment only with regard to that contexture. The specific *thisness* of a piece of equipment, its *individuation*, if we take the word in a completely formal sense, is not determined by space and time in the sense that it appears in a determinate space-and-time-position. Instead, what determines a piece of equipment as an individual is in each instance its equipmental character and equipmental contexture. [BP: 292]

This passage is not simply expressing the conditions under which something is a piece of equipment. This passage expresses Heidegger's views on when a piece of equipment is. Traditionally, present-at-hand entities were thought to be individuated by their spatiotemporal location; if two present-to-hand entities are located at the same spacetime region, then they aren't really two: "they" are identical.⁹ Ready-to-hand entities are not individuated in this way: they are individuated by their node in a network of equipmental relations: the hammer is for hammering nails, the nails are for joining the boards of the shed, the shed is for storing the hammer and the nails, etc. The identity conditions of present-at-hand and ready-to-hand things are different.¹⁰ By Leibniz's Law, nothing ready-to-hand is identical with anything present-at-hand.

Present-at-hand and ready-to-hand entities differ in other respects besides their identity conditions. They also differ with respect to the ways in which they are temporal. As Daniel Dahlstrom (2001, pp. 380-381) astutely observes, Heidegger distinguishes three different kinds of time-series: *dimensional time*, *world time*, and *timeliness*, and this distinction corresponds to "Heidegger's ontological division into being-on-hand, being-handy, and being-here."¹¹ In other words, each of the three different kinds of Being Heidegger focuses on in *Being and Time* corresponds to a distinct kind of time. Neither a present-at-hand object nor a ready-to-hand object enjoys Dasein's specific kind of temporality. More to the point here, they do not enjoy each other's specific form of temporality. This is a second metaphysical difference between the present-at-hand and the ready-to-hand, and so again, by Leibniz's Law, they cannot be identified.¹²

A third difference between the ready-to-hand and the present-at-hand is that the ready-to-hand are essentially bearers of value, whereas no present-at-hand object is. A present-at-hand object is simply *there*, situated in spacetime, bearing the sorts of properties that make it a suitable object of the mathematical-physical sciences. If a present-at-hand object has value, it has value merely contingently, perhaps by being the object of some "pro-attitude" or "con-attitude", such as desire, liking, aversion, etc. But we cannot understand the value had by ready-to-hand things in this way, as Heidegger makes clear:

⁹ Whether this traditional claim is correct, e.g., whether it is possible for two fundamental physical particles to spatiotemporally coincide, is something I set aside as not germane to the interpretation of this passage.

¹⁰ See also BT: 105. Cerbone (1999, p. 326, footnote #10) makes a similar argument.

¹¹ See BT: 135. On the different sorts of time associated with these different entities, see McKinerney (1991), p. 128. Blattner (1999) p. 91 also notices this, and takes these three different time-series to form three numerically different kinds of time. A large portion of Blattner's book consists in careful attempts to articulate the differences and similarities of these three time-series.

¹² Similarly, ready-to-hand and present-at-hand objects enjoy different kinds of spatiality:

BT 141: The Objective distances of Things present-at-hand do not coincide with the remoteness and closeness of what is ready-to-hand within-the-world.

See also Dreyfus 1991: 127-130

Now the entities within the world are Things—Things of Nature, and Things ‘invested with value’. [BT: 91] If one is oriented primarily by Thinghood, these [value] qualities must be taken as non-quantifiable value-predicates by which what is in the first instance just a material Thing, gets stamped as something good. Adding on value-predicates cannot tell us anything about goods, *but would merely presuppose again that goods have pure presence-at-hand as their kind of Being*. [BT: 132]

But ultimately, we can go one step further back and in the end also concede that this kind of apprehension still only shows the wax as a thing of nature.... What it still lacks in order to characterize it as worldly in the full sense are certain predicates of value: good, bad, plain, beautiful, suitable, unsuitable, and the like, which tend to adhere to the material thing of nature. These are the predicates which all utensils, all objects of use, also intrinsically have. If we go so far as to grant some of the value-predicates of the sensory thing also to the sense qualities, then the *practical* thing, that is the thing as it is first found in the world, would be completely defined by us. It is a thing of nature with the fundamental stratum of materiality, but at the same time laden with predicates of value. It is in this way that one first tries even today in phenomenology to define the environmental thing in its being. Yet this definition is in its approach not essentially different from that of Descartes. Here too, a thing is approached as an object of observation and perception, and perception is then, as it is typically put, complemented by the value judgment. As we shall see, the authentic being of thing is passed over here just as it is in Descartes’s extreme formulation of *res corporea* as *res extensa*. [HCT: 182-183]

A hammer can be a *good* hammer or a *bad* one, and moreover everything that is hammer is such as to be correctly evaluable as a good or a bad hammer. A car can be an *effective* means of transportation or an *ineffective* gas guzzler, and everything that is a car is such as to be a satisfactory vehicle or a defective vehicle. These ready-to-hand things *cannot* be identified as present-at-hands things that ‘have been invested with value’, i.e., have value-properties merely contingently in virtue of certain ‘value judgments’ we make or ‘evaluative attitudes’ we embrace.

Heidegger ascribes incompatible modal, temporal, and axiological properties to the present-at-hand and the ready-to-hand. Since the present-at-hand and the ready-to-hand have incompatible properties, no ready-to-hand object is identical with a present-at-hand object.

III. An Argument from Phenomenology

The second argument for the two worlds view is *phenomenological*. Heidegger holds that certain objects are given to us, and moreover are given in a certain way. If the one domain view is correct, the distinction between the ready-to-hand and the present-at-hand amounts to a distinction between how one and the same set of things are given. The ready-to-hand way of giving objects enjoys a kind of priority in that typically and for the most part things are given in that way. But on the one domain view, this fact isn’t

interesting from a *metaphysical* perspective (as opposed to an epistemological or “phenomenological” perspective), since we are still dealing with one and the same set of entities.

To see this, note that someone who holds the *metaphysical* views of a Cartesian philosopher or even of a Berkeleyian idealist could agree that certain objects are given to us, and moreover are given to us *as* tools. According to the Berkeleyian idealist, to be is to be either a thinker or an idea had by a thinker. Berkeley believes that certain things are given – moreover, he is happy to say that certain things are given *as* ordinary objects, such as bread and hunks of cheese. After all, Berkeley believes that you see loaves of bread (and believes that you see loaves of bread *as* loaves of bread instead of *as* lumps of cell-tissue or *as* swarms of particles or *as* inert matter), and this fact even forms the basis of one of his arguments for his idealism: the way to avoid Cartesian skepticism is by identifying “material” objects with ideas that are directly given in perception.¹³

The idealist could in principle grant Heidegger that we are essentially in a world filled with other people, hammers, cars, etc. This fact doesn’t necessarily show that a robust version of idealism is false. It may be the case that I exist only if tools exist. But this doesn’t tell us what these tools are made of. Only a hasty philosopher would conclude that, since I exist only if there are tools, it follows that tools are made out of continuous masses of matter, strings, or quarks, or whatnot. From the fact that I exist only if there are Fs, nothing immediately follows about what the Fs are composed of or the necessary conditions under which Fs exist.

From the claim that I exist only if there are other entities numerically distinct from me, whether these are minds or tools, nothing immediately follows about whether those things distinct from me are metaphysically independent of me. An idealist could insist that I exist only if tools exist while simultaneously identifying tools with certain ideas had by myself or other thinkers, perhaps even including God.

However, the Berkeleyian position discussed above is repugnant to Heidegger, which he equates with a “vicious subjectivizing of the totality of entities.” [BT: 34] Heidegger does believe in material objects that are metaphysically independent of any thought that Dasein entertains. In fact, a realism about the entities studied by natural science was defended in one of his earliest publications.¹⁴ But nothing could justify Heidegger in claiming that the Berkeleyian ontology is *false* if (1) the method of ontology is *phenomenology*, the study of the given as it is given and (2) when it comes to material objects, the whole content of what is given to us consists merely in entities that typically appear to us as tools.¹⁵

Fortunately, *more* is given. I claim that Heidegger follows Husserl in believing that essential features are given. So if in some situations, some entities are given to us *along with their essential features* in such a way as to make it clear that those entities are *metaphysically independent* of us, Heidegger has *phenomenological* grounds for rejecting Berkeleyian idealism (as well as some versions of Cartesian skepticism).

¹³ See especially the third dialogue of Berkeley (1988).

¹⁴ For a discussion, see Caputo (1982) pp. 24-27.

¹⁵ Hoffman (2000) worries about this point.

Heidegger claims that there are such situations. One of the most discussed passages concerns what happens when a tool is radically damaged.¹⁶ I am hammering away in my workshop, “lost in my work”. Suddenly, the metal head of the hammer breaks off, and I am left grasping a broken piece of wood. I now focus on the chunk of wood, and no longer think of myself as holding a piece of a tool. Instead, I stare at a mere wooden thing that is in front of me. This is one way to become aware of things-present-at-hand. The metaphysical independence of this wooden thing from me and my will, desires, beliefs, is made *apparent* in this situation. The essential features of this wooden thing are given in this experience, and the metaphysical independence of this wood thing is one of the most salient essential features so given.

But this is not how the entities encountered in our ordinary dealings appear. Ordinary objects appear as things to be manipulated, objects of use, things that are in-order-to, etc. The entities that appear in ordinary settings not only to fail to manifest themselves as independent of our practices, they appear as being dependent on them. A hammer is for hammering, and appears as an entity that is for hammering. The hammer does not appear as independent of our practices; it appears as something whose very being is defined by those practices, and it appears as such in practical comportment.

When Heidegger claims that present-at-hand and ready-to-hand entities have distinct modal properties, this claim is *made on the basis of how things show up to us*. The phenomenologist takes these appearances at face value: some objects are given as independent of our practices, whereas other objects are given as dependent on our practices. Those entities that show themselves as they are in themselves as *independent* of our practices are present-at-hand entities, whereas ready-to-hand entities show themselves as practice-dependent. This latter thesis is stated tersely in *Basic Problems of Phenomenology*:

To the being of this being [an equipmental being] there belongs its inherent content, the specific whatness, and a way of being. The *whatness* of the beings confronting us every day is defined by their equipmental character. [BP: 304]

The *whatness* of a being consists in the essential features of that being. Heidegger tells us that we are *confronted* every day with these essential features; these essential features are *given* in comportment. Moreover, these essential features that make up what it is to be a being of this sort are fixed by the kind of equipment that they are. These points are elaborated on in *Being and Time*:

We shall call those entities which we encounter in concern “*equipment*”. In our dealings, we come across equipment for writing, sewing, working, transportation, measurement. The kind of Being which equipment possesses must be exhibited. Equipment is essentially ‘something in-order-to.’ [BT 97]

.... The less we just stare at the hammer-Thing, and the more we seize hold of it and use it, the more primordial does our relationship to it become, and the more unveiledly is it encountered as that which it is—as equipment. The kind of

¹⁶ See BT: 405-406.

Being which equipment possesses—in which it manifests itself in its own right—we call “*readiness-to-hand*”. . . . No matter how sharply we just *look* at this ‘outward appearance’ of Things in whatever form this takes, we cannot discover anything ready-to-hand. If we look at Things just ‘theoretically’, we can get along without understanding readiness-to-hand. [BT 98]

The kind of Being which belongs to these entities is readiness-to-hand. But this characteristic is not to be understood merely as a way of taking them, as if we were talking such ‘aspects’ into the ‘entities’ which we proximally encounter, or as if some world-stuff which proximally present-at-hand in itself were ‘given subjective colouring’ in this way. . . . *Readiness-to-hand is the way in which entities as they are ‘in themselves’ are defined ontologico-categorically.* [BT 101]

The structure of the Being of what is ready-to-hand as equipment is determined by references or assignments. In a particular and obvious manner, the ‘Things’ which are closest to us are ‘in themselves’; and they are encountered as ‘in themselves’ in the concern that makes use of them without noticing them explicitly...[BT: 105]

The present-at-hand *show* themselves as independent, whereas the ready-to-hand *show* themselves as dependent. So nothing ready-to-hand can be identical with anything that is ready-to-hand.

Hubert Dreyfus has discussed the phenomena of “total breakdown of equipment” and theoretical circumspection in some detail, so it will be worth contrasting his view on these phenomena with mine. I’ll focus on Dreyfus’s (2001) article. My remarks will be critical, so let me note that I think Dreyfus is right that Heidegger is a realist about the entities studied by natural scientists.¹⁷

First, in this article, Dreyfus simply identifies the being of entities with the intelligibility of entities. I’ve elsewhere argued why I think this is a mistake, and won’t revisit the issue here.¹⁸ Dreyfus’s (mis-)identification affects the way in which he interprets the phenomena under investigation:

The first two phenomena Heidegger calls to our attention are two different ways of being. He points out that normally we deal with things as equipment. Equipment gets its intelligibility from its relation to other equipment, human roles, and social goals. Heidegger calls the equipmental way of being *availability* (*Zuhandenheit*). But Heidegger also points to another equally important phenomenon; we sometimes experience entities as independent of our

¹⁷ Heidegger writes at BT 251: Along with Dasein as Being-in-the-world, entities within-the-world have in each case already been disclosed. This existential-ontological assertion seems to accord with the thesis of *realism* that the external world is Really present-at-hand. 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.

¹⁸ In ___.

instrumental coping practices. This happens in cases of equipmental breakdown. Heidegger calls the mode of being of entities so encountered, *occurrentness* (*Vorhandenheit*). Occurrent beings are not only revealed in breakdown but also revealed when we take a detached attitude towards things that decontextualizes or—in Heidegger's terms—deworlds them. In this detached attitude, we encounter occurrent entities as substances with properties. [Dreyfus 2001, pp. 161-162]

It might initially sound like Dreyfus indicates his sympathy in this passage with the two domains view. After all, he seems to be distinguishing two different ways of being, and seems to be distinguishing two different kinds of entities that have this way of being. But since Dreyfus simply equates a kind of being of an entity with a way in which that entity can be rendered intelligible, he is really indicating his sympathy with the one domain view discussed earlier. Although the passage above is not explicit on the question of whether the beings encountered as available are numerically identical with the beings revealed in breakdown, I believe this is his view. Consider the following remarks made by Dreyfus, and carefully track the pronouns:

Our practices for coping with the available are significantly different from our practices for dealing with the occurrent. Thus, Heidegger understands this changeover from dealing with things as available to occurrent as discontinuous. [Dreyfus 2001, p. 163]

What the phenomenon of total breakdown supports is the more minimal claim that nature can be experienced as independent of our coping practices and as underlying everyday things. If we had only the “available” mode of encountering entities, we could never encounter entities more independent of our coping practices than particular hammers are. But, if Heidegger is right, we can deworld such entities and be led to see them as occurrent components of the universe. [Dreyfus 2001, pp. 163-164]

Both passages indicate that Dreyfus (2001) holds that the things encountered when practically engaging the world are one and the same things as those encountered when engage in the practice of formulating theories. This is the one domain view.

Another way in which Dreyfus and I seem to disagree is on whether Heidegger believes that phenomenological investigation reveals the essential properties of things. I do; Dreyfus seems to say otherwise:

In the 1920s he realized he wanted to talk about important features of human being and yet he could not claim at the beginning of his investigation that these were essential ones. This methodological requirement put him in opposition to Husserl in two related ways: Husserl held that (1) general terms refer by way of the essential features of the types the terms referred to and (2) that one could have an immediate eidetic intuition of essential structures. Since Heidegger saw that his hermeneutic method deprived Husserl's eidetic intuition of any possible ground, he needed some other way to approach the essential structures of human being.

How could he refer to kinds without knowing their essential features? [Dreyfus 2001, p. 165]

Although it is true that Heidegger is suspicious of eidetic intuition, this is because he is suspicious of intuition *in general*, and *not* because he thinks that essential features are not given.¹⁹ These disagreements are what generate the fundamental disagreement over how to understand Heidegger's account of the phenomena under discussion:

The point is *not* that the phenomenon of total breakdown, theoretical inspection, or anxiety gives us *sufficient grounds* for believing in the independent existence of natural things.... Although the quotation may suggest this, we shall see that the phenomenon of total breakdown cannot supply such grounds. What the phenomenon of total breakdown supports is the more minimal claim that nature can be experienced as independent of our coping practices and as underlying everyday things. [Dreyfus 2001, pp. 163-164]

Pace Dreyfus, the point *is* that the phenomena of total breakdown, theoretical inspection, and anxiety give us sufficient grounds for believing in the independent existence of natural things. The phenomena supply such grounds because what is given in them is the essential independence of natural entities.

Dreyfus's earlier work seems to be equally skeptical about what phenomenology can show about "the external world" or nature in itself. Dreyfus (1991, pp. 250-256) contains a discussion of this issue. The key sentence (p. 256) is this, "All that hermeneutic phenomenology can do is show the coherence of the natural scientist's background "assumption" that science can discover the way nature is in itself." I suppose that showing the *coherence* of this "assumption" is a step in the right direction, but it's an awfully small step, as Dreyfus himself realizes. If all that hermeneutic phenomenology can do is show the coherence of the assumption of the external, independent world, then it is no surprise at all that philosophers have tried to do better than this, that philosophers have tried to *prove* the existence of the external world. Most of us were already confident that the hypothesis of the external world is *coherent*.²⁰ We were worried about whether we could know that it is true. It might be *scandalous* that a philosopher should try to prove the existence of mind-independent material entities, but *merely* attempting to prove that it is *coherent* that there are such entities is barely worth doing.

Heidegger dismisses these attempts.²¹ And if Dasein is the kind of being to whom items in the external world are "always already" *given*, and given along with their

¹⁹ Compare with Crowell (2005, pp. 59-60).

²⁰ Nonetheless, some philosophers have argued that the notion of an external world is incoherent, so if Heidegger has at least provided a refutation of those philosophers, then that is some (admittedly small) progress. Carman (2003) pp. 189-190 claims that realism is at least *motivated* by phenomenological investigation.

²¹ See, for example, see BT: 249-250. Inwood (1999) p. 180 also contains a discussion of Heidegger's rejection of proofs for the external world. According to Inwood, Heidegger dismisses the attempt to prove the external world because such attempts always "lead to ... whittling Dasein down to a worldless consciousness." According to Mulhall (1996) pp. 45, the Cartesian model must be rejected because it "is

essential independence of us and our practices, then it does seem scandalous to attempt to prove that *which needs no proof*. As Being-in-the-World, a Dasein is essentially such as to be open to the occurrent. That is, if I am a Dasein, then, necessarily, I am the kind of thing for which the independence of occurrent entities can be given. If I understand this fact, and I note that occurrent objects have indeed been given as independent objects, I see that there is no need to try to prove the existence of independent objects. And accordingly there is no need to prove the *mere* coherence of the claim that such entities exist either.²²

Husserl held that the metaphysical dependence of one feature on another is given in intuition.²³ In fact, Husserl also held that the metaphysical dependence of one *object* on another *object* can be in given in intuition. Husserl's third logical investigation concerns the theory of parts and wholes. There, Husserl distinguishes between the *pieces* of an object and the *dependent parts* of an object. The difference between a piece of an object and a dependent part of an object is *modal*: pieces can exist independently of the wholes in which they are contained, whereas mere parts of an object are metaphysically dependent on the wholes in which they are contained. That an object is a piece of another object, or that an object is a mere part of another object, are facts that can be given. The

meant to provide an ontologically adequate account of knowing", but since this account allegedly leads to skepticism, it thereby "annihilate[s] the very phenomenon [it was] intended to explain." For the reasons just given, I don't think Inwood or Mulhall have successfully accounted for why Heidegger takes himself to be justified in rejecting the attempt to prove the external world.

²² Heidegger's rejection of the "problem of other minds" seems to be more or less parallel. He holds that every Dasein is essentially such as to be open to other Daseins, that is, necessarily, if something is a Dasein, other Daseins can be *given* to it. So the existence of other Daseins does not need to be *proved*. That other minds exist is *given*. Heidegger writes:

HCT 238: ... *As being-in-the-world, Dasein is at the same time being with one another*—more rigorously, '*being-with*.' Being-with signifies a character of being of Dasein as such which is *co-original* with being-in-the-world.

HCT 239: This *co-Dasein of others* right in everydayness is characteristic of in-being as absorption in the world under concern. The others are there with me in the world under concern, in which everyone dwells, even when they are not bodily perceived as on hand. If others were encountered merely as things, perhaps they would not really be there. All the same, their being-there-with in the enviroing world is wholly immediate, inconspicuous, obvious, similar in character to the presence of world-things.

HCT 242-243: The apparently presuppositionless approach which says, 'First there is only a subject, and then a world is brought to it,' is far from being critical and phenomenologically adequate. So is the assumption which holds that first a subject is given only for itself and the question is, how does it come to another subject? Since only the lived experiences of my own interior first given, how is it possible for me to apprehend the lived experiences of others as well, how can I "*feel my way into*" them, *emphasize* with them. This way of formulating the question is absurd, since there never is such a subject in the sense it is assumed here. If the constitution of Dasein is instead regarded without presuppositions as in-being and being-with in the presuppositionless immediacy of everydayness, it then becomes clear that the problem of *empathy* is just as absurd as the question of the reality of the external world.

See also Thiele (1995) p. 52-53 for discussion of the problem of other minds and the givenness of other persons.

²³ For example, see section 10 of the third investigation of Husserl's *Logical Investigations*.

claim that the dependence or independence of one object on another can be given in an encounter with an object is endorsed by both Husserl and Heidegger.

Moods provide a third – and perhaps the most important – way in which occurrent objects can be given as independent of us. Carman (2003, pp. 190-199) has a very nice discussion of how when a Dasein experiences *anxiety*, occurrent entities are given as independent of us. The independence of these entities is in fact what gnaws at us when we are anxious.²⁴ When experiencing *anxiety*, we have something akin to an intuition of an essence: essences are given to us when we are anxious. It is interesting to note that – although Carman (2003) does recognize that anxiety gives us occurrent entities as independent and so accordingly there are some situations in which occurrents are given as independents – Carman does not look for other such situations, especially since the contexts of “equipmental breakdown” and “theoretical deworlding” have been so frequently attended to.²⁵

Now Dreyfus has a different (and far more complicated) story concerning Heidegger’s realism about the entities of natural science. I lack the space here to fully discuss why I do not accept this story. I think that Dreyfus does not consider the interpretation I offer because he interprets talk of ‘the being of an entity’ as ‘its mode of intelligibility’, while I think that such talk concerns the way in which that entity is, i.e., the mode of being or way of existing that the entity enjoys.²⁶ Furthermore, as noted, Dreyfus is skeptical about the givenness of essences. On my view, once one has determined that the independence of the occurrent is *given*, the only tasks left are to call attention to this fact, and to remove the obstacles that block its recognition. This is what Heidegger attempts to do. He is not interested in simply demonstrating the *coherence* of the assumption of the “external world” or even the practical inevitability of assuming its existence.²⁷

4.6 An Argument from Hermeneutics

My final argument is *hermeneutical*. A good interpretation can shed new light on old and problematic texts, revealing previously unnoticed depth and texture. Let’s

²⁴ Carman’s interpretation of Heidegger on anxiety, which seems to me to be exactly right, is radically at odds with the interpretation of Dreyfus (1991, p. 337), according to which, anxiety reveals that “...since reality is relative to human practices, and nothing can define the self, human beings can never find a foundations for their lives, and can never feel at home in the world.” I don’t see how Dreyfus can consistently attribute both this kind of relativism to Heidegger and the robust realism about reality that he correctly interprets Heidegger as endorsing. (Although the passage in which this quotation was taken consists primarily in a discussion of the “later Heidegger”, it is clear that Dreyfus is referring to the Heidegger of *Being and Time* in the quoted remarks.)

²⁵ For another interesting discussion on how anxiety (and other moods) can reveal the existence of independent entities, see Hoffman (2000). I am not sure whether Hoffman would agree with everything I say here, since he seems to be sympathetic to the one domain view.

²⁶ See McDaniel (2009) and Carman (forthcoming) for further discussion.

²⁷ Cerbone (2000) is useful to look at in this context.

consider the following passages from *Being and Time*, and see how they appear in light of the two domains view:

It is precisely when we see the ‘world’ unsteadily and fitfully in accordance with our moods, that the ready-to-hand shows itself in its specific worldhood, which is never the same from day to day. By looking at the world theoretically, we have already dimmed it down to the uniformity of what is present-at-hand, though admittedly this uniformity comprises a new abundance of things which can be discovered by simply characterizing them. [BT: 177]

Here Heidegger tells us that when we look at the world theoretically, we see *a new abundance of things*. He doesn’t tell us that we see *the same old things but in a different way*. This reading is the straightforward reading, which is available to us if we hold that present-to-hand things are never identical with ready-to-hand things. It is theoretical reflection that allows us to discover a new set of entities, of which we were previously unaware. When we gaze at the ready-to-hand within the world, when we cease simply coping with the equipment that surrounds us and instead reflect on the constitution of what is in front of us, the present-at-hand thing that is *in* the ready-to-hand thing is made manifest.²⁸ When we “de-world” a ready-to-hand thing we do not simply treat the ready-to-hand thing differently; instead, we make the present-to-hand thing that was already there within but numerically distinct from the ready-to-hand entity show itself as it is in itself. Conversely:

The less we just stare at the hammer-Thing, and the more we seize hold of it and use it, the more primordial does our relationship to it become, and the more unveiledly is it encountered as that which it is—as equipment. The kind of Being which equipment possesses—in which it manifests itself in its own right—we call “*readiness-to-hand*”. No matter how sharply we just *look* at this ‘outward appearance’ of Things in whatever form this takes, we cannot discover anything ready-to-hand. If we look at Things just ‘theoretically’, we can get along without understanding readiness-to-hand. [BT: 98]

If our only way of encountering entities within the world is via theoretical reflection, we will fail to discover a *distinct* set of things, namely, those that are ready-to-hand. If we just look at things, we cannot *discover* anything ready-to-hand.

Heidegger doesn’t say: if we just look at things, we cannot discover that we can encounter them as things that we can use. Heidegger doesn’t say: if we treat objects only as objects of theoretical inquiry, we do not treat them as tools. *These* claims are tautologies: of course someone who deals with things only theoretically doesn’t deal with things practically. But these tautologies are not asserted in the above passage. Instead,

²⁸ In BT 121, Heidegger writes: Within our present field of investigation, the following structures and dimensions of ontological problematics, as we have repeatedly emphasized, must be kept in principle distinct: 1. the Being of those entities within-the-world which we proximally encounter—readiness-to-hand; 2. the Being of those entities which we can come across and whose nature we can determine if we discover them in their own right by going through the entities proximally discovered—presence-at-hand[.]

Heidegger tells us that *different* entities are encountered in practical comportment than in theoretical reflection, and that these entities *could not be encountered in theoretical reflection*. This latter claim is no tautology, and in fact forms part of his critique of Descartes's ontology:

[if it not possible to demonstrate that the ontological problem of the world is formulatable given Descartes's ontology], we must then demonstrate explicitly not only that Descartes's conception of the world is ontologically defective, but that his Interpretation and the foundations on which it is based have led him to *pass over* both the phenomenon of the world and the Being of those entities within-the-world which are proximally ready-to-hand. [BT: 128]

No Cartesian spectator could grasp the kind of being had by the ready-to-hand. Even a super-Cartesian spectator, such as the God of classical theism, who is unchanging, impassable, and omnipotent couldn't grasp the kind of being had by the ready-to-hand:

What is ready-to-hand in the environment is certainly not present-at-hand for an eternal observer exempt from Dasein: but it is encountered in Dasein's circumspectively concerned everydayness. [BT: 140]

In a similar vein:

Dasein, in its familiarity with significance, is the ontical condition for the possibility of discovering entities which are encountered in a world with involvement (readiness-to-hand) as their kind of Being, and which can thus make themselves known as they are in themselves. [BT: 120]

If there ain't no Daseins, then there ain't no one discovering those entities that are ready-to-hand. Dasein is the *ontical condition* for their discovery, i.e., necessarily, no ready-to-hand entities are discovered if Dasein does not exist. Ready-to-hand things can be discovered only by beings whose fundamental kind of intentional state is practical comportment. Pure Cartesian Egos are left out of the loop.

But the ready-to-hand and the present-at-hand can both be encountered by Dasein. Moreover, both kinds of entities can be encountered as they are in themselves, in "pure" or "true" encounters. But these contexts of encountering are very different, as the following two passages indicate:

When something present-at-hand has been uncovered, it is encountered most purely if we just look at the entity and let it be encountered in itself. [BT: 309]²⁹

Thematical perception of Things is precisely not the way equipment ready-to-hand is encountered in its "true "in-itself." [BT: 405]³⁰

²⁹ See also BT: 89.

³⁰ See also BT: 96, 98.

The two domain view has a philosophically interesting take on these passages: there are two distinct kinds of things, and for each kind of thing, there is a distinct way of encountering that kind that reveals that kind of thing as it most truly is.³¹ (Recall the passage earlier about the hammer from BT: 98. The hammer is most truly grasped as *what it is* when it is *used*, not when it is *looked at*.) It's hard to see how the one domain view can accommodate these passages. Perhaps it can be done, but I suspect that the interpretation will be a convoluted one.

As the two domain view becomes salient, the pressure to read passages in accordance with it becomes very difficult to resist:

... "Nature" is not to be understood as that which is just present-at-hand... The wood is a forest of timber, the mountain a quarry of rock, the wind is 'wind in the sails'. As the 'environment' is discovered, the 'Nature' thus discovered is encountered too. If its kind of Being as ready-to-hand is disregarded, this 'Nature' itself can be discovered and defined simply in its pure presence-at-hand. But when this happens, the Nature which 'stirs and strives', which assails us and entralls us as landscape, remains hidden. The botanist's plants are not the flowers of the hedgerow; the 'source' which the geographer establishes for a river is not the 'springhead in the dale.' [BT 100]

Just look at the last two sentences, in which Heidegger seems to explicitly claim that two entities, one of which is present-at-hand, the other of which is ready-to-hand, *are numerically distinct*. He tells us that an entity, the Nature of our enviroing world, is *hidden*, and a distinct entity, the 'Nature' that is the object of the sciences, is made manifest. The entity studied by the botanist – a part of the Nature studied by the sciences – is *not identical with* the flowers of the hedgerow. The source of a river is *not identical with* the springhead in the dale. My reading of this passage is not mandatory but it is the most literal, straightforward reading of this text. The reading favored by the one world view is less straightforward and far less philosophically interesting: the botanist deals with an entity (a plant which is numerically identical with a flower) in one way, e.g., studies its cellular makeup, whereas the lover of gardens attends to its beauty. This reading of the passage is available, I suppose, for the friend of the one domain view, but it makes this passage a trite truism disguised in poetic rhetoric.

A similar passage which lends itself to a duality of readings – one straightforward, philosophically interesting, and consonant with the two domains view, the other less straightforward, trite and truistic, but consonant with the one domain view – is this one:

What gets taken as a sign becomes accessible only through its readiness-to-hand. If, for instance, the south wind 'is accepted' by the farmer as a sign of rain, then this 'acceptance'—or the 'value' with which the entity is 'invested'—is not a sort of bonus over and above what is already present-at-hand in itself—*viz*, the flow of air in a definite geographical direction. [BT 111]

³¹ Compare with Cerbone (1999), pp. 312-313. See also Okrent (1988), p. 75.

What is the relationship between the flow of air and the south wind? On the two domains view, it is *not* identity.

Here is a passage that has puzzled many:

The kind of Being which belongs to these entities is readiness-to-hand. But this characteristic is not to be understood merely as a way of taking them, as if we were talking such ‘aspects’ into the ‘entities’ which we proximally encounter, or as if some world-stuff which proximally present-at-hand in itself were ‘given subjective colouring’ in this way. *Readiness-to-hand is the way in which entities as they are ‘in themselves’ are defined ontologico-categorically.* [BT: 101]

On the one domain view, readiness-to-hand and presentness-at-hand are simply different ways of encountering entities, or different kinds of intelligibility. Accordingly, on the one domain view, one should either read this passage as saying that we can encounter entities as available to our use only in virtue of our encountering entities as the objects of theoretical reflection, or as saying that entities are intelligible to us as entities of use only in virtue of being intelligible to us as entities available for theoretical reflection. Both readings look pretty unpromising as interpretations of Heidegger.³²

On the two domain view, readiness-to-hand and presentness-at-hand are two different kinds of Being that are had by two disjoint sets of entities. Given the two domain view, we can read this problematic passage as making a claim about *metaphysical dependence*. The reading I favor of this passage is that Heidegger is telling us that, necessarily, ready-to-hand things have being only if present-to-hand things have being. This latter claim seems plausible. You are holding a hammer. You are holding a hunk of wood and metal. The hammer is *numerically distinct from* the hunk of wood and metal. The former is ready-to-hand, the latter is present-at-hand. These two entities are distinct, and yet intimately related: the present-at-hand thing *makes up* or *constitutes* the ready-to-hand thing. You can’t imagine a hammer not made out of some hunk of matter; it’s metaphysically impossible. Ready-to-hand things exist only if present-to-hand things exist. Given the two domain view, this reading of the problematic passage is extremely tempting.

But it does not follow that the ready-to-hand is *metaphysically determined* by the present-at-hand.³³ The present-at-hand would metaphysically determine the ready-to-hand the ready-to-hand if it were the case that the existence of ready-to-hand objects is entailed by the existence of present-at-hand objects. But this is not the case, since Daseins are not present-at-hand objects, and no ready-to-hand being could exist without existing in a world (in Heidegger’s ontological sense) and a world exists only if a Dasein does. So the present-at-hand is *necessary* for the ready-to-hand, but certainly is not *sufficient*.

³² Dostal (1993) pages 161-162 wrestles with this passage. He seems to be sympathetic to a one domain view, and with admirable candor raises (but does not settle) what appear to be genuine worries for this interpretation. Harries (1978) p. 74 also wrestles with this passage, and admits that it poses a challenge for Heidegger. I must confess to not being at all clear on how Harries hopes to answer this challenge.

³³ Carman (2003) also makes this point on page 196.

(Otherwise, Heidegger's metaphysics would be a mere metaphysics of the present-at-hand.)

Moreover, the metaphysical dependence of the ready-to-hand on the present-at-hand is completely compatible with other kinds of dependence of the present-at-hand on the ready-to-hand. An analogy: perhaps everything is metaphysically dependent on God, but no can know that God exists without reflecting upon the structure of the universe, and then determining that it has been lawfully designed. If this is the case, then although there is a metaphysical dependence of created things upon God, there is an epistemic dependence of God on created things. In general, from the fact that one thing metaphysically depends on another, it doesn't follow that an epistemic dependence runs in the same direction.

So Heidegger is well within his rights to insist that one could have knowledge of present-at-hand entities (or even encounter or be aware of them) only if one is already immersed in a world filled with ready-to-hand entities with which one comports oneself towards. Moreover, it might be the case that, in order to understand the kind of being had by some set of objects S1, we need to first understand the kind of being had by some set of objects S2, and then understand the kind of being had by those in S1 in terms of the kind of being had by those in S2, even though *every* one of the members of S2 depends on the existence of some of member of S1. In fact, the view that one could not even conceive of present-at-hand objects without first understanding what it is to be ready-to-hand and thereby grasping the kind of being had by the ready-to-hand is consistent with both the metaphysical independence of the present-at-hand from the ready-to-hand and the metaphysical dependence of the ready-to-hand on the present-at-hand.

This completes my case for the two domain view.³⁴

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