

## Chapter 2: Meaning and Understanding

The last chapter has left us with a number of unresolved issues regarding the significance of the question of Being as a question of meaning, and the role that Heidegger's theory of meaning plays within his initial attempt to formulate the question. In order to resolve these, we must now provide an account of existential structures of meaning and understanding as Heidegger lays them out in the existential analytic of Dasein. However, we can only do this if we situate them amongst the other existential structures that make up Being-in-the-world as Heidegger sees it. To keep this as brief as possible, we will abandon the peculiar (hermeneutically circular) order of exposition that Heidegger follows in the analytic, and attempt to present these various structures from the outset as an ordered whole. We will begin by outlining the principal features that distinguish Heidegger's phenomenology of Dasein from Husserl's phenomenology of consciousness.

The most obvious departure from Husserl is methodological. This is his commitment to pursue a *hermeneutic* phenomenology, rather than the *scientific* phenomenology espoused by Husserl. This methodological shift has already been glimpsed in our presentation of the two different hermeneutic circles that Heidegger identifies in the structure of the inquiry, namely, the circularity of inquiring into Being in general via a specific being (Dasein), and the circularity internal to the existential analytic, owing to the unitary structure of Being-in-the-world. However, beyond the specifically historical significance of this shift<sup>1</sup>, the real substance of it can only be understood on the basis of Heidegger's development of a rigorous concept of interpretation. As this is part of the existential analysis of understanding, we can say no more about it for the moment.

Moving beyond the methodological, there are three exemplary differences in the content of Heidegger's analysis of Dasein.<sup>2</sup> The first of these is his abandonment of Husserl's concern with *perception*, and its theoretical orientation, as the paradigm case of intentionality, replacing it with the *concern* that we have for things in our everyday practical dealings with them. The second of these is that Heidegger abandons the correlative primacy of the concept of *intuition* in Husserl's conception of consciousness in favour of the concept of

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<sup>1</sup> I am referring here both to Heidegger's critical stance toward Husserl's 'scientific' ambitions, and to his relation to the hermeneutical tradition of Dilthey and Count Yorck (See Chapter 1, fn. 58).

<sup>2</sup> There are of course many more ways in which Heidegger differs from Husserl, but these exemplary differences provide us with a way to uncover the central themes of the existential analytic in their interrelation.

*understanding*.<sup>3</sup> The third difference is the eminently social character of Dasein as *Being-with*, which is not isolated from the other fundamental existential structures, but is rather constitutive for them.<sup>4</sup> As indicated, these three features of Heidegger's account are not properly separable, but they provide us with the essential clues to the three structural elements of Being-in-the-world as Heidegger identifies them: the *world* (in its worldhood), *Being-in* as such, and the 'who' of Dasein in-the-world, respectively. We will examine each of these differences in turn, along with the structural elements they correspond to, before addressing Heidegger's theory of meaning and its relation to the question of Being directly.

### **1. World: Environmentality and Pure Significance**

For Heidegger, the world is the totality of beings, but it is also more than simply this totality. It is not a totality understood as the grouping of some accidental set of beings, as if we picked out a grouping of entities and by happenstance they were all the entities there are. Indeed, the world is no grouping of particular beings, accidental or not. Rather, the world is the 'how' of beings as a totality, which is to say that it is the very structure of totality as independent from whatever beings there are.<sup>5</sup> Heidegger takes the world to be a phenomenological structure which is prior to any of our encounters with beings. The world is in fact the *horizon* within which beings can appear and be encountered as such.<sup>6</sup> The function of the world as horizon is to organise the totality of beings and their relations in advance. It does this precisely by organising our possibilities for *comporting* ourselves toward beings. This is where the first deviation from Husserl we pointed out becomes pertinent. Heidegger conceives of the mainstay of intentionality to be our relation to beings within our everyday practical use of them. As such, the horizon of possibilities for comportment, which are prior to and a necessary condition of comportment as such, are first and foremost the possibilities for *action* they open up (as well as those they close off). The paradigm case of this is the use of

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<sup>3</sup> Theodore Kisiel's article 'From Intuition to Understanding' (*Heidegger's Way of Thought*, ch. 8) is a good account of this shift.

<sup>4</sup> We are not of course denying the presence of an analysis of sociality in Husserl's thought, but rather claiming that the role that sociality plays in Heidegger's account of Dasein is far more essential and central than anything in Husserl's work. The central character of sociality will be elucidated shortly.

<sup>5</sup> Heidegger is most clear on this point in his essay 'On the Essence of Ground' (p. 121), and in *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, where he contrasts his notion of world with the 'naive' concept of world (pp. 284-285).

<sup>6</sup> It is important to note here that although extant beings appear within the world, they are not in it in the way which Dasein, as Being-in-the-world, is. The way in which we encounter Other Dasein will be touched on shortly.

*equipment*.<sup>7</sup> For instance, an everyday encounter with a hammer is oriented by a prior understanding of the possible ways in which the hammer could be used. Moreover, these possibilities are structured in terms of the possible activities the hammer can become part of, and the possibilities of the other entities that these may involve. So my understanding of hammers is bound up with my understanding of repairing furniture, putting up shelves, etc. and the nails, pieces of wood and other equipment these involve.<sup>8</sup>

The kind of Being that entities encountered in this way present is what Heidegger calls readiness-to-hand (*Zuhandenheit*), which is also translated as *availability*. The ordinary form of awareness we have of such entities in our concern with them Heidegger calls *circumspection* (*Umsicht*), as opposed to perception. Circumspection is characterised by the fact that the available entity fades into the background, and we remain only peripherally aware of the features of it that are salient for its involvement in our activity. So, for instance, we are circumspectively aware of the size and shape of the screwdriver and that it fits a certain task, but we switch between it and another, more appropriate implement to deal with a task that it is unsuited for, without stopping to actively look at the sizes and shapes of the tools and compare them to the screws they are to be used on. It is this peripheral, circumspective awareness that lets us navigate our *environment* (*Umwelt*). Heidegger thinks that circumspection is not a form of perception, but rather that they are both forms of *sight* (*Sicht*). Sight is not exclusively visual, it is just Dasein's understanding of what is manifest to it, regardless of what is manifest and how it manifests.

It is also important to talk about a particular, deficient mode of perception: merely looking at something. We might also call this theoretically oriented perception. Things which are encountered in this way have a kind of Being different to availability, called presence-at-hand (*Vorhandenheit*) or *occurrence*. A merely occurrent thing has distinct *properties* that are abstracted from their involvement in our practical dealings. For instance, the screwdrivers are of a definite geometric size and shape, our grasp of which is not immediately referred to actions those features are appropriate for, or the hammer has an exact measurable weight,

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<sup>7</sup> It is important to recognise that Heidegger does not think that everything we encounter is a tool for use. Things first appear to us in terms of the way they affect our practical possibilities for action, but these can be affected in various ways. Importantly, things within the world can function as obstacles, limiting what we can do, rather than simply expanding it. Some things can do both, such as the walls of a house, which limit our possibilities of movement, while simultaneously providing shelter from the elements.

<sup>8</sup> Heidegger has a very detailed terminology for describing possible activities, the relations between equipment within them, and the goals pursued in them (e.g., the with-which, towards-which, in-which, etc.). I am not going to explain or deploy this terminology, because I feel it is unnecessary in providing this kind of brief overview.

rather than being ‘too heavy’ or ‘heavy enough’ for a given kind of task. Occurrence and availability are the two principle *categories* of extant beings that Heidegger posits, of which availability has priority, occurrence being derived from it just as theoretical perception is derived from practical, concerned circumspection.

It is important to note that there are two different sides to the structure of the world.<sup>9</sup> There is the *environment*, which we have briefly touched on (the existential character of which we call *environmentality*), and what we will call *pure significance*. Taken together, these constitute the worldhood of the world as *significance* as such.<sup>10</sup> The relation between these has to do roughly with the relation between *particularity* and *generality*, respectively. The best way to elaborate this is by means of another example. When I sit down in my study to write a letter to a friend, I am circumspectively aware of the equipment to be deployed toward this end: the paper, the pens, the desk, the lamp, envelopes, stamps, etc., but this circumspective awareness is not for that matter a direct awareness of *all* the possibilities of this equipment. I do not see the paper first as something with which I could write a letter, draw or doodle, or make a paper plane. I do not even see it in the full *generality* of the possible relations it could enter into in any one of these tasks, e.g., I do not see it as something that could be written on with *any* pen, pencil, etc. Rather, I encounter it primarily in terms of the *particular* possible relations it bears to the equipment in the context in which I’m situated, i.e., I see the paper as something that can be written on with *this* pen, or *this* pencil. However, this does not mean that our grasp of these particular relations is prior to our grasp of the general relations that equipment can enter into. Encountering the equipment as situated within a network of particular possible relations still depends upon a prior understanding of the general possibilities for action that the given *types* of equipment open up, i.e., I need to understand that paper in general stands in a certain relation to pens in general, before I can encounter *this* paper as standing in a possible relation to *this* pen.

<sup>9</sup> Although, I would note, Heidegger does not present this clearly. He does not distinguish between the general forms of possibility and particular environmental possibilities very well within his elaboration of the structure of worldhood.

<sup>10</sup> The distinction between *pure* significance and significance *as such* is one which is not present within Heidegger’s own writing. I have drawn this distinction in order to bring out a structure which is present but under-emphasized in Heidegger’s exposition of the existential analytic. This is a distinction between kinds of what Heidegger calls *assignment relations*. Although Heidegger does have a complex account of the different kinds of assignment relations (which we have avoided discussing in detail), one feature which he is not explicit about is the difference between *general* and *particular* assignments. I take this to be an oversight on his part, rather than a structural flaw in his approach. Heidegger discusses these issues in a more explicit way in *Basic Problems of Phenomenology* (pp. 292-294) in talking about the difference between *equipmental character* and *equipmental contexture*. Regardless, the value of drawing the distinction in the above terms will hopefully become apparent in the subsequent reading.

Nonetheless, for the most part, we circumspectively navigate our environment in terms of the particular possibilities that equipment *immediately* presents to us, rather than actively working out what particular possibilities are open to us on the basis of our general understanding.

However, there is an additional level of mediation between our general understanding of types of equipment and our encounter with an instance of this type in terms of the particular possibilities it provides. In order for a particular thing (this paper) to appear within a network of possible relations to other particular things (this desk, this lamp, this pen, etc.) there must be some grasp of the network in advance. It is the fact that I have a certain familiarity with my office that enables me to sit down and start writing a letter *immediately*, circumspectively navigating the various bits of equipment while focusing on the content of my letter. The *environment* is the existential structure in which this familiarity consists. It is spatial, but not in the sense that it is an extended and measurable metric space within which extended occurrent things are to be found. Just as occurrence is derivative upon availability, Heidegger takes our metric grasp of space to be dependent upon our prior practical grasp. We first understand distances not in terms of metric units, but rather in terms of the way it fits into our activities. For instance, I may grasp the distance between my home and my workplace in terms of, to use Heidegger's example, the time it takes to smoke a pipe, or rather, how many songs I can listen to on my mp3 player. This existential grasp of distance is only part of the matter though: we divide up our environment into *regions*, and organise these in terms of the networks of possible equipment that orient our activity both within and between them.

The fundamental principle of this organisation is provided by the totality of ends (or goals) that our actions aim at, and the various relations of subordination between them. I will call this our *purposive orientation*.<sup>11</sup> For example, the prior grasp of my study, which makes possible my circumspectively guided action within it, is organised in terms of the various ends that I habitually pursue within it, one of which is letter writing. Although writing a letter can be an end in relation to other activities, it is also a means towards other ends, such as

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<sup>11</sup> This is another term that is not present in Heidegger's own writing, but its introduction should perhaps be less controversial. This is simply a way of articulating Heidegger's understanding of the way the 'for-the-sake-of-which' (c.f. *B&T*, pp. 160, 182) is bound up with significance in constituting the world. Of course, Heidegger's conception of the way in which Dasein projects ends for itself is developed in much greater detail when the initial existential analytic of division one is recapitulated in terms of temporality in division two. However, it isn't necessary to examine this more detailed account in order to make the points we wish to make here.

applying for a job or maintaining a relationship with a distant friend. These can of course themselves be means in relation to further ends. Fundamentally, Heidegger thinks that all of our various activities are united through being subordinated to an ultimate end, namely, Dasein itself (ourselves) as that “for-the-sake-of-which” all our actions are performed. This is to say that, ultimately, all of our action is guided by *who* we want to be. This is just what it is to say that Dasein individuates itself through the choices it makes. In relation to this ultimate end we see various possible means, which may be projected as subordinate ends, in relation to which there are further possible means which may become projected ends and so on. As such, it is important to see that our awareness of possible means is not unconstrained by our projection of ends. We see possible means only in relation to the ends that we have projected. We thus navigate our environment in terms of a prior grasp of the possible means that its various regions and their resident equipment present for our ongoing life projects, united by the fundamental aim of individuating ourselves.

To summarise, pure significance makes a grasp of the environment possible by providing the general forms of possibility, but the environment and the circumspective awareness correlative to it necessarily mediates between pure significance and particular encounters with entities, by turning abstract possibilities into concrete possible choices for how to be. Taken together, they make up *significance* as such, which is the totality of all possible relations, both general (abstract possibilities) and particular (concrete possibilities). As such, pure significance and environmentality make up the two fundamental features of the *worldhood* of the world, independently of the specific types of equipment and regions that make up the world of this or that Dasein. Moreover, because, for Heidegger, Dasein *consists* in its possibilities, it also consists in its orientation within its environment. This is what Heidegger means when he says that Dasein “is in every case its ‘there’.”<sup>12</sup> Dasein *just is* its purposive orientation within its given situation, along with the existential structures which make this orientation possible.

## **2. Being-In: Disposedness, Understanding and Interpretation**

This brings us to the second shift away from Husserl, and the existential structure it heralds: *Being-in*. This is Heidegger’s abandonment of the concept of intuition in favour of

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<sup>12</sup> B&T, p. 171.

understanding.<sup>13</sup> This runs in tandem with the already discussed reorientation of intentionality from the theoretical to the practical, and can already be seen in our description of worldhood in terms of the *prior* understanding or grasp involved in both pure significance and environment. It is precisely the fact that understanding precedes encounters with entities that differentiates it from intuition in the relevant way. This is not to say that *all* understanding is prior to experience. If no understanding were gained in experience, this would eliminate the point of experience altogether. Rather, it is simply the case that what is encountered in experience can only be made sense of by being fitted into the complex framework of understanding which constitutes the *world* as an existential structure. This framework is by no means exhaustive, and experience can thus provide new understanding that fills it out.<sup>14</sup> There is even the possibility of the very understanding which constitutes the framework being revised on this basis. *Being-in* names this way that Dasein constitutes and revises its world, *through* encountering beings in terms of it, or rather *within it*.

However, there is more to Being-in than understanding – it is made up of three equiprimordial existentialia: *disposedness* (*Befindlichkeit*)<sup>15</sup>, *understanding* (*Verstand*), and *discourse* (*Rede*). We will only be able to understand Heidegger's account of meaning once we have grasped the ways in which these three structures relate to one another, as none can be properly understood in the absence of the others. However, despite the fact that discourse plays a role in constituting the other two, it can only be effectively elucidated after them (as Heidegger himself did). Our presentation of the existential structure of discourse will also have to wait until we have given an effective account of sociality and *Being-with*.

Disposedness has an important relation to what Heidegger calls Dasein's *thrownness*. This is the fact that Dasein is always in a world that is constituted in a certain way. Despite the fact that the existentiell structure of the world may be revised, and our orientation within it can change, this always happens on the basis of the structure and orientation that are already there. The pure significance in terms of which Dasein understands the entities it encounters in the world is not something Dasein chooses, but is something Dasein is given

<sup>13</sup> Heidegger talks about this shift explicitly within the section on understanding (Ibid., p. 187).

<sup>14</sup> We are not thereby implying that experience is *required* to revise our understanding. Indeed, as we will see, the possibility of revising our understanding through interpretation is something which belongs to understanding as such.

<sup>15</sup> This term is standardly translated by Macquarrie and Robinson as 'state-of-mind', but this does not really capture the meaning of the term adequately. Indeed, as with many of Heidegger's terms, it is impossible to find a completely suitable cognate in English. In the absence of such a cognate, I have opted for Dreyfus's later translation of the term as 'disposedness', as it at least does not have the awkward English connotations of 'state-of-mind' that can confuse what Heidegger means.

over to. The same holds true of Dasein's purposive orientation in its environment: it is given over to this orientation insofar as it *just is* its 'there'. Disposedness has the distinction of being able to disclose the fact of Dasein's thrownness. This is because disposedness is not, like understanding, primarily oriented toward the specific entities we encounter in the world. As we noted earlier, the world, as horizon, is the totality of beings, albeit not as a fixed set of specific beings. Disposedness is the aspect of Being-in that is correlative to this totalising character of the world: it is oriented toward our situation as a whole.<sup>16</sup>

The best way to elaborate this is by examining the original German term 'Befindlichkeit', which like many of Heidegger's terms is a construction out of more ordinary German vocabulary. The verb 'befinden' in German is used in a way similar to the reflexive use of the verb 'find' in English, as in "to find oneself in a situation". In this case it indicates the 'where', or the character of the situation itself. However, this reflexive form is deployed in a slightly different way in the casual greeting "Wie befinden Sie sich?", which means roughly "How are you doing?" or more literally "*How* do you find yourself?".<sup>17</sup> This 'how' indicates how one is *disposed* to the situation one finds oneself in. We are always disposed to our situation in some way, but the precise way in which we are disposed may change. A given disposition is thus an existentiell modification of disposedness as such, and is what Heidegger calls a *mood* (*Stimmung*). Mood is the primary way in which our world is disclosed to us, insofar as it discloses the world as a whole. What this means is that the specific way we are disposed toward the world at any given time reflects its current state, and thus reveals it in a way that is different from the way we encounter particular entities within the world. As such, the 'how' of a mood reveals the 'where' of our situation as we are oriented within it, which is just to say that it reveals our 'there'. Moreover, moods disclose the fact of our thrownness into the 'there' simply by way of disclosing the 'there' itself in our dispositions. This means that although the way in which different moods disclose our situation changes, the disclosure of thrownness is a consistent feature of disposedness as such.

It is important to note that the existentiell modification of disposedness by moods is not something which happens occasionally. Dasein is always in some particular mood, but whichever mood it is in, this mood discloses the world as a whole, and in doing so discloses

<sup>16</sup> It's important to point out that by the word 'situation' we do not mean something restricted to a *part* of the world. Our situation is the way things stand in the world *as a whole* at any given moment. Our situation changes either as things in the world change, or our place within it does.

<sup>17</sup> It should be noted that this phrase has actually fallen out of common German usage.



Dasein's thrownness into the world. Moreover, although Dasein's mood may change, it only has one mood at a time.<sup>18</sup> However, it remains unclear what this disclosure of the world consists in, and how exactly it varies between moods. Heidegger makes it clear that although there is a sense in which mood reveals something about Dasein, insofar as it is related to Dasein's dispositions toward the world, this is not its primary function.<sup>19</sup> It is not the case that mood discloses the world by disclosing our dispositions toward it. It is rather the case that our dispositions toward the world are *effectuated* by the way mood discloses the world. Mood is directed at the world, not at Dasein and its dispositions. However, we still need to establish how mood discloses world, how this is related to our dispositions, and how it varies between moods. The key to this is the connection Heidegger draws between mood and the way things 'matter' to us. He claims that without disposedness nothing could matter to Dasein. Furthermore, he holds that "Being-in-the-World [submits itself] to having entities in the world "matter" to it in a way which its moods have outlined in advance."<sup>20</sup> The implication here is that moods structure the way we encounter entities as mattering to us, and that what distinguishes between moods are differences in this structure.

In order to explain this, it is necessary to think through the picture we have painted of Dasein's environment and its purposive orientation within it. In any given situation, Dasein is presented with multiple possibilities for what it may do, and these possibilities are structured by its prior understanding of its environment, which is in turn structured by its ongoing life goals, united by its obligation to itself as that for-the-sake-of-which it does anything. This picture presents the fact that Dasein is given options to choose, and that it must choose between them, but it tells us nothing about how Dasein does in fact choose. As far as we can tell, all possibilities appear in the same way – as equally viable. If this is so, then in each case Dasein must either randomly select a possibility, or engage in explicit practical reasoning about which possible action best achieves its ends. Moods flesh out this picture by making our possibilities appear in different lights, so that we are *disposed* towards certain actions over others, narrowing down our choices, though not necessarily determining them. Different possibilities may thus appear as *mattering* in different ways, as attractive or repellent, important or unimportant, and so on, all to differing degrees. It is by disclosing our possibilities in these ways that mood effectuates our dispositions. This does not mean that a

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<sup>18</sup> This is a feature of Heidegger's account that seems to change after *Being and Time*. See fn. 25.

<sup>19</sup> *B&T*, pp. 175-176.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 177.

mood cannot be rationally overridden (i.e., that we can't choose something we are not disposed toward), or even that we can't rationally affect our moods. Our moods work in tandem with practical reasoning, and can indeed be overridden and modified. It is simply the case that there is no rational choice independent of mood. Even our attempts to rationally take hold of and control our moods always take place from within a given mood.<sup>21</sup>

Nor are moods completely distinct from the purposive orientation that structures our possibilities. This is best indicated by returning to disposedness as the existential ground of mood. Dreyfus insightfully characterises disposedness as “*being found in a situation where things and options already matter*.”<sup>22</sup> The important point is that this fact that things already matter to us is not identical with the fact that we are always already in some given mood. Of course, things and options matter to us in different ways in different moods, they show up in different lights. For instance, simple everyday possibilities such as getting out of bed and having breakfast matter differently when we have a sunny disposition to when we are in the midst of a deep depression. However, what matters to us is not completely open to variation between moods. If this were the case, moods would be as free-wheeling as the random selection between possibilities we opposed above. We must have certain things that matter to us (e.g., companionship, privacy, avoiding certain kinds of embarrassment, etc.) in a way that, although not necessarily unchanging, can at least be invariant between different moods, and which functions as the basis of the way moods disclose the world to us. For example, the possibility of embarrassing myself weighs on me differently depending on the mood I am in, but *that* it weighs on me in some way does not vary with my mood, because it is a distinct existentiell facet of disposedness as such.

Moods do not primarily direct themselves toward particular beings or the possibilities they present us. Rather, a mood orders the way *general* possibilities matter to us, and how the ways they matter are interconnected. For instance, in my depressive mood certain activities (e.g., sleeping and watching television) become prioritised over other activities (e.g., eating well and spending time with friends). The *particular* possibilities encountered in experience are then disclosed as mattering to us in a certain way, insofar as they are derived from these general possibilities.<sup>23</sup> This is why moods disclose the world *as a whole*, as it means that they

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 175.

<sup>22</sup> Hubert Dreyfus, *Being-in-the-World*, p. 168.

<sup>23</sup> Heidegger never provides a detailed account of the way that mood makes possible particular affects, but it would be possible to provide an account in which environmentality and purposive orientation play a role in mediating between the mood's structuring of our dispositions toward general possibilities and the particular affects that are based on it, in a similar fashion to the way they mediate between pure significance and the

essentially disclose *all* of our possibilities in some way. As such, it is in virtue of having a mood (e.g., fearfulness or apprehension), which orients me to my situation as a whole in a certain way, that I can have *affects* which are directed at particular things and possibilities that show up in that situation (e.g., fearing my neighbour's dog).<sup>24</sup> We thus have a three level structure: disposedness (which includes general non-purposive motivations), moods (which order these motivations into proper dispositions), then intentional affects (which instantiate these in particular encounters).<sup>25</sup>

This brings us to the link between disposedness and purposive orientation. Dasein is always given over to a particular network of particular ends which organise the possibilities that may be encountered in its environment. However, this network of ends cannot be static. In order for there to be the possibility of extending and revising this network, for expanding and adapting one's ongoing life projects, there must be something beyond the network which can potentially conflict with it. It is the fact that there are always things and possibilities which matter to Dasein in a way not reducible to its particular goals which provides this. For example, being well disposed toward children can motivate the development of my goal of becoming a parent. Conversely, as we have already noted, the motivating factors that disposedness provides are themselves open to expansion and revision, and, crucially, the particular ends that make up our purposive orientation may play a part in this. Continuing the previous example, my goal of becoming a parent can itself affect my dispositions, making me become ill disposed towards things I think unfit for parents, such as excessive drinking and other irresponsible activities. It is also the case that moods, as specific orderings of these general motivating factors which dispose us to our current situation, are sensitive to our goals. This is obvious to anyone for whom the achievement of a goal has heightened their

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particular possibilities we encounter in experience. This would go some way to explaining how we can have affects which relate us to specific people, things and places that are fairly stable, such as a fear of a specific doctor that is not based upon some general disposition toward doctors.

<sup>24</sup> Heidegger is very explicit that moods are not directed at anything specific, but that they do make possible affects which are so directed (*B&T.*, pp. 176-177).

<sup>25</sup> This is not an entirely uncontroversial reading of Heidegger. In particular, the idea of there being motivations which are independent of mood, even if they are never unmodified by mood, is unusual. However, I think the way this lets us explain the interconnectedness of disposedness and purposive orientation justifies the reading. Nonetheless, it is important to recognise that Heidegger later moves away from this picture, adopting a more nuanced account of mood, which dispenses with disposedness as an invariant existential ground (Cf. *FCM*, *BQP*). This reincorporates mood-invariant motivating factors into moods by abandoning the idea that we are only ever in one mood and replacing it with a multi-layered account of moods. So, for instance, we may be consistently within a wider cultural mood, despite this being modified by the more localised moods of depression, elation, or listlessness. Heidegger does not develop this picture in a great deal of detail, but his introduction of a variety of cultural moods, along with the structural mood of being-free-for (See Chapter 3), indicates this multi-layered picture.

feeling of what else they may achieve, or for whom the corresponding failure has narrowed the range of what they *feel* they may do (as opposed to what they *understand* they could do).

Disposedness is in truth the *ground* of our purposive orientation in the world. However, as the above discussion shows, this is not a straightforward relationship of grounding. The network of ends that makes up our purposive orientation is unified by our obligation to ourselves as that for-the-sake-of-which we act. This is to say that all of our goals are subordinated to the ultimate goal of individuating ourselves – becoming *who* we aim to be.<sup>26</sup> This ultimate goal is non-negotiable, but all goals beneath it are. However, although we have suggested that this process of revision *can* involve non-purposive motivating factors, and the moods that arrange these into our current dispositions, alongside practical means ends reasoning, we have not shown that it *must* involve disposedness in this way. However, the precise content of the ‘who’ that we wish to be is not something that can be determined by, or changed in light of, any of our goals, because all of these are in principle subordinated to it. This is not to say that we form our picture of who it is we wish to be in a purely irrational manner, Heidegger is still very much opposed to this kind of view. It is simply the case that the development of our ultimate end *necessarily* requires the kind of non-purposive motivations that disposedness provides. The specific existentiell make-up of our motivations, moods, and goals are always subject to revision in relation to one another in the ways discussed above, but the existential character of disposedness as ground of our purposiveness is constant.

We may now move on to a more detailed discussion of Heidegger’s conception of understanding itself. As indicated, we have laid out much of the structure of understanding already. What remains for us to do is to make this explicit as the structure of understanding, and to outline the nature of the special possibility which belongs to understanding itself, namely, *interpretation* (*Auslegung*). Firstly, it is important to emphasise that, for Heidegger, the sense in which Dasein *is* its possibilities is just the sense in which Dasein *understands* its possibilities. For a being to be encountered by Dasein alongside it in the world is just for it to be understood, or for us to develop some grasp of it. Heidegger describes this as *projecting* a being *onto* its possibilities, or sometimes as *freeing* it *for* its possibilities. However, understanding is more than just the projection of possibilities for *particular* entities. The prior

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<sup>26</sup> It is important to note that the sense in which individuation is a goal is unusual. Individuating oneself is not a task as such, because *whatever* one does one individuates oneself. It is individuating oneself *in a certain way* - becoming who one aims to be - which is the ultimate goal of every Dasein. One cannot fail to individuate oneself, but one can fail to individuate oneself as one aims to.

organisation of *general* possibilities within and between the various regions that make up the environment is also projective. These two aspects of projection are properly inseparable. The world, as horizon, is the projected totality of these possibilities, or, alternatively, the totality of such projection. This means that Dasein's Being-in-the-world is just its projection of the world as this space of possibility, and all this involves.<sup>27</sup> However, it is important to emphasize that, for Heidegger, projection is not a matter of *representation*. Anything that we would ordinarily call representation is *dependent* upon projective understanding.

The basic structures on the basis of which projection functions have already been described: pure significance and environmentality. Projecting a being onto its possibilities is a matter of *presenting* to oneself a set of particular possibilities for action in which it is involved. This necessarily involves taking the particular entity as a *kind* of entity, the understanding of which provides the general possibilities for involvement of such entities. These general possibilities become particular by being mediated in two ways: firstly, they are narrowed down by our purposive orientation both within and between the given regions of the environment; secondly, these narrowed general possibilities are fixed by the projective grasp we have of other particular entities we have encountered within our environment. To recapitulate the earlier example: I walk into my study, I see the pen, and my understanding of all the things pens may be involved in is narrowed down to the possibilities pens are usually involved in within this study (in accordance with my multitude of ongoing projects); this is then particularised by my circumspective awareness of the paper, the desk, and the study's other equipment, which mutually fix one another's particular possibilities by limiting the possible relationships they can enter into in the given situation. I thus see the pen in terms of its particular possibilities for writing letters with this paper on this desk, but perhaps also for writing poems, or idly doodling. These possibilities are of course then shed in a certain light by my mood, a different one coming to the fore depending upon whether I feel fastidious, whimsical, or listless, respectively.

We are now in a position to examine the nature and function of the derivative mode of understanding Heidegger calls *interpretation*. Interpretation is a possibility which understanding itself provides, rather than one that it simply projects. It is the understanding's possibility of "developing itself".<sup>28</sup> Heidegger provides a distinctly *hermeneutic* account of interpretation. However, although the model for such a hermeneutic conception is provided

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<sup>27</sup> Heidegger makes this very clear in the essay 'On the Essence of Ground' (p. 123).

<sup>28</sup> *B&T*, p. 188.

by textual interpretation, Heidegger's account has a far broader scope than this. Indeed, for Heidegger, interpretation is not something we learn how to do (at least not something we cannot do without learning it). The principal form of interpretation is one that is *always* open to us: interpreting our possibilities for action. For the most part, we are given over to a certain understanding of the things we encounter in the world. As we have just described, we are presented with a certain set of options to choose from, and this set is a limitation of those possibilities supplied by our general understanding. Interpretation allows us to actively re-evaluate this delimited set of possibilities. However, it is important to note that the initial set of possibilities that we are immediately provided with in any instance is not arrived at through interpretation. The way in which our general understanding is filtered through our environmental orientation to produce a grasp of particular possibilities is just the work of understanding as such. Interpretation is the active re-working of what is already present in understanding, and is thus a different process to the way our possibilities are initially worked out. Nonetheless, it could not function without such prior understanding. It is for this reason that interpretation is a derivative mode of understanding.

It is helpful to give an everyday example of this kind of interpretation: If I come home from work and enter my kitchen with the intention of making dinner for my family, I obviously am familiar with the kitchen and the various cooking equipment it contains, but I am also constrained by the ingredients I have to cook with. When I survey the ingredients I have available, what I see first of all are the possibilities for recipes I am most familiar with, those I make often. I could pick one of these, and then get straight to the task of preparing it, my circumspective awareness of the kitchen and its equipment then guiding me through the task in the ordinary way. However, another possibility open to me is to re-evaluate my options: I can stop seeing my ingredients merely as resources for recipes I am intimately familiar with, and actively consider the various other ways in which they could be used to make food. I can do this in several ways: by simply contemplating the possible ways of preparing and combining the various ingredients, by searching through recipe books for something which fits, or some combination of the two. Regardless, in each case I am actively reworking my understanding of my situation, through *interpreting* what lies within it and the possibilities it presents.

This possibility of interpretation is an existential feature of Dasein. This means that, as already noted, Dasein may always reinterpret its possibilities. This applies on all levels,

from reinterpreting what one can do with one's life as a whole (e.g., I could become a chef), through reinterpreting the possibilities a given situation provides (e.g., I could make risotto instead of pasta), to reinterpreting the specific ways one can execute a particular portion of a larger task (e.g., I could add the cheese at a different time). The process through which we change and develop our purposive orientation, by reconfiguring our network of means and ends, is thus an interpretative one. Similarly, the projected understanding of the environment, which structures the way in which particular entities and their possibilities are encountered within a given region, is itself not static, but developed through a process of interpretation. Importantly, although interpretation is indeed active, it is not necessarily a matter of detached reflection or contemplation. Interpretation may be carried out this way, but most ordinary interpretation is *circumspective interpretation*. This means that it is something we do in the course of performing circumspectively guided activities, rather than something we do prior to them. In fact, Heidegger thinks that we are *always* engaged in some form of interpretation. This is not to say that there is no circumspection without interpretation. Heidegger maintains that interpretation is not a matter of "acquiring [further] information about what is understood".<sup>29</sup> Without prior understanding out of which to interpret there could be no interpretation, and without pre-interpretative circumspection supplying this understanding, there could be no interpretative revision of our projection of the world on the basis of experience.

Now that we know roughly what interpretation is, we have to give an account of how it functions. To do this we have to situate our earlier account of the concept of phenomenon within the picture of Being-in-the-world we have so far provided. Earlier, we claimed that the minimal structure of the formal conception of phenomenon was that of something manifesting *as* something. Importantly, this formal notion was not limited to the manifestation of something as a *kind* of entity (e.g., as pens, knives, onions, etc.). Although this means that there can be manifestation in ways beyond manifesting as an instance of a kind (e.g., as low on ink, dangerously sharp, or moldy, respectively), it does not settle the issue as to whether this is nonetheless dependent upon manifesting as a kind. The structure of understanding and interpretation provide the answer to this problem. As has been noted, beings are encountered in terms of their particular possibilities. They are not encountered in terms of the general possibilities that are common to a kind of thing. However, as has been

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., pp. 188-189.

shown, the particular possibilities of an entity are only projected on the basis of a prior grasp of general possibilities. This implies that any entity must always be taken as a kind of entity, in order that the general understanding of this kind (provided by pure significance) may be distilled into the particular understanding of that entity as it fits into our possibilities for action.

However, despite making our immediate grasp of an entity possible, our understanding of it as a kind of entity is hidden by this very immediate grasp. Our grasp of entities as instances of kinds is for the most part *implicit*. To elaborate, our grasp of particular beings is bound up in the projection of the set of possible actions open to us. These include *all* of the relevant ways in which our actions could involve *any* of the entities within our current context. For example, I don't primarily see a knife, I see that I could start chopping onions, among other things. The knife is of course *involved* in this, but only as a peripheral element of the possible activity. Interpretation is the activity through which we take apart the various elements of the possibilities we project, making *explicit* our implicit grasp of these entities *as kinds of entities*, at least in part. Heidegger calls this as the *as-structure* of interpretation. It is through making explicit general possibilities belonging to the particular beings we encounter that it is possible to reassemble a different set of possibilities for action. Thus, interpretation has roughly three stages: we start with an initial understanding, which is *disarticulated* into its various elements, the general possibilities of these are then *explicated*, and out of these a new understanding is *articulated*. There are three further aspects of Heidegger's account that remain to be discussed: the *fore-structure* of interpretation, the circular character of interpretation, and the more complex forms of interpretation that are also characterised by these structures.

What Heidegger calls the fore-structure of interpretation is a threefold set of conditions which are necessary for interpretation to take place: *fore-having* (*vorhaben*), *fore-sight* (*vorsicht*), and *fore-conception* (*vorgriff*). The fore-having required by interpretation is just the understanding constituted by significance as the totality of involvements, made up of both the general understanding of involvements between kinds of equipment (pure significance), and the more particular understanding of involvements within the environment. This fore-having provides the content which is made explicit in interpretation. In Heidegger's words: "fore-sight 'takes the first cut' out of what has been taken into our fore-having, and



does so with a view to a definite way in which this can be interpreted.”<sup>30</sup> When we disarticulate our initial understanding, we do not make explicit the general character of every element of it, nor do we even make explicit every general possibility of those we do select. Effectively, we require some perspective, or point of view, which limits the vast selection of general possibilities provided by pure significance. For instance, in circumspective interpretation this mediating role is played by our purposive orientation within our environment, in the same way it does in ordinary circumspective understanding. As Taylor Carman points out, these two elements are already present in understanding as such, and are not peculiar to interpretation, whereas the final aspect – fore-conception – is unique to interpretation.<sup>31</sup>

Heidegger takes fore-conception to be an expectation or anticipation of the outcome of interpretation which guides it. This is not a matter of having a complete conception of the result prior to the interpretation itself. Rather, it may be more or less well conceived, but it guides the activity of interpretation by providing something for it to aim at. Moreover, fore-conceptions can either be drawn from our understanding of the matter as we proceed, or can be supplied in advance by concepts and ideas we have had independently or taken over from others. Bringing these aspects together, we can continue our earlier example: in reinterpreting what dishes I can prepare with my ingredients, I have an understanding of these kinds of ingredients in advance (*fore-having*), which enables me to grasp them explicitly *as* onions, celery, cheese, etc. My understanding of what I can do with these various ingredients in relation to one another is delimited (*fore-sight*) by my purposive orientation (e.g., by the need to cook for four, within a short space of time) and my environmental grasp of my kitchen (e.g., its limited hob space, its lack of a deep fryer). Finally, I have watched a lot of TV cooking shows, giving me various pre-conceived ideas about the kinds of things one can make (even though I do not *know* how to make them). I thus articulate a viable set of possibilities (in this case rough recipes) out of a general understanding, narrowed by my situational perspective, guided by a certain pre-conceived notion of semi-professional TV food.

Moving on, it is important to recognise that all interpretation involves a certain circularity. However, this shows up differently in different forms of interpretation. In general, it consists in the fact that the development of a new understanding is always dependent upon

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 191.

<sup>31</sup> Taylor Carman, *Heidegger's Analytic*, pp. 213-214.

an existing understanding out of which it is developed. On the face of it, this does not look like circularity, because the same might be said of distinctly non-circular reasoning, namely, that a conclusion is always dependent upon the premise it is inferred from. The important difference here is that interpretation is not a mere *extension* of our understanding by working out its implications (indeed, Heidegger thinks that reasoning is a derivative form of interpretation), but also involves the possibility of the *revision* of that initial understanding. A revised understanding need not necessarily be broader than the corresponding initial understanding. Moreover, revision need not require 'new information', but can take place in a fashion entirely internal to the existing understanding. Its specifically circular structure is manifest in the way in which different elements of our understanding may be related. We may reinterpret our grasp of one element of our understanding on the basis of an explicit grasp of some other related element, and then reinterpret our grasp of the second element in light of this very reinterpretation of the first. Here we have a process through which revisions may feed into one another successively. Successive interpretations are thus not straightforwardly linear developments of what came before, but always involve an uprooting of the understanding produced by the previous interpretation. Nor do successive interpretations function like different interpretations of the same initial understanding, but are always guided by their antecedent interpretation. However, as we noted in relation to the particular hermeneutic circles found in the inquiry into the meaning of Being, this circularity is not equivalent to *vicious* circularity, or circular reasoning. This is because developing one's understanding is not a matter of *justification*, and it is circular justification which gives circular reasoning its specifically vicious character.

This circularity, which characterises interpretation in general, is what makes Heidegger's account a specifically hermeneutic account of interpretation. We are thus in a good position to tackle the final aspect of Heidegger's account, namely, that it extends beyond the development of our possibilities for action to include more complex forms of interpretation, including the case of textual interpretation which provided it its model. As we have already noted, interpretation need not just be the reworking of our understanding of our immediate possibilities for action, but it is also the process through which we develop and revise both our purposive orientation and our projection of the structure of our environment. These kinds of interpretation are already more than the primary form we originally outlined. However, there are further variants of interpretation. Indeed, *any* form of understanding is

open to interpretation. This means that the general understanding which constitutes pure significance is open to development through interpretation. It also means that the special modes of understanding that belong to Being-with, namely, understanding other Dasein, and the understanding that is deployed within discourse, are both open to interpretation. We cannot say much about this, as we have yet to delve into the structure of Being-with or discourse (the final aspect of Being-in), but we can note that textual interpretation is a variant of discursive interpretation. It is important to mention the other derivative form of interpretation that Heidegger takes time to discuss: *assertion*. As we have seen from his interpretation of 'logos' in the introduction, Heidegger parts ways with the traditional understanding of discourse as he sees it, and the primacy it gives to assertion. Nonetheless, he recognises the importance of assertion, and that he must give an account of it. Despite the fact that Heidegger himself gives his account prior to discussing the existential structure of discourse, we will be able to understand the significance of his account better if we examine it after we have presented his account of discourse in general.

Finally, we can now examine the significance of Heidegger's methodological shift away from Husserl. Heidegger's hermeneutic conception of phenomenology treats it as another complex form of interpretation. This differentiates it from the more Cartesian approach recommended by Husserl, in that it ceases to see itself as a matter of aiming at a pure intuition of the structures of consciousness (regardless of whether such pure intuition is practically achievable), and instead sees itself as an incremental process of explicating and revising an understanding that we already possess. There are obviously further methodological constraints which differentiate phenomenology from other kinds of interpretation, but we need not go into these in detail here. Instead, we are interested in how this sheds light on the method of both the existential analytic and the project of fundamental ontology in general.

As noted earlier, Dasein not only has a pre-ontological understanding of Being in general, which makes possible comportment toward beings in general, but it also has an understanding of its own mode of Being, which makes possible comportment toward itself. This pre-ontological understanding of existence just consists in its implicit grasp of the fact that it is confronted with possibilities from which it must choose. It thus becomes clear that the existential analytic is a hermeneutic inquiry through which the pre-ontological understanding of existence is interpreted, whereas the project of fundamental ontology proper

is a hermeneutic inquiry through which the more general pre-ontological understanding of Being is interpreted. This puts into context both Heidegger's claim that fundamental ontology must be pursued by way of an existential analytic of Dasein and his claim that ontology and phenomenology are identical. In developing our pre-ontological understanding of our own existence into a full blooded account, the existential analytic makes explicit the character of our pre-ontological understanding of Being in general, given that this understanding is constitutive for existence. The inquiry into the meaning of Being proper is then a matter of interpreting the pre-ontological understanding of Being so explicated. This is what Heidegger means when he talks of 'interpreting' the meaning of Being. Whether this can only be performed by phenomenology, and thus whether phenomenology and ontology are identical, depends upon the necessity of the additional methodological constraints that phenomenology places upon these hermeneutic inquiries.

### **3. Sociality: Being-with, the One, and Discourse**

We can now turn to Heidegger's final substantive shift away from Husserl: his conception of Dasein as an essentially social being. The essential character of this sociality, which distinguishes it from Husserl's account of inter-subjectivity, is the way it is intertwined with the other existential structures, such that they are impossible without it. In Heidegger's terms: "Dasein's Being-in-the-world is essentially constituted by Being-with".<sup>32</sup> The goal of this section is to give a brief account of what Being-with consists in, and on this basis to show precisely how it is constitutive for Being-in-the-world as such. There are two closely related aspects to this: the way Being-with is constitutive for worldhood, and the way that Being-with is constitutive for discourse, which is itself indispensable for disposedness and understanding. It is through inquiring into the first of these aspects that we will uncover the existential structure Heidegger calls 'the One' (*das Man*)<sup>33</sup>, and through this complete our understanding of Heidegger's conception of the 'who' of Dasein. It is by inquiring into the second that we will be able to understand Heidegger's account of meaning.

Heidegger's phenomenological analysis of the way we encounter Other Dasein within the world strongly differentiates it from the way we encounter extant entities. As has been

<sup>32</sup> *B&T*, p. 156.

<sup>33</sup> Here I am choosing Dreyfus' translation of *das Man* as 'the One' over the Macquarrie and Robinson translation of 'the They'. The latter translation tends to disguise the fact that we are not opposed to Other Dasein, but that we are all equally subjected to what 'one' does.

noted, Heidegger takes our relation to extant entities to be one of *concern*, whereas he takes our relation to Others to be one of *solicitude*. He takes both of these to be forms of *sight*, which is just the general existential structure of encountering entities as such. Heidegger's account of encounters with Others completely bypasses any of the classic Cartesian problems regarding other minds. As far as Heidegger is concerned, we no more merely look at an occurrent human body and infer that it is another Dasein than we merely look at an occurrent hammer and infer that it may be used for hammering. We simply encounter Others *as* Others directly. However, we do not encounter Others as if they were equipment for our use, their mode of Being is not availability, but rather Dasein-with (*Mitdasein*). The important difference here is that whereas we encounter equipment solely in terms of how it fits into our own possibilities for action, we encounter Other Dasein in terms of their own possibilities for action. This isn't to say that we aren't presented with certain specific possibilities for action in relation to Others, as they most definitely do affect the possibilities for action presented to us. For instance, I may encounter a shopkeeper in terms of the possibilities they present for acquiring the items I am seeking, just as I may encounter fellow passengers on a bus in terms of the way they restrict where I can sit or stand. Indeed, Others even present me with possibilities for *co-ordinated action*, wherein the action in relation to one another is mutual, such as is involved in something as simple as passing the salt at the request of a fellow diner. We may even encounter Others in terms of possibilities for *joint action*, in which we co-ordinate our actions so as to pursue some shared goal. What is important is that all of these possibilities that Others present for our own action are grounded in our understanding of their own possibilities for action. We will see the reason why this is the case shortly.

Heidegger thus thinks that the world, and the things we encounter within it, is shot through with references to Other Dasein. However, there are several distinct senses in which these references are constitutive for significance, and thus the worldhood of the world as such. First, references to particular Others can be part of the existential structure of the environment. For instance, when I encounter my neighbour's house, even in their absence I encounter it *as* theirs. Even in passing a house whose owner I do not know, I encounter it as the home of some Other, and I understand it in terms of the possibilities for living it offers to them. Similarly, the environment can be structured by references to *kinds* of Others. In the case when I encounter a school, even if I do not know of any particular children who attend it, I understand it in terms of its relation to school children as such. Secondly, precisely

insofar as we do understand kinds of Others, the relationships among these and their relationships to kinds of equipment, this understanding is an aspect of pure significance. For example, my grasp of school children as such contains reference to parents and teachers, as well as the kinds of actions they engage in (both individually and collectively) and the networks of equipment these involve. The social world, along with the various roles that people take up within it, is thus an integral part of the world as such.

However, there is a more fundamental sense in which Being-with is constitutive for worldhood, which grounds all of the others. This is indicated by Heidegger's claim that "[t]he world of Dasein is a *with-world* [*Mitwelt*]"'.<sup>34</sup> The social does not just make up an essential part of the world, but it is constitutive for worldhood as such. This is because of the very way in which pure significance is articulated. Our understanding of the general possible relations between types of equipment is not essentially restricted to the ways in which they could be deployed within our own action, but is always already an understanding of how they could be deployed in action by *anyone*. As such, when I encounter a hammer, although I encounter it in terms of the possibilities it presents for my current projects, I also implicitly encounter it as something that could be used by someone else. This implicit reference to Others is entirely independent of the presence of actual Others, and it is what the possibility of encountering Others as playing more concrete roles within the social world is grounded upon. In essence, because we understand ourselves in terms of our possibilities, and our understanding of our possibilities is based upon an understanding of general possibilities that belong to *no one in particular*, there is the necessary possibility of encountering Others who are understood in terms of their own possibilities. The possibility of Other Dasein is thus guaranteed, even if factually there happen to be none.

This is only part of the story however. It gains an extra dimension when we consider it in relation to Dasein's *thrownness*. This is the fact that although Dasein chooses between its possibilities, it does not choose which possibilities are presented to it, nor its disposition toward them (its mood). The salient fact here is that Dasein is not just given over to the particular possibilities that are presented by its environment, but also to the general possibilities provided by pure significance. Dasein is thrown into a world in which there are already types of ends that anyone can pursue and types of means by which to pursue them. This means that Dasein does not just understand Others in terms of its own possibilities for

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<sup>34</sup> B&T, p. 155.

action, but that conversely it understands its own possibilities for action in terms of the actions of Others. It is through finding itself in a world where there are already various kinds of activities that people engage in that Dasein makes sense of the activities it can perform, and thus also of the goals it can undertake.

We are now beginning to see that the structure of Dasein's understanding is intrinsically social, but there is a further layer to the picture. So far we have provided a picture of how it is that Dasein encounters available entities within the world in terms of the particular possibilities they present to it, by way of its understanding of the general possibilities that types of equipment offer in relation to one another, and the structures which mediate between the general and the particular. However, there is an additional fact about these general possibilities which needs to be understood. This is that Heidegger takes our understanding of types of equipment to be a fundamentally *normative* matter.<sup>35</sup> What this means is that our understanding of a type of equipment consists in a practical grasp of how it is *appropriately* used as a part of different activities in a various circumstances. To take an illustrative example, just as it is possible to pick up a pen in my study and use it to write a letter on the paper before me, it is equally possible for me to use the pen to pick my nose, or eat the paper, but the latter uses of the pen and paper would not be appropriate uses of them. This is not necessarily because these uses are taboo (although they might be, especially in company), but rather because they are not uses of the pen and paper *as* pen and paper. Moreover, within those activities that constitute using a pen as a pen, there are *norms* governing their proper performance. For instance, one writes a letter in a certain orientation, with a certain regimentation of lines of text, with a certain amount of spacing. There are obviously various ways to do so acceptably, but there are most definitely certain ways one could write that are inappropriate in the ordinary context of letter writing.

So, our understanding of a type of equipment consists in our grasp of the *functional roles* that it plays within a variety of activities, and such functional roles are intrinsically normative. Thus, the particular possibilities that we are presented with in our encounters with particular entities within the world are in fact a selection of the appropriate ways of acting given the equipment present in the environment and the purposive orientation we occupy. This throws a new light upon the fact that we understand our own possibilities for action in

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<sup>35</sup> This interpretation of Heidegger is most famously espoused by Hubert Dreyfus (p. 151-155). Heidegger never explicitly formulates his position in terms of normativity (and it is quite possible he would be opposed to such formulations, given his antipathy to Baden school Neo-Kantianism), but this is the best way to make sense of his account of equipment and sociality as a whole.

terms of the actions of Others. The functional norms which constitute significance apply to anyone and everyone, but they are determined by no one in particular. Dasein thus encounters things within the world in a way that implicitly refers to some indeterminate authority, one that all Others are similarly subject to. This indeterminate authority constitutes an additional existential facet of Dasein's constitution, which Heidegger calls *the One*. The One is not any particular Other or any group of Others, but is an aspect of Dasein's existence. Each individual Dasein primarily sees its possibilities for acting within the world in terms of *what one does*. A paper and pen can be used as *one* would use them. A letter can be written as *one* would write it. The One is the existential structure through which we grasp the impersonal authority underlying these functional norms.

The upshot of this is that, although we get our grasp of appropriate behaviour from the behaviour of the particular Others we encounter, and thus also what possibilities for action are open to us, at no point can any particular Other be identified as the ultimate authority underlying these norms. This means that although we must by necessity take over such norms from the social world that we are born into, we must not for that matter see the actions of every Other as licensing the appropriateness of the kind of action they are performing. We must take our cues from Others, but not from every Other and not all of the time. This means that Dasein is always concerned with the difference between its own behaviour at that of Others. This is what Heidegger calls *distantiality* (*Abständigkeit*). It is this constant concern that enables us to adjust our grasp of what one does, taking cues from the behaviour of some and ignoring (or even correcting) that of others. However, the One does have some additional effects beyond its constitutive role. Heidegger takes it that although we need not necessarily take the behaviour of any given Other as more correct than our own, that we nonetheless tend to see the behaviour of the majority of Others as that which is appropriate. This produces an overall averageness of behaviour, in which we tend towards the mean. Heidegger calls this a “levelling down” [*Einebung*] of possibilities of Being.”<sup>36</sup> He takes this to produce a social situation in which the innovative and exceptional are suppressed.

We needn't concern ourselves too much with the more value-laden comments Heidegger makes about the One and the averageness that it produces. However, it is important to recognise that Heidegger's answer to the question of the 'who' of Dasein is tied up with these analyses to some extent. For the most part, which is to say in its everydayness,

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<sup>36</sup> B&T, p. 185.



Dasein is what Heidegger dubs the *one-self* (*das Man-selbst*). As the one-self, Dasein sees its possibilities for action purely in terms of those provided by the One. This everyday character of Dasein is what Heidegger calls its *inauthentic* (*uneigentlich*) way of Being. However, Heidegger thinks that it is possible for Dasein to become *authentic* (*eigentlich*), in which case it is able to reinterpret the possibilities that it is given over to, so as to make them its own, opening up ways of acting that potentially differ from what one does. The best way to get a grip on this is to consider the way in which Dasein individuates itself. As we've already explained, the ultimate goal to which all of Dasein's actions are subordinated is individuating itself as *who* it wants to be. However, as inauthentic, Dasein can only individuate itself in the terms presented to it by the One. This means that Dasein can only see itself in terms of the variety of social roles through which it understands Others – as a teacher, a lawyer, a farmer, a father, a drunk, etc. – and must approach this role in the way Others do. In contrast, an authentic Dasein can appropriate one of these social roles, so as to redefine its significance.

Of course, Dasein can also be authentic in other ways. It can reinterpret possibilities for all different kinds of action in innovative ways. However, it is important to note that Dasein is never wholly authentic. As Heidegger notes, authentic being-one's-self is “*an existentiell modification of [the One] – of [the One] as an essential existentiale*”.<sup>37</sup> What this means is that the One plays an essential role in the constitution of significance, because we always require possibilities to authentically appropriate. As we noted above, interpretation must always function on the basis of some prior understanding, and as such, although it is possible to reinterpret one's possibilities in a way that makes them authentically one's own, this can only be done on the basis of possibilities that have already been provided by the One. As such, authenticity is not a state that is opposed to inauthenticity, but is something that arises out of it, as a development of specific inauthentic potentials. All of this reveals an additional existential feature of Dasein, which Heidegger calls *falling* (*Verfallen*). This is not a fixed state that Dasein is in, but a “movement”<sup>38</sup> that results from the fact that Dasein is always already thrown into a socially articulated world. It indicates the fact that Dasein tends to become *absorbed* in the world, which means that it tends to focus on the possibilities that are immediately presented to it by the entities it encounters in the world, as they are articulated by the One, in such a way that it ignores its authentic possibilities for being itself. In essence, Dasein is not only inauthentic by default, but this inauthenticity tends to obscure

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 168, translation modified.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 221.

the very possibility of authenticity. Moreover, even when it achieves some form of authentic self-relation, Dasein is always drawn or ‘tempted’ back towards inauthenticity. Heidegger’s account of falling is more detailed than this, involving several distinct ways in which it becomes manifest, but these details are superfluous for our purposes.

Now that we have given an overview of the structure of Being-with, and shown exactly how it is constitutive for worldhood, we are in a position to lay out the final existentiale which makes up Being-in, namely, *discourse*. It is first important to point out that Heidegger uses the term ‘discourse’ in two distinct but intimately related senses. As we noted in the last chapter, Heidegger uses the word ‘discourse’ to translate the Greek ‘*logos*’, and he provides an interpretation of it as “letting something be seen”. What Heidegger means by discourse in this sense is just talk, or better, *expression*. This is not restricted to making assertions and questioning, but extends to other modes of expression (requesting, commanding, assenting/refusing, warning, etc.) Indeed, it shouldn’t even be restricted to linguistic expression, but should include non-linguistic forms of communication (gestures, facial expressions, demonstration, etc.). This first sense of ‘discourse’ treats it as an activity, one that comes in many different forms. The second sense in which Heidegger uses the term indicates the existential structure which underpins this activity. This is what he is referring to when he calls discourse the third existentiale of Being-in – the existential structure of expression as such.

Of this existentiale Heidegger says the following: “*Discourse is existentially equiprimordial with [disposedness] and understanding. The intelligibility of something has always been articulated [gegliedert], even before there is any appropriative interpretation of it. Discourse is the Articulation [Artikulation] of intelligibility.*”<sup>39</sup> Discourse is equiprimordial with disposedness and understanding insofar as it plays an essential role in structuring them, and this role consists in its “Articulation of intelligibility”. Now, owing to its role as the existential structure of communication, Being-with is constitutive for discourse. If we can understand precisely what discourse’s articulation of intelligibility consists in, we can thus complete our analysis of the way that Being-with is essentially bound up in Being-in-the-world. Unfortunately, Heidegger does not go into a great deal of detail about the existential structure of discourse. Moreover, he tends to switch between talking of discourse as activity

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., pp. 203-204, translation altered. It is helpful to point out that Heidegger uses two different words that are both translated as ‘articulation’ – *Gliederung* and *Artikulation* – although the latter is generally capitalised to acknowledge the distinction.

and talking of the existentials without explicitly acknowledging the subtle shift in sense. This makes interpreting precisely what he means by the “Articulation of intelligibility” quite difficult. We will endeavour to overcome these difficulties and reconstruct Heidegger’s account of discourse out of the scant passages he dedicates to it.

Heidegger claims that there are four distinct existential features of any discourse: *what is talked about* (*das Geredete*), *what is said* (*das Beredete*), the *communication*, and the *making-known*.<sup>40</sup> The distinction between what is talked about and what is said is fairly straightforward. If I assert that “the hammer is heavy” we can obviously draw a distinction between what the assertion is about (the hammer) and what is said about it (that it is heavy). Similarly, if I offer the hammer to someone else (either by saying “here, have a hammer”, or by making an appropriate gesture), what is talked about is the hammer, and the offering is what is said. Heidegger takes this distinction to apply to all the various forms of expression. With regard to the communicative aspect of the discourse, Heidegger is quite explicit that it is nothing like a “conveying of experiences, such as opinions or wishes, from the interior of one subject to another”.<sup>41</sup> Rather, he takes it to be a matter of developing shared moods and understanding. Given our earlier discussion of Being-with as constitutive for worldhood, we can see that there is already some sense in which understanding is shared. The significance which Dasein is given over to in its thrownness is always taken up as something socially articulated. However, Heidegger takes it that although understanding is always already shared to some extent, that it is so *implicitly*, and that communication is that through which this is taken up and developed *explicitly*. Making-known is not really a separate aspect of discourse, but is rather just that feature of communication through which we indicate and share our moods, in contrast to understanding, through such things as “intonation, modulation, the tempo of talk, ‘the way of speaking’.”<sup>42</sup> We might speculate that Heidegger would say something similar about disposedness to what he says about understanding, namely, that it is always implicitly shared, and that it becomes explicitly shared in discourse. Heidegger never says anything about this explicitly in *Being and Time*, but his account of disposedness and mood does move in a more social direction in subsequent work.<sup>43</sup>

If we are to explain the way that discourse articulates intelligibility, we need to elaborate on Heidegger’s account of communication. We showed above how Being-with

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., pp. 204-206.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 205.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> See fn. 25.

structures our possibilities for action generally, but we also showed that it provides specifically social possibilities, such as co-ordinated action and joint action. In its most basic form, communication is that existentiell possibility of Dasein through which such social actions get co-ordinated. This co-ordination is essential, because if we are to act in concert, even if we are not necessarily working towards the same goal, we must be able to *collectively interpret* the possibilities which are available to us. For instance, if we are engaged in the joint activity of building a shed, my offer of a hammer can signal to my building partner the appropriateness of this tool for the task he is performing, or simply draw his attention to the various other ways the tool could be used in the context of the larger project. Alternatively, if I am driving behind someone in traffic, even though we are not pursuing the same goal, if he signals a turn, this forces me to reinterpret my possibilities for action, just as he would be forced to reinterpret his possibilities if I were to indicate my intention to overtake him.<sup>44</sup> Communication allows us to develop and maintain a shared grasp of each other's possibilities for action in such a way that we can adequately respond to each other, either in the context of pursuing our individual ends or in the context of some larger shared task. Such a shared grasp of possibilities is the condition under which these forms of action are possible. This process of collective interpretation is precisely what discourse's function as "letting something be seen" consists in – what in the previous chapter we called the *eliciting of manifestation*.

Now, as well as claiming that discourse (the existentielle) is the Articulation of intelligibility, Heidegger also claims that the existentiell activity of discoursing "is the way in which we articulate 'significantly' the intelligibility of Being-in-the-world".<sup>45</sup> It is important to keep these claims distinct, as understanding the latter sheds light on the former. The salient fact here is that we don't just develop a shared grasp of our *particular* possibilities through the collective interpretation communication facilitates, but that it is also the principle way through which we develop, adjust and extend our grasp of the functional norms on which our understanding of *general* possibilities is based. Through co-ordinating our action with Others we correct one another's behaviour, adjusting our grasp of what is appropriate to the activities we are engaging in. For instance, if I am sensitive to the fact that my partner is a master builder, then the process of co-ordinating our joint action will also likely hone my appreciation of the intricate details of *proper* craftsmanship, and perhaps even open me up to

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<sup>44</sup> This is of course the example that Heidegger famously uses to explain his notion of *signs* earlier in *Being and Time* (pp. 107-114). We will discuss this further below.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 204.

possible appropriate uses of equipment that were heretofore unknown to me. This is just what it is for discoursing to articulate the intelligibility of Being-in-the-world.

Although discoursing is an activity that Dasein engages in, it is useful for us to distinguish the *expressive possibilities* it presents from Dasein's more ordinary *practical possibilities*. Just as Dasein's practical possibilities are governed by functional norms, expressive possibilities are governed by their own norms.<sup>46</sup> Although Heidegger would most likely argue that the various modes of expression discussed above (questioning, asserting, assenting/refusing, suggesting, etc.) are existential features of the structure of discourse itself, the various forms of communication in which these are realised are existentiell modifications of them, and are governed by a variety of contingent norms. Everything from complete languages (e.g., English) to small sets of gestures adapted to a particular purpose (e.g., the hand signs soldiers use to co-ordinate their movements in combat) are structured by a particular set of expressive norms. However, we should note that this doesn't exclude the possibility of primitive or improvised forms of communication which are not based on a received set of norms.

Putting these points together, we can reveal a special relationship between practical possibilities and expressive possibilities. The pure significance in which our grasp of the general possibilities pertaining to types of equipment consists is structured in such a way as to enable that equipment to be involved in expression. For instance, we encounter hammers as things that can be requested, offered, suggested, etc. We encounter them as things that we can *talk about*, that we can *say something* about, that we can *communicate* with others about, and that we can *make known* our dispositions toward. In essence, the existential structure of our understanding is such that the possibility of our entering into the kind of collective interpretation which adjusts and extends it is guaranteed. It is not only an existential feature of Dasein that its understanding is implicitly shared, but also that this sharing can become explicit, that it can expressively articulate it in discoursing. The sense in which the existential structure of discourse articulates intelligibility is just this: that the various general and particular possible relations between types and individual pieces of equipment that make up significance are structured so that they can be expressively brought to light and reconfigured.

Thus, when Heidegger says that the "intelligibility of something has always been articulated, even before there is any appropriative interpretation of it"<sup>47</sup>, he is in fact

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<sup>46</sup> Taylor Carman makes this point in his extended discussion of discourse (p. 215).

<sup>47</sup> *B&T*, p. 203.

indicating that interpretation is dependent on the expressive structure of discourse. What this means is that our ability to explicitly interpret our own understanding is somehow derived from our ability to share our understanding explicitly in the kind of collective interpretation that co-ordinates social activity. This might sound strange, but Carman, who agrees on this point, alleviates this worry through analogy: “We can talk to ourselves, of course, but doing so is like paying oneself a salary: It is perfectly possible, but only by being parasitic on a social practice involving more than just one agent. Soliloquy is parasitic on dialogue, just as self-employment is parasitic on exchange.”<sup>48</sup> Interpretation is an existential possibility of Dasein because expression is also such a possibility, and this means that the additional expressive resources acquired through the development of expressive norms can at the same time open up new possibilities for interpretation, but only because our understanding is structured in a way that makes it expressible in principle.

It is useful here to consider the idea that expression is a practice, one that can be governed by its own norms, and thus which can also have its own equipment. This is what underwrites Heidegger’s conception of language in *Being and Time* (a conception which famously changes quite drastically in the subsequent work<sup>49</sup>). Discourse provides the existential structure of language. In Articulating significance, it guarantees the possibility that both the various types of equipment, the relations they bear to one another, and the particular ways these are instantiated within the environment, can be expressively brought to light in collective interpretation. However, what this does is to provide for the possibility of specific kinds of equipment that can be used in this activity in regular ways, namely, *words* and *signs*.<sup>50</sup>

Heidegger’s account of signs comes much earlier in *Being and Time*, where he uses them to help explain his account of significance.<sup>51</sup> The function of signs is to draw one’s attention to the structure of one’s environmental context in such a way that one can reinterpret one’s possibilities for action appropriately. The main example Heidegger uses is one we considered earlier – the use of indicator signals in cars. Although signs like indicators have an expressive role, this role is part of the larger set of practices that make up the social activity of driving around others. All signs play roles within the context of some activity or

<sup>48</sup> Carman, pp. 248-249.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. Heidegger, ‘On the Way to Language’. The fundamental change is that Heidegger ceases to see language as something that is derivative upon a prior realm of practical significance, and comes to see it as constitutive for our understanding.

<sup>50</sup> Taylor Carman provides a good account of signs along these lines as “*interpretative tools*” (p. 234).

<sup>51</sup> *B&T*, pp. 107-114.

set of activities, though they needn't be restricted to communication *between* individuals. In all cases, signs do not directly affect our possibilities, but indicate things which do, forcing us to reinterpret the actions open to us. There are artificial signs such as clock faces, fuel gages, and even natural signs such as a cow lying down, which indicate different things within particular contexts (e.g., that it is time for bed, that we need to refuel soon, or that it is about to rain, respectively). Heidegger notes that there can even be very simple, improvised signs, such as a knot tied in a handkerchief, which can serve as a reminder of almost anything. However, even such a simple sign has a specific purpose to fulfil.

Words are similar to signs, but whereas signs play specific expressive roles within the context of other activities, words play more general expressive roles. For Heidegger, words are not occurrent sounds or symbols to which a 'meaning' gets attached. Words are bits of equipment, but their proper use is not determined by their role in any ordinary practical activity. Rather, words correspond to particular parts of the structure of significance, or *significations* (*Bedeutungen*), and their proper use within expressive activities is derived from these significations. For instance, the word 'hammer', does not get its proper use from any fixed role it plays in the activity of hammering, but from the relations that constitute that type of equipment within the structure of pure significance, whereas the phrase 'my hammer' would have its use further determined by the relations that constitute one's environment and purposive orientation. This derivation is what Heidegger means when he says: "To significations, words accrue. But word-Things do not get supplied with significations."<sup>52</sup> This is the basic feature of Heidegger's theory of meaning.

#### **4. Meaning: Intelligibility and Conditions of Possibility**

We are at last in a position to consider Heidegger's theory of meaning in detail. Obviously, Heidegger's account of linguistic meaning gives primacy to the meaning of words, as opposed to theories of meaning that take sentences or propositions as primary. However, although Heidegger's theory of meaning does provide an account of the meaning of words and other linguistic expressions, it is more than just this. There are two distinct but intimately related terms that Heidegger uses in his account: meaning (*Sinn*) and signification (*Bedeutung*). To quote Heidegger:-

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 204.

That which can be Articulated in interpretation, and thus even more primordially in discourse, is what we have called “meaning”. That which gets articulated as such in discursive Articulation, we call the “totality-of-significations” [*Bedeutungsganze*]. This can be dissolved or broken up into significations. Significations, as what has been Articulated from that which can be Articulated, always carry meaning [...*sind... sinnhaft*].<sup>53</sup>

Meaning is thus essentially synonymous with intelligibility, as that which is articulated by discourse. Significations are similarly articulated by discourse, and they ‘carry’ meaning. However, this should not be taken to imply that meaning and signification are effectively synonymous. Signification is in fact a *species* of meaning, or a form of intelligibility, but there are potentially forms of intelligibility that are not structured in the manner of significations. This can be better understood if we examine the way Heidegger defines the notion of meaning in relation to understanding:-

That which can be Articulated in a disclosure by which we understand, we call “meaning”. The *concept of meaning* embraces the formal existential framework of what necessarily belongs to that which an understanding interpretation Articulates. *Meaning is the “upon-which” of a projection in terms of which something becomes intelligible as something; it gets its structure from a fore-having, a fore-sight, and a fore-conception.* Insofar as understanding and interpretation make up the existential state of Being of the “there”, “meaning” must be conceived as the formal existential framework of the disclosedness which belongs to understanding.<sup>54</sup>

In effect, for Heidegger, meaning is just *what is understood* in understanding anything. The meaning of words is primary for Heidegger because words simply take their meaning from our understanding of the things they refer to. Indeed, words are only able to refer to things because we have some understanding of them, in terms of which we encounter them *in the world*. We have already explained above that this understanding takes the form of *projection*, but in order to explain what it is for meaning to be the “upon-which” of projection, we must examine the structure of projection further.

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p. 193.



In *Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, Heidegger describes the structure of understanding as consisting in a “stratification of projections”.<sup>55</sup> This stratification corresponds to the various layers of understanding involved in grasping any given entity in experience. When I encounter the paper in my study, my understanding of it has various facets that are all bound up together. I initially see it in terms of the particular possibilities it presents me within the environmental region that it occupies (my office), in relation to the other pieces of equipment that make up its context and my purposive orientation within it (writing a letter). The paper is *projected* upon these as that which provide its possibilities. The paper’s various features are projected upon particular aspects of this context. For instance, my understanding of it as oversize is projected upon the relation it bears to the envelopes I keep within my drawer, which are too small to fit it neatly. However, this situated understanding is in turn projected upon the general relations which constitute pure significance. I understand the paper *as* paper, and it is as such projected upon the set of relations that constitute paper as the type of equipment it is. Similarly, the particular features of the paper are projected upon the general relations underlying the particular ones they were projected upon. This stratification can potentially proceed further still, insofar as we project the general type ‘paper’ on something even more general, such as ‘stationary’. All of these various layers are implicit in our encounter with the paper, and it is only in the process of interpretation that we can make them explicit and deal with them separately.

Meaning and signification pull apart precisely insofar as there are aspects of our understanding which don’t correspond to anything *within the world* at all. Everything that is encountered within the world is projected upon the significations which make up the world, but there are more general forms of understanding that underlie the very structure of these significations, and although these forms of understanding are projections, they are no longer projecting upon significations. So, continuing the above example, the paper is eventually projected upon *availability* as the mode of Being it possesses.<sup>56</sup> Our understanding of availability is constitutive for signification as such, but is not itself a signification. Similarly, in theoretically oriented perception we project what we encounter upon occurrence, and in solicitude we project Other Dasein upon Dasein-with. Indeed, Heidegger thinks that we project ourselves upon existence (*Existenz*). Ultimately, everything is projected upon Being,

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<sup>55</sup> *BPP*, p. 280.

<sup>56</sup> Heidegger makes this point in *BPP* (p. 293), although he talks about functionality or involvement (*Bewandtnis*) rather than availability (*Zuhandenheit*).

and this is just what our pre-ontological understanding of Being consists in.<sup>57</sup>

We are now left to ask about the consequences of this distinction between meaning and significance. The real issue is that whereas we have an adequate grasp of how word meaning and interpretation function with regard to entities within the world, namely, in terms of significations, we are somewhat at a loss as to how these are to be understood with regard to the meaning that underlies the world itself.

This leads us back to the problems we posed at the end of the last chapter, and to the interpretative paradox that spawned them. We are now in a position to claim that our grasp of the various aspects of Being (what-being, that-being, etc.), and of the various modes of Being (existence, occurrence, etc.) is grounded in our pre-ontological grasp of Being as such, insofar as they are projected upon Being. Our grasp of the meaning of the words that correspond to them is derived not from intra-worldly significations, but from the very existential structures which make up this pre-ontological understanding. However, properly understanding the underlying structure which unifies both these aspects and modes of Being involves more than this recognition, it involves *interpreting* the meaning of Being as such – developing our pre-ontological understanding into a properly conceptual understanding of Being. This means making explicit the horizon upon-which Being itself is projected.<sup>58</sup> This projection of Being upon its meaning is the *ultimate* projection in the hierarchy of stratified projections.

Why, though, is this projection ultimate? Why is there not a further stratum of projection upon which the meaning of Being is itself projected? This is because Being is not something *other* than its meaning. Heidegger sometimes seems to contradict himself on this point. On the one hand, in *Basic Problems of Phenomenology* he claims that in interpreting the meaning of Being we are in a certain sense thinking *beyond* Being to whatever it is that it is projected upon.<sup>59</sup> On the other hand, in *Being and Time* he claims that:-

if we are inquiring about the meaning of Being, our investigation does not thereby become a “deep” one [*tiefsinnig*], *nor does it puzzle out what stands behind Being*. It asks about *Being itself* insofar as Being enters into the intelligibility of Dasein. *The meaning of Being can never be contrasted with*

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<sup>57</sup> *B&T*, p. 371; *BPP*, pp. 280-281, 308. “We understand a being only as we project it upon [B]eing.” (Ibid., p. 280).

<sup>58</sup> *BPP*, p. 280.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p. 282.

*entities, or with Being as the 'ground' which gives entities support; for a 'ground' becomes accessible only as meaning, even if it is itself the abyss of meaninglessness.*<sup>60</sup>

These claims are not contradictory because the sense in which the meaning of Being is beyond Being has nothing to do with it functioning as a ground of entities, but simply with providing the underlying structure of Being itself. This is 'beyond' Being only in the sense that there must be something beyond our *pre-ontological* understanding in which the unifying structure of the various aspects and modes of Being consists. It is something in terms of which that which defines beings as beings is to be explained, but in explaining this, it simply *is* what defines beings as beings.

We can now venture a solution to the paradox posed in the last chapter. The question of the meaning of Being is not an ordinary question of meaning, insofar as it inquires into Being itself, but neither is it a question of essence ('What is Being?'), because the reflexive structure of that question makes it impossible to approach in principle. However, the reflexive character of this subject matter implies that the inquiry into Being has a *hermeneutically circular* structure. This hermeneutic circle is distinct from the other two we have identified so far – the circle internal to the existential analytic, and the circle between the analytic as inquiry into a mode of Being and the inquiry into Being as such. It consists in the fact that the very way in which we are to understand what Being 'is' is itself dependent upon this understanding. On this basis, we can see that the sense in which the question of Being is a question of *meaning* is just the sense in which it consists in an *interpretation* of the meaning of Being. Such a hermeneutically circular inquiry can only proceed by way of interpretation. This underscores what was said at the end of the last section: the inquiry into the meaning of Being consists in a process of interpretation which develops our pre-ontological understanding of Being into a genuine concept of Being.

However, we do not yet entirely understand what such an interpretation would consist in. This is because, although we have already provided a fairly detailed account of interpretation, this has mostly been restricted to the way interpretation develops the kind of understanding that is articulated in significations. Obviously, this is not applicable to the case of the interpretation of the meaning of Being. However, the requisite kind of interpretation is already underway within the existential analytic, both when Heidegger interprets the meaning

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<sup>60</sup> B&T, p. 193-194, italics added.

of Dasein's Being as *care* (*Sorge*), and when he subsequently interprets the meaning of care as *temporality* (*Zeitlichkeit*). In the course of the latter he provides a more general account of what meaning and interpretation consists in. His crucial point is that: "Projecting discloses possibilities – that is to say, it discloses the sort of thing that makes possible... To lay bear the "upon-which" of a projection, amounts to disclosing that which makes possible what has been projected."<sup>61</sup> In essence, all interpretation at least consists in making explicit that which makes possible what is interpreted, with regard to the way in which it makes it possible. So, returning to the example from the last section, when I interpret the possibilities for action initially presented to me by the ingredients and cooking equipment available in my kitchen, I progressively make explicit the various significations that provide these possibilities. It is not a matter of uncovering the socio-economic conditions that 'make possible' my possession of a reasonably well stocked kitchen, but rather of uncovering the elements of my understanding upon which my initial grasp of the situation is grounded.

This account of meaning in terms of *conditions of possibility* lets us flesh out the account of the existential analytic and the wider project of fundamental ontology we provided earlier: as hermeneutic inquiries which develop our pre-ontological understanding of our own mode of Being and of Being in general, respectively. We can now grasp the fundamental feature of each interpretation, namely, the explicit projection of each upon its meaning, or its condition of possibility. In the former case, after unpacking the various basic structures of Being-in-the-world (worldhood, Being-in, etc.), and naming their unity care, Heidegger poses the question of the condition of the possibility of this unity.<sup>62</sup> As already noted, this turns out to be temporality. The interpretation then proceeds to uncover the specific ways in which the features of Being-in-the-world are grounded in the structure of temporality, and this is the principle focus of Division II of *Being and Time*.

Finally, we may return to the projected structure of fundamental ontology proper. As we have already explained, the interpretation of the meaning of Being as such was not carried out in *Being and Time*, but its essential features were laid out in *Basic Problems of Phenomenology*. Without going into too much detail about the structure of Dasein's temporality, Heidegger's intention was to use the results of the existential analytic to show that because pre-ontological understanding belongs to Dasein's Being, and the meaning of Dasein's Being is temporality, that temporality is the condition for the possibility of the

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p. 371.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

understanding of Being.<sup>63</sup> This makes temporality the horizon for the interpretation of the meaning of Being, and this interpretation then takes the form of working out the specific ways in which the various aspects and modes of Being are grounded upon it. However, the precise way that temporality functions as the meaning of Dasein's Being and the way it functions as the meaning of Being as such are distinct. Heidegger calls the latter primordial temporality (*Temporalität*) to distinguish it from the former.<sup>64</sup> The difference between the two is simply the temporal interpretation of the difference between Dasein and the world. Just as there can be no Dasein without world, there is no temporality without primordial temporality, or vice versa. Nonetheless, whereas the former provides the structure of all comportment toward beings, the latter is the horizon within which beings can appear as such. Moreover, this horizon is not restricted to the appearance of beings in the present, but is in fact the unity of what Heidegger calls the horizontal schemata of past, present and future. In essence, Heidegger's aim was to locate the unity of the various aspects and modes of Being within the structure of primordial time as the horizon within which beings are encountered, and he believed that this would lead to temporal solutions to all of the problems of classical ontology. Indeed, at the end of *Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, he proclaims that ontology is *temporal science*.<sup>65</sup>

This basic outline is the closest Heidegger comes to fulfilling the two functions of the existential analytic laid out in the last chapter, and thus completing the formulation of the question of Being begun in *Being and Time*. On the one hand, the question has been identified as a matter of interpreting our pre-ontological understanding of Being in terms of its condition of possibility. On the other, the first step in this interpretation has been taken, insofar as this condition has been identified as time, and its structure has been described in a preliminary fashion (Division II of *Being and Time*). Heidegger never proceeds beyond this basic outline, but it is interesting to note that even as the concept of temporality becomes less important after *Basic Problems*, slowly being replaced with a renewed concern with the concept of truth, the essential elements of this formulation remain intact, at least for a while. This is evident in *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, where Heidegger repeats the same basic strategy, locating the meaning of Dasein's Being in *world-forming*, and the meaning of Being as such within the *prevailing of world* that corresponds to it.<sup>66</sup> Although this is arguably

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<sup>63</sup> *BPP*, p. 280.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 274.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 323.

<sup>66</sup> *FCM*, pp. 349-366.

even briefer and less developed than *Basic Problems*, it displays the same essential structure – the location of the meaning of Being within the structure of the horizon within which beings can be encountered as such, or the essence of the “world as manifestness of beings as such as a whole”.<sup>67</sup>

This way of formulating the question has an important consequence. As we have already explained, the horizon within which beings can be encountered is projected by Dasein. The structure of this horizon must therefore be understood in terms of Dasein’s own existential structure. This means that the meaning of Being is ultimately located within Dasein itself, and thus in some sense dependent upon it. The multiplicity of regions of beings, the modes that characterise them, and the way the various aspects of Being are articulated within them are contained in advance in the way that Dasein opens up a world for itself. The development of our pre-ontological understanding of Being into a proper concept of Being is thus a matter of making *explicit* what was already *implicit* within this understanding, albeit by way of a complicated analysis of our own existential structure.<sup>68</sup> The consequence of this is that there is nothing more to Being than the way in which entities are made intelligible to Dasein. This creates a certain proximity between Heidegger and Kant, insofar as it means that the inquiry into Being is a matter of inquiring into the conditions of the possibility *intelligibility*, in a manner analogous to Kant’s inquiry into the conditions of the possibility of *experience*.<sup>69</sup> Indeed, although there is nothing comparable to modes of Being in Kant’s system, his account of the *categories* does amount to an account of the aspects of Being, the inquiry into the underlying structure of which does correspond to Kant’s notion of metaphysics.

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p. 349.

<sup>68</sup> This might appear to contradict the claim made in the first chapter (section 3, part *i*), that Heidegger does not present the question as a matter of simply making explicit our pre-ontological understanding. However, the point is that Heidegger does not start out by *assuming* that the question is simply a matter of explication, but rather tries to demonstrate this point. The reasons for this are precisely the same as those for the claim that Heidegger does not *define* Being as intelligibility given below.

<sup>69</sup> Of course, how one articulates this proximity will depend upon one’s reading of Kant. Heidegger’s own reading of Kant is highly idiosyncratic, although he retracts much of it later on. The reading presented *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics* draws very explicit parallels between the projects of *Being and Time* and the *Critique of Pure Reason*, claiming that Kant’s synthetic *a priori* knowledge is equivalent to the understanding of Being, and that his transcendental inquiry is thereby equivalent to the scholastic *metaphysica generalis* or ontology proper (*KPM*, pp. 9-11). Heidegger nonetheless criticises Kant for failing to take up the question in a sufficiently originary fashion (*KPM*, Part 4). Despite engaging with the metaphysical tradition coming out of Aristotle, Kant essentially *redefines* metaphysics as transcendental inquiry. By contrast, Heidegger *reorients* metaphysics by uncovering the original problem that the tradition is concerned with, and showing how this makes metaphysics something other than the tradition takes it to be. This distinguishes Heidegger from Kant both on his own reading and on any less metaphysical reading of him. We’ll discuss Heidegger’s account of metaphysics in more detail in chapters 3 and 4.

However, it is important to interpret this connection between Being and intelligibility correctly. There are a number of commentators who hold that it is not the result of an argument, but rather a matter of *definition*.<sup>70</sup> This position is perhaps expressed most succinctly by Taylor Carman: “Being is the intelligibility, or more precisely the condition of the intelligibility, of entities as entities.”<sup>71</sup> On this interpretation, what Heidegger means when he talks about the Being of a particular entity is nothing more than its meaning, and what Heidegger means when he talks about Being in general is simply the conditions under which entities can be meaningful in this way. This means that in raising the question of the meaning of Being Heidegger is *directly* inquiring into the conditions of the possibility of intelligibility. There are a number of things which recommend this reading. First, there is a very close relationship between meaning of entities and their Being within the existential analytic: “If we say that entities ‘have meaning’, this signifies that they have become accessible *in their Being*; and this Being, as projected upon its “upon-which”, is what ‘really’ ‘has meaning’ first of all.”<sup>72</sup> Second, Heidegger’s insistence that ontology must be phenomenology seems to indicate that he takes Being to inhere in the way entities are given to us, or the conditions under which they are made intelligible to us.

However, there is a serious problem with this reading. If Heidegger had simply defined Being as intelligibility, then his inquiry into Being would be radically disconnected from the history of philosophy as he himself understood it. This is most easily demonstrated by considering his relationship to Aristotle. As we showed in the previous chapter, Heidegger takes the origin of the question of Being to lie in Aristotle’s problem of the unity of the manifold senses of ‘Being’. He does not take Aristotle to have correctly formulated the question, but he does at least take him to be concerned with the same topic. Yet it is clear that Aristotle does not take ‘Being’ to be synonymous with ‘intelligibility’, and despite his tendency to find phenomenological themes within Aristotle’s work, Heidegger does not interpret Aristotle in this way. This means that Heidegger must see the claim that Being is intelligibility as a genuine improvement upon Aristotle’s position, and this can only be the case if it is not a matter of definition. The same reasoning applies in relation to Heidegger’s

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<sup>70</sup> This interpretation is adopted most famously by Hubert Dreyfus (*Being-in-the-World*, p. 10) and many of those influenced by his reading of Heidegger. It is also adopted by Thomas Sheehan in his essay ‘A Paradigm Shift in Heidegger Research’ (section 2). This interpretation is explicitly rejected by William Blattner (‘Is Heidegger a Kantian Idealist?’, *Heidegger Reexamined, Vol. 2: Truth, Realism and the History of Being*, p. 186), although he argues against it on slightly different grounds.

<sup>71</sup> Carman, p. 15.

<sup>72</sup> *B&T*, pp. 371-372.

engagement with the ontological debates that appear in the metaphysical tradition following Aristotle.<sup>73</sup> Heidegger could hardly take himself to be providing solutions to the problems of classical ontology if he was not addressing the same issues as them. Although the early Heidegger is critical of the metaphysical tradition, he does not reject it outright, but takes himself to be in dialogue with it.<sup>74</sup> For this to be the case he must *demonstrate* that Being is intelligibility, rather than *stipulating* it.

This is precisely what the above formulation of the question is supposed to do. Heidegger's preliminary formulation of the question does not assume that Being is intelligibility, but the constraints he places upon completing this formulation ultimately lead to a position in which whatever the precise structure of Being is, it is to be located in the way in which entities are made intelligible to us. How then are we to account for the features of Heidegger's work which recommend the definitional reading? The answer to this lies in the fact that Heidegger does hold that Being is intelligibility at the beginning of *Being and Time*, much as he already holds that time is the horizon for interpreting it, even though he is committed to demonstrating both of these assumptions. He is thus at times tempted to foreshadow these results in ways that he is not strictly entitled to. This is relatively harmless in the case of the close relationship between the meaning of entities and their Being, as nothing in the argument hinges upon it. However, the identification of phenomenology and ontology is more complicated. Although the claim that *fundamental* ontology is an essentially phenomenological inquiry is not deployed in the argument that establishes the identity of Being and intelligibility, it nonetheless implicitly depends upon the claim that the *regional* ontology of Dasein, or the existential analytic, is an essentially phenomenological inquiry. This means that even if we see the identification of phenomenology and ontology in the introduction to *Being and Time* as an essentially harmless foreshadowing of a position he will ultimately justify, it is an open question as to whether Heidegger is justified in taking a phenomenological approach to the Being of the questioner. This is not a particularly serious issue, as it is possible to argue that the results Heidegger's phenomenological method produces are sufficient to justify it, especially in the absence of a viable alternative approach. Nonetheless, this leaves open the possibility of alternative (i.e., non-phenomenological) methodologies.

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<sup>73</sup> Although Heidegger engages with traditional ontological debates in several places, the best examples are to be found in *Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, Part I of which is given over to this task.

<sup>74</sup> We will discuss Heidegger's relation to the metaphysical tradition in more detail in chapter 4.



We have now answered two of the questions we posed in the last chapter: we have provided a solution to the interpretative paradox and thereby established the sense in which the question of Being is a question of meaning, and we have given an account of what the interpretation of the meaning of Being consists in. However, we have not addressed the second question we posed in the last chapter, namely, what kind of understanding of the nature of meaning we require to formulate the question, and, in relation to this, to what extent Heidegger's formulation is dependent upon his own theory of meaning. We have established that the question must be a question of meaning insofar as the subject matter has a peculiarly reflexive structure. This means that the inquiry into the meaning of Being has a hermeneutically circular structure, and that it must therefore take the form of an interpretation of our pre-ontological understanding of Being. All of this fits neatly with Heidegger's hermeneutic theory of meaning and interpretation. The question is to what extent it is dependent upon Heidegger's theory, and if it can be separated from it, to what extent we would require an alternative theory.

Now, it is obvious that the basic insight into the question as a question of meaning is independent of Heidegger's theory of significance and the role it plays in constituting the meaning of most words. This is because Heidegger's account of the meaning of the word 'Being' appeals to the more general notion of meaning understood in terms of conditions of possibility. However, although this more general notion of meaning is essential to Heidegger's account of what it is to interpret the meaning of Being, and thus to *his* formulation of the question, it is not clear that the basic insight is dependent upon it either. It seems possible that one could interpret our pre-ontological understanding in a way which did not proceed by inquiring into the conditions of the possibility of this understanding. If this is the case, then Heidegger's theory of meaning could be abandoned entirely, without abandoning the basic insight, and thus the idea of the question of the *meaning* of Being as such.

However, to pursue such an alternative approach one would have to meet several conditions. First, although one would not necessarily have to provide a complete theory of meaning, one would definitely have to provide an alternative account of interpretation. This is because, as we have seen, Heidegger's own account of interpretation is intimately bound up with his theory of meaning and understanding. Secondly, this account of interpretation would have to allow for the kind of hermeneutically circular structure the basic insight

indicates. Thirdly, in accordance with what we determined at the end of the last chapter, one would have to provide an account of the meaning of the various senses of Being, and the way our grasp of these senses is bound up with our pre-ontological understanding of meaning. In short, in order to formulate the question without using Heidegger's theory of meaning, one would require a theory of meaning and interpretation rich enough to give an alternative account of what the interpretation of our pre-ontological understanding of Being consists in.

Heidegger's initial formulation of the question establishes the identity of Being and intelligibility, and thus of ontology and phenomenology. In doing so it retrospectively legitimates Heidegger's phenomenological approach to the existential analytic. However, this essentially depends upon the phenomenological theory of meaning that Heidegger develops within the analytic. If there could be a non-phenomenological approach to the question of the structure of questioning, and a correlative non-phenomenological theory of meaning, it might also then be possible to adopt a non-phenomenological approach to the question of Being itself. This is to say that an alternative methodology for addressing the two principle constraints placed upon the formulation of the question might lead to the denial of the identity of Being and intelligibility, and thus undercut the retrospective legitimation of phenomenology. For the moment, this can be nothing more than a possibility. We must now turn to the ways in which Heidegger departs from his initial formulation of the question in his subsequent work.