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Hermeneutic Conditions and the Objective in Heidegger's "Being and Time"

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Abstract. For several years an interesting debate has unfolded regarding the extent to which Heidegger's thinking in *Being and Time* can be classified as either idealist or realist, or rather, and for many this is Heidegger's official stance, as an attempt to overcome the presuppositions that give rise to these doctrines. One way of considering the debate regards the question as to whether the conditions of intelligibility or, as Taylor Carman calls them, the 'hermeneutic conditions,' that *Being and Time* lays out, are to be understood as access conditions to, or as metaphysical conditions of, entities. The first but not the second interpretation is compatible with a realist reading of *Being and Time*. For many, including me, the realist reading is the most satisfactory one, both exegetically and theoretically. Several attempts at working out a way of making sense of the transcendental conditions as access conditions have been made, starting with Dreyfus's and Spinoza's widely discussed paper. A very important contribution to the debate is owed to Taylor Carman's excellent *Heidegger's Analytic*, where he makes a case for a full-blooded realist reading of Heidegger's early work. I will argue, however, that Carman's reading is not completely successful in making sense of the conditions of intelligibility as access conditions rather than metaphysical conditions. I will present a general diagnosis of Carman's impasse and argue that it results from a thought that has no hold in Heidegger's way of thinking.

Key words: Heidegger, realism, hermeneutic conditions, Carman, objectivity

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I

For several years an interesting debate has unfolded regarding the extent to which Heidegger's thinking in *Being and Time* can be classified as either idealist or realist, or rather, and for many this is Heidegger's official stance, as an attempt to overcome the presuppositions that give rise to these doctrines.

This issue is closely related to the problem of interpreting *Being and Time*'s transcendental character. As it is well known, in the Introduction to this work Heidegger calls his enterprise a fundamental ontology, which, roughly, he understands as a transcendental philosophy on the *a priori* conditions for our understanding of being.¹ Within this framework, one way of considering the debate regards the question as to whether the conditions of intelligibility or, as Taylor Carman calls them, the 'hermeneutic conditions,' that *Being and Time* lays out, are to be understood as access conditions to, or as metaphysical conditions of, entities.² The first but not the second interpretation is compatible with a realist reading of *Being and Time*. For many, including me, the realist reading is the most satisfactory one, both exegetically and theoretically. Several attempts at working out a way of making sense of the transcendental conditions as access conditions have been made, starting with Dreyfus's and Spinoza's widely discussed paper.³ A very important contribution to the debate is owed to Taylor Carman's excellent *Heidegger's Analytic*,⁴ where he

¹ M. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. J. Macquarrie, E. Robinson, Harper & Row, New York 1962 / *Sein und Zeit*, in: *Martin Heidegger Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 2, ed. F.-W. von Herrmann, Klostermann, Frankfurt a.M. 1978, 31/11, 33–34/13. I follow Macquarrie's and Robinson's translation with slight modifications. I use the abbreviation BT in reference to this work, stating first the page number of the English translation followed by the page number of the German edition.

² See H. Dreyfus, Ch. Spinoza, *Coping with Things-in-Themselves: A Practice-Based Phenomenological Argument for Realism*, *Inquiry* 42(1999)1, 49–78, and J. Malpas, *The Fragility of Robust Realism: A Reply to Dreyfus and Spinoza*, *Inquiry* 42(1999)1, 89–101.

³ H. Dreyfus, Ch. Spinoza, *op. cit.*, 49–78.

⁴ T. Carman, *Heidegger's Analytic. Interpretation, Discourse and Authenticity in Being and Time*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge–New York 2003.

makes a case for a full-blooded realist reading of Heidegger's early work that debunks the most important idealist proposals, i.e. those of Lafont and Blattner,⁵ and avoids what he correctly identifies as problematic and unnecessary assumptions of Dreyfus's and Spinoza's realist reading.⁶

I will argue, however, that Carman's reading is not completely successful in making sense of the conditions of intelligibility – or the hermeneutic conditions, as he calls them⁷ – as access conditions rather than metaphysical conditions. In the course of his analysis Carman expresses worries that suggest a quasi-Cartesian reflex⁸ on his part, a reflex which has no place in Heidegger's thinking. Identifying and dislodging this presupposition is important, for it seems to be shared by other realist readings such as Dreyfus-Spinoza's and Philipse's, and allows us to bring the true nature of Heidegger's realism into relief.

I will start by presenting Dreyfus-Spinoza's realist proposal and Carman's reaction to it (section 2). Next (section 3), I will focus on Carman's worries about the way realism can be accommodated within Heidegger's philosophy, explain what seems to be the motivation of Carman's concerns, and why such motivation is exegetically ill-founded. Finally (section 4), I will present a general diagnosis of Carman's impasse, argue that the diagnosis can also be applied to Dreyfus and Spinoza, and that it is based on a thought that has no hold in Heidegger's way of thinking.

⁵ W. D. Blattner, *Heidegger's Temporal Idealism*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge–New York 1999; Ch. Lafont, *Heidegger, Language, and World-Disclosure*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2000. Blattner responds to Carman in: W. Blattner, *Heidegger's Kantian Idealism Revisited*, *Inquiry* 47(2004)4, 321–337. For a recent discussion of Lafont's interpretation, see D. McManus, *Heidegger and the Supposition of a Single, Objective World*, *European Journal of Philosophy* (2012). (By the time the present paper was finished, McManus's paper was only available online).

⁶ A criticism that in my view applies just as well to more recent realist readings, such as H. Philipse, *Heidegger's 'Scandal of Philosophy': The Problem of the Ding an Sich in 'Being and Time'*, in: *Transcendental Heidegger*, eds. S. Crowell, J. Malpas, Stanford University Press, Stanford, Calif. 2007, 169–189.

⁷ In Carman's mouth, hermeneutic conditions are not simply conditions of intelligibility, but conditions of explicit intelligibility, that is to say, in his view, conditions of interpretation. However, I don't think this distinction, if warranted, is relevant for the ensuing discussion.

⁸ I owe this expression to Stephen Mulhall, who used it in discussion.

II

Let us start by considering, very briefly, Dreyfus's and Spinoza's well-known attempt at finding the foundations of robust realism in Heidegger's philosophy.⁹ This effort derives from the perception of a problem; namely, that *in principle* Heidegger seems to endorse a form of 'deflationary realism.' On Dreyfus's and Spinoza's mouth, deflationary realism is the doctrine that we cannot conceive the totality of entities independently of the totality of our practices and vice versa. This position "makes unintelligible all claims about both things-in-themselves apart from practices and the totality of practices apart from things."¹⁰ *In principle*, they argue, "Heidegger seems to agree with the deflationary realist that while entities show up as independent of us, the being or intelligibility of entities – what entities *are*, Joseph Rouse would say – depends on our practices. So any talk of things-in-themselves must be put in scare quotes."¹¹

For Dreyfus and Spinoza, Heidegger's apparent endorsement of realism¹² "amounts to the *seemingly paradoxical* claim that we have practices for making sense of entities as independent of those very practices."¹³ However, Dreyfus and Spinoza think that in several instances Heidegger seems to endorse a *robust* form of realism, understood as the thesis that entities are independent of all practices of

⁹ All the quotes to Dreyfus and Spinoza in this section are to this paper.

¹⁰ "We cannot make sense of the question whether the *totality* of things could be independent of the *totality* of our practices or whether things are essentially dependent on our practices, because to raise these questions meaningfully requires thinking (...) that we can conceive of the totality of things, and the totality of practices with sufficient independence from each other to claim that one is logically prior". H. Dreyfus, Ch. Spinoza, op. cit., 252. Dreyfus and Spinoza find this doctrine exemplified by Davidson, a point I cannot take issue with here. The point is discussed in J. Malpas, op. cit., 89–101.

¹¹ H. Dreyfus, Ch. Spinoza, op. cit., 253.

¹² The relevant passage is: "What-is [*Das Seiende*] is, quite independently of the experience by which it is disclosed, the acquaintance in which it is discovered, and the grasping in which its nature is ascertained". BT, 228/183.

¹³ H. Dreyfus, Ch. Spinoza, op. cit., 254; my italics.

making them intelligible. And so they formulate the following problem: “How can Heidegger have it both ways? Does the real exist and has properties *in itself* or only ‘in itself,’ relative to our background practices?”¹⁴ In response to this question they purport to show 1) that for Heidegger it is possible to *make sense* of the Dasein-independence of entities, and therefore, that such possibility is not *incoherent*; and 2) that Heidegger has resources, which he never completely exploited, to make a case for robust realism in science, i.e., the thesis that science can gain access to entities as they are in themselves. The first issue is, then, that of the *intelligibility* of robust realism, the second, that of its *justification*, at least as regards the entities of empirical sciences. I will not discuss Dreyfus–Spinoza’s proposal at length. For present purposes, what is important to register is simply that their solution to the second problem rests on the possibility of certain form of experience, namely, the experience of the *strange*, which occurs by virtue of *defamiliarisation* or *deworldling*. As they characterise it, “defamiliarisation is (...) the breakdown of everyday coping, and all that remains of intelligibility after defamiliarisation are coping practices that enable us to *identify* things in a non-committal,¹⁵ contingent, prima facie not fully adequate way.”¹⁶ On the basis of this kind of experience in which our ordinary forms of making sense of things are somewhat suspended while certain form of reference to entities is maintained, it is possible, Dreyfus and Spinoza argue, to build knowledge that presents its objects in their Dasein-independence. Noticeably, Dreyfus–Spinoza’s proposal proceeds in two stages:

1. *They perceive and specify a problem* regarding the place of realism within Heidegger’s philosophy.

¹⁴ Ibid., 256.

¹⁵ By ‘non-committal reference’ they mean a form of reference that does not depend on picking out ‘essential features’ of the entity that is being referred to; in consequence, this form of reference implies no commitment as to the essence of the entity in question, even though it is enough to identify it. They say Heidegger envisaged something like this in his early writings under the heading ‘formal indication’. H. Dreyfus, Ch. Spinoza, op. cit., 258.

¹⁶ Ibid., 262–263.

2. Given the *prima facie* problem, Dreyfus and Spinoza *set out to provide an interpretation that shows that Heidegger himself offers the resources to amend the problem*, resources he never exploited for that purpose.¹⁷

The problem is that *in principle*, Heidegger's philosophy suggests that the conditions of intelligibility¹⁸ are *constitutive* of the object of our understanding. This is an anti-realist position that is considered undesirable.¹⁹ Part of their solution to the problem lies in *allowing for a form of understanding that has the character of an exception to the way intelligibility in principle operates*.

Carman explicitly dismisses the first problem Dreyfus and Spinoza attempt to solve, namely, that of the *coherence* of realism. For Carman there is no such problem, neither of itself, nor within Heidegger's philosophy. He is somewhat silent, however, as regards the second of the problems Dreyfus and Spinoza consider, that of the justification of robust realism. Carman's apparent lack of concern with this second problem is not important to our analysis.²⁰ But the reason he thinks the problem of coherence is not a real concern is worth considering. Carman asserts, correctly in my view, that there is no conflict between the idea that our understanding of things is conditioned and the idea that such understanding can be of things as they are in themselves, i.e., independently of the conditions of our understanding. He explains this idea in analogy with our use of conventions.²¹

"It is only apparently paradoxical to insist that we can know things as they are, independently of the conditions of our knowing them, in

¹⁷ In particular, Dreyfus and Spinoza allude here to Heidegger's notion of 'formal indication.'

¹⁸ What they call the practice-based framework of intelligibility.

¹⁹ Or a form of deflationary realism, as Dreyfus and Spinoza call it. It is important to note, however, that insofar as deflationary realism asserts that entities are not *completely* Dasein-independent, it can be considered an anti-realist position.

²⁰ Most probably, for Carman the main objection to realism is the charge of incoherence – at least as he understands it – and hence removing it would be sufficient for the doctrine in question to hold.

²¹ All references to Carman are to T. Carman, op. cit.

the same way that it is only apparently paradoxical to claim that a planet can be (roughly) 7,900 miles in diameter, independent of the institution of miles as units of measurement. For from the fact that we cannot specify the size of anything without relying on our own conventions of measurement, it does not follow that nothing can be said to have any determinate size independently of those conventions.”²²

As we will see a little later, it is significant that Carman thinks that this idea that our understanding of things can be both conditioned and revelatory of things as they are independently of those conditions can be expressed “even” using the “double-aspect construal of appearances and things in themselves” that is sometimes applied to Kant’s philosophy: “Heidegger’s ontic realism requires the further possibility that things can in principle appear to us as they are in themselves. Of course, no knowledge is complete or exhaustive, so appearances will always only be partial and selective. Nevertheless, it is perfectly possible, in Heidegger’s view, that appearances will sometimes coincide with at least parts or aspects of the structure of occurrent entities in themselves.”²³

For Carman, then, realism is in itself a coherent position, and therefore Dreyfus’s and Spinoza’s attempt at defending its intelligibility is unnecessary.²⁴ However, somewhat implicitly, Carman’s reading is not completely free of an anxiety about how exactly to locate realism within Heidegger’s philosophy. In other words, he still thinks that some work has to be done in order to *ground* realism in this context, and in this sense, he *redefines* rather than avoids the first stage of Dreyfus-Spinoza’s approach to the problem.

III

Carman’s worry stems from the identification of a fundamental feature of our understanding, a feature that in my view the precedent readings

²² Ibid., 182.

²³ Ibid. Carman translates Heidegger’s technical concept of *vorhanden* as ‘occurrent.’ ‘*Zuhanden*’ is rendered as ‘available.’ For coherence reasons I follow this use throughout this paper.

²⁴ Ibid., 188–189.

did not appreciate sufficiently: “Indeed, the contingency of our practices *vis-à-vis* the occurrent entities to which they afford us *access is itself part of what we understand* about ourselves and our relation to the world in our encounter with those entities.”²⁵ In other words, what we understand about things not only *can coincide* with the way those things are in themselves, but this is a possibility that is somehow immediately and pre-reflectively incorporated in the understanding of those things. This, in my view, is exactly right and deserves centre stage in the current discussion. One of the features of our understanding of entities as occurrent is what in a similar context John McDowell calls an *objective purport*.²⁶ This is a phenomenological fact that relates to what Husserl called the transcendence of the object. In *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology* Heidegger ponders this fact quite a lot more than in *Being and Time*. As he discusses perception, Heidegger states: “The occurrent surely doesn’t undergo any alteration due to my perceiving it (...) On the contrary, *implicit in the sense* of perceptual apprehension is the aim to uncover what is perceived *in such a way that it exhibits itself in and of its own self*.”²⁷

Some lines later Heidegger asserts that “something like an understanding of occurrentness is already implicit in the intentionality of perception.”²⁸ This understanding is explained in purely phenomenological terms, that is to say, this understanding is something that figures

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 189; my italics. Carman also discusses this feature of understanding in pp. 128–132. It is worth noting that this discussion is very insightful and completely free of the anxieties that lead him to the flawed reading I am starting to discuss.

²⁶ J. McDowell, *The Disjunctive Conception of Experience as Material for a Transcendental Argument*, in: *The Engaged Intellect. Philosophical Essays*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass.–London 2009, 225–240.

²⁷ M. Heidegger, *Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, trans. A. Hofstadter, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, Ind. 1982 / M. Heidegger, *Die Grundprobleme der Phänomenologie*, in: *Martin Heidegger Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 24, ed. F.-W. von Herrmann, Klostermann, Frankfurt a.M. 1997, 71/99–101; my italics. For this work, I will hereupon use the abbreviation BPP and refer first to the page number of the English translation followed by the page number of the German edition. I make slight modifications to the English translation.

²⁸ BPP, 70/98–99.

in and informs the intentionality of perception, not something (a piece of information, say) that is somehow added to it: “In order to see this we need only interrogate the tendency of apprehension, or its directional sense, *which lies in perception itself*. In accord with its directional sense, perceiving intends the occurrent *in its* occurrentness. The occurrent in its occurrentness belongs to the directional sense – that is to say, the intentio is directed toward uncovering the occurrent in its occurrentness.”²⁹

It seems possible to generalise the point to all intentional comportment *towards the occurrent*:³⁰ “Intentional comportment itself as such orients itself toward the occurrent. I do not first need to ask how the immanent intentional experience acquires transcendent validity; rather, what has to be seen is that it is precisely intentionality and nothing else in which *transcendence* consists.”³¹

What I am calling the *objective purport of cognition* consists, then, in the fact that when we understand an entity as occurrent, a fundamental part of that understanding is that such entity is Dasein-independent and that what we understand about it (if correct) belongs to the entity (or relates to it) *as it is in itself*, i.e., independently of our understanding it.³² It is important to note that this feature is *internal* in the sense that the point is not that our understanding is always *in fact* related to a Dasein-independent entity, for we can be mistaken about it. Also, recall that the objective purport of a piece of understanding is not something over and beyond that piece of understanding, something that is somehow *added* to it. Rather, it is constitutive of that piece of understanding in the sense that it *presents us* entities *as independent of*

²⁹ BPP, 71/99–101; my italics.

³⁰ I do not think the point applies to intentional comportment *tout court* because it seems that sensations, emotions, etc., cannot be treated as something occurrent and thereby nor as Dasein-independent, even though there are intentional comportments towards them.

³¹ BPP, 63/88–89. See also how Heidegger applies the point to the phenomenon of merely “bringing to mind”. BPP, 70/98–99.

³² Obviously, this claim requires qualification in the case of relational properties and secondary qualities.

that understanding.³³ The objective *purport* of the understanding of the occurrent consists in the fact that such understanding *purports* to be of an independent entity.³⁴

As mentioned, for Carman the objective purport of understanding gives rise to a problem. Let me quote at length his formulation of it: “We understand occurrent entities and socially constituted artifacts in fundamentally different ways, and our phenomenology ought to reflect that difference. Heidegger’s analytic is sensitive to the difference in denying that cognition, or assertoric interpretation, has a monopoly on our understanding of the occurrent. Again, if it did, we would be in no position to suppose that the entities uncovered in those interpretations themselves lie outside the sphere of ontological structures or hermeneutic conditions constitutive of Dasein’s being-in-the-world. And yet this is precisely what Heidegger’s ontic realism asserts: *Occurrent entities exist independently of the conditions constitutive of our*

³³ It is important to clarify that I understand the adjective ‘objective’ as primarily related to something’s being as it is *independently of our understanding*. In this sense, I am not using the term as primarily related to a particular *mode* of understanding *irrespective* of the actual relation of that type of understanding to the world. The latter seems to be the sense in which Heidegger himself understands objectivity more often. He frequently talks of objectivity as the result of a process of ‘objectification’ by means of which entities are understood in such a way so as to make them possible objects of scientific inquiry (say, as calculable entities). BT, 414/363. ‘Objectification’ involves projecting criteria for counting as an object of inquiry. This way of talking about objectivity is developed further in later texts. On this view, objectivity relates primordially to the mode of understanding rather than to the entity the mode of understanding is about, and the question as to whether that entity is Dasein-independent or not is not in the foreground. To be sure, in its more general form this use of the concept of ‘objective’ can be traced back to the scholastic tradition.

³⁴ It is important to note, however, that although this is not Heidegger’s more common way of employing the term ‘objective’ it is not completely alien to him. Or at least that is what I think the following passage suggests: “The objectivity of a science is regulated primarily in terms of whether that science can confront us with the entity which belongs to it as its theme, and *can bring it, uncovered in the primordially of its being, to our understanding*”. BT, 447/395. I take it that “bringing the entity in the primordially of its being” can be understood in terms of uncovering the entity as it is in itself.

interpretation of them as occurrent. Such a notion of occurrent reality would find no place in our understanding if we had no experience of the occurrentness of entities apart from our conceptual and propositional attitudes about them. But we do.³⁵

Very roughly, the problem is that *it is prima facie unclear how can our understanding have objective purport*, as I have called it, how can it *present itself as related to entities in their Dasein-independence*. For this reason, Carman sets out to establish what can be the source of the objective purport of our understanding of the occurrent. Practical purposive engagement or absorbed coping cannot be the source of the objective purport of understanding for the reason that, according to Heidegger, the being of available or ready-to-hand entities is Dasein-relative in the sense that it consists in the role the entity plays within a Dasein-centred framework of action. This means that this type of entities do not show up as objective in the relevant sense. Carman needs to look somewhere else. His proposal is that the objective purport of understanding derives from a type of encounter with certain type of entities, i.e. anxious encounter with nature. As one can see, Carman's approach to the question of Heidegger's realism is strikingly similar to the two-stage approach of Dreyfus-Spinosa's: the identification of a problem and the Heideggerian amendment. Moreover, Carman's solution is also very close to Dreyfus-Spinosa's, for it involves a radical disruption of both our practical and our usual detached/cognitive ways of understanding things.³⁶

I don't want to examine Carman's solution to the problem. For present purposes, the most important thing is that his formulation of the problem is flawed in the first place. In order to show this, let me start by reconstructing what seems to be the line of reasoning behind Carman's assertion that there is a problem with the source of the objective purport of our understanding of the occurrent.

(1) Our understanding of the occurrent has an objective purport.

³⁵ T. Carman, op. cit., 190; Carman's italics.

³⁶ It is also quite similar to Philipse's, even though Philipse's appeal to anxiety is not restricted to the encounter of natural entities. See H. Philipse, op. cit.

(2) The usual form of understanding of the occurrent is assertoric-conceptual cognition.

(3) The objective purport of our understanding of the occurrent cannot depend on assertoric-conceptual cognition.

My critique focuses on the third claim. In my view, this claim does not reflect Heidegger's position and this fact introduces a critical distance between Carman's interpretation of the relation of understanding and the world, and Heidegger's own picture. Let us start by considering the alleged support for this claim. Carman's line of reasoning in this respect seems to be grounded in Heidegger's widely known critique of the Cartesian-Kantian conception of understanding. The relevant idea is expressed thus: "It is a striking fact about our understanding of things that we can, as it were, see past the contingency of our practices *in a way Cartesian and Kantian subjects arguably would not be able to see past* their ideas, their rational faculties, and the pure categories of their understanding."³⁷

We can put the point in the following way:

The objective purport of the understanding of the occurrent cannot derive from a Cartesian–Kantian type of understanding.

Some lines after the quoted passage, and without any explicit relevant inference, Carman states claim (3) thus:

The pure occurrentness of entities therefore cannot be exhausted by the kind of objectivity constituted in cognition and theory or assertoric interpretation (BT, §§33, 44b).³⁸

The reference to *Being and Time* in this quotation is indicative of the fact that Carman is inferring (3) from (a), for the Cartesian–Kantian conception of understanding is the topic of the cited sections. Now is this inference correct? Evidently, the first question is whether Heidegger holds (a). I think this can be granted. As it is well known, one of the main points Heidegger makes in his critique of the Cartesian–Kantian conception of understanding is that it involves an unbridgeable ontological separation between the subject and its object. Arguably, (a)

³⁷ T. Carman, op. cit., 189; my italics.

³⁸ Ibid., 190; Carman's reference to *Being and Time*.

could be derived from this characterisation. The main question regarding Carman's reasoning is whether (a) entails (3). It is not particularly difficult to make a good guess about what might lead Carman to think so: a fundamental component of Heidegger's critique is that the Cartesian–Kantian conception of understanding is modelled on conceptual-assertoric cognition.

So Carman seems to be thinking that since the Cartesian-Kantian conception cannot ground the objective purport of understanding (a), and such conception is *modelled* on cognition (b), then, cognition does not provide such ground either (3). But this reasoning only works under an additional presupposition, namely:

(a) The model of cognition on which the Cartesian–Kantian conception rests is a *correct* model of cognition (i.e. real or actual cognition involves the Cartesian–Kantian scheme).

This, I contend, is not something Heidegger says or implies. It is true that Heidegger holds against the Cartesian-Kantian view of understanding that it is modelled on a very particular type of understanding, namely, assertoric-conceptual cognition. The Cartesian–Kantian view supposes that cognition is primordial and thereby that all forms of understanding are reducible to it. For Heidegger, this supposition is wrong. The more primordial form of understanding is the one we usually exhibit in average everydayness, namely, practical-purposive engagement with entities, i.e., absorbed coping. This mistake damages the Cartesian–Kantian view in two ways. *First*, it makes it a wrong account of *understanding in general* because there are forms of understanding that are not reducible to cognition. This is the claim that usually draws more attention from readers of *Being and Time*. Perhaps one of the most notable insights Heidegger's analysis of being-in-the-world offers is that the practical-purposive type of understanding that leads most of our lives is nothing like the type of understanding the Cartesian-Kantian view depicts. It seems to me, though, that Carman focuses on this aspect of Heidegger's critique more than he should. *For there is a second*, less exploited consequence of Heidegger's critique, namely, that the Cartesian–Kantian view of understanding *also fails as a conception of cognition in particular*. By taking cognition as primor-

dial, the Cartesian-Kantian view cuts it off from practice and thereby from its basic footing on the practical-holistic structure of understanding. *Cognition is then necessarily misunderstood*. Heidegger makes this point explicit: “Because cognition has been given this priority, our understanding of its ownmost kind of being gets led astray.”³⁹ Also: “No sooner was the ‘phenomenon of knowing the world’ [*Welterkennen*] grasped that it got interpreted in a ‘superficial,’ formal manner. The evidence for this is the procedure (still customary today) of setting up knowing [*Erkennen* = ‘cognition’] as a ‘relation between subject and Object’.”⁴⁰

This last passage suggests that the dichotomy subject/object, understood in the traditional metaphysically-laden way, is inadequate *even for cognition*. Carman fully acknowledges that practical-purposeful engagement grounds cognition, and this plays a very important role in his reading of *Being and Time*. But in the context of the present discussion, Carman does not seem to realise, however, that this should be taken at least as a warning against uncritically attributing the defects of Cartesian–Kantian cognition to *actual* cognition, or to cognition as Heidegger sees it. In conclusion, the Cartesian–Kantian view fails twice: first as a conception of *understanding in general*, and second as a conception of *cognition in particular*. This last point debunks premise (c) and so undermines the idea that the critique of the Cartesian–Kantian conception of understanding supports (3) (that cognition cannot ground the objective purport of understanding).

Does Carman provide alternative reasons in support of (3)? At some points Carman’s discussion suggests that one of his reasons for claiming (3) is the belief that Heidegger’s remarks about anxiety and nature reveal that ‘the in itself’ and the ‘independence of entities’ can only be properly accessed in the anxious encounter with nature. In other words, that *when Heidegger is using these expressions he has in mind the anxious encounter with nature and not cognition*. In this sense, the claim would be that for Heidegger *there is a necessary relation*

³⁹ BT, 86/59.

⁴⁰ BT, 86–87/60.

between nature, anxiety and Dasein-independence. But this is objectionable. Many passages in *Being and Time* make clear that Heidegger does not consider access to, or understanding of, the in-itself as essentially related to anxious encounter with nature. Take for instance the following passage: “Only because being is (...) understandable in Dasein (...) can Dasein also understand and conceptualise such characteristics of being as independence, the ‘in-itself,’ and Reality in general. Only because of this are ‘independent’ entities, as encountered within-the-world, accessible to circumspection.”⁴¹

This excerpt not only makes clear that independence and the in-itself are *conceptualisable* but also suggests that it is entities within-the-world – i.e., as involved in the pragmatic structure of meaning – that can be encountered as Dasein-independent. But perhaps the most decisive remarks are those that Heidegger makes in his analysis of assertoric truth: “To say an assertion “*is true*” signifies that it uncovers the entity as it is in itself” and “through Newton the [Newtonian] laws became true; and with them, entities became accessible in themselves to Dasein.”⁴² These remarks not only show that Heidegger is happy to associate the expression ‘in itself’ to cognition, but also assert that assertoric-conceptual cognition can in fact give us access to entities as Dasein-independent.

I conclude then that Carman’s motivations for thinking the objective purport of our understanding of the occurrent cannot be grounded in cognition are ill-founded. For Heidegger, there is absolutely no problem with thinking that cognition can, of itself, have objective purport.

V

I turn now to propose a diagnosis of Carman’s tendency to see a problem regarding the phenomenological place of realism in Heidegger’s account. I think Carman is somewhat unwillingly making a very problematic assumption, and realising this is instructive because, by way of

⁴¹ BT, 251/209.

⁴² BT, 261/219.

contrast, it allows us to appreciate Heidegger's actual position. This assumption insinuates itself in the type of solution Carman offers as a solution to the problem of the objective purport. The idea that the problem is solved by allowing for an *exception* to the scope of the hermeneutic conditions responds to the perception of a need to *break away* from such conditions. This is why Carman claims that had we not a non-cognitive and non-purposive form of access to entities in themselves, "we would be in no position to suppose that the entities uncovered in those interpretations [cognition] themselves *lie outside the sphere* of ontological structures or hermeneutic conditions constitutive of Dasein's being-in-the-world".⁴³ This way of talking evinces that for Carman – and he is no different from Dreyfus-Spinosa and Philipse in this regard – the conditions of intelligibility constitute some kind of *enclosure*, a "sphere" that grants us understanding at the price of cutting off our direct contact with entities. In other words, intelligibility is rendered as a necessary *intermediary* between entities and us, an intermediary both in the sense that it makes the cognitive transaction possible and in the sense that it gets in the way of a direct deal. Recall Carman's way of paving the path for the formulation of the problem: "It is a striking fact about our understanding of things that we can, as it were, *see past* the contingency of our practices."⁴⁴ The problem was, in his view, that cognition did not account for this capacity: "if cognition is the ground floor of our experience and understanding, then arguably no experience or understanding could afford a *glimpse* of things *as they are, independently of the categories of our cognition*."⁴⁵ I have shown that Carman's exegetical reasons to hold such claim are flawed. But it is still edifying to ask about the presuppositions behind his reading. The last passage suggests a line of reasoning that is also present in Dreyfus-Spinosa's reading: If intelligibility depends on Dasein, and if our cognitive efforts are directed towards Dasein-independent entities, which is what the objective purport of understanding leads us to think, then it seems that whatever we understand

⁴³ T. Carman, op. cit., 190; my italics.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 189; my italics.

⁴⁵ Ibid.; my italics.

always necessarily *falls short* of Dasein-independent entities, because it always brings in a Dasein-dependent component (the workings and elements that make possible intelligibility). Whatever we understand, the pieces of understanding we achieve, always *include* a contribution from our cognitive apparatus.⁴⁶ The problem is, apparently, that cognition is incapable of distinguishing between what it brings of itself into what we understand and the rest – if any. And this means that cognition does not allow us to recognise whether the pieces of understanding we achieve are correct, adequate or true *of Dasein-independent entities in themselves*. Thereby, the pieces of understanding cognition yields are most properly *not directly* about the Dasein-independent entities we are supposedly directed towards at a given moment, but about something else. In other words, those pieces of understanding *have another direct object*. By ‘direct object of understanding’ I mean that which shows up for us – or that towards which we are related – *most immediately* when we understand something.⁴⁷ Carman’s worries involve a picture on which this direct object is something that stands between us (or our understanding) and Dasein-independent entities, and on which this intermediary is partly constituted by Dasein’s cognitive operations. This of huge epistemological consequence: *the direct object of cognition is Dasein-dependent*. In Carman’s passage quoted above this intermediate object is partly made out of “the categories of our cognition.”⁴⁸ It is significant in this regard that when asserting, against Dreyfus and Spinosa, that strong realism is *prima facie* compatible with Heidegger’s proposal, Carman thinks the point can be made unproblematically in

⁴⁶ I understand “cognitive apparatus” here in the wide sense in which Heidegger talks about understanding: our general capacity to make sense of things, be it in absorbed coping, perception, contemplative knowing or scientific theorising.

⁴⁷ Bill Brewer’s discussion of the problem of the objects of perception has been an important influence in my approach to this issue. For one, my attention to the question of the *direct object* of understanding, as well as my definition thereof, derive from my reading of Brewer’s work. See B. Brewer, *Perception and Its Objects*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2011.

⁴⁸ The same point is made in terms of “practices” and behavioural responses” by Dreyfus and Spinosa.

the vocabulary of a “double aspect construal” typically associated with Kant: “Nevertheless, it is perfectly possible, in Heidegger’s view, that appearances will *sometimes coincide* with at least parts or aspects of the structure of occurrent entities in themselves.”⁴⁹ Here, the suggestion is that what we understand most *directly* is *appearances*, not “occurrent entities themselves.” If the Dasein-directed reading were not presupposing that the direct-object of understanding is Dasein-dependent it would not have any need whatsoever of *breaking away* or *seeing past* the conditions of understanding in order to *reach* Dasein-independent entities.

Notice that this idea that the direct object of understanding is Dasein-dependent is exactly what an idealist reading holds. Dasein’s conditions of intelligibility are constitutive of entities, and thereby it makes no sense to think of a Dasein-independent reality.

I think it is clear from the passages from Heidegger quoted above and from the general anti-Cartesian thrust of Heidegger’s philosophy that the above picture is not right. In Heidegger’s view, Dasein is open to a world in a completely direct way. This is true both of practical-purposive dealing with things and of cognition.

Despite several important differences, I think in this respect Heidegger’s position is very similar to one urged by John McDowell in *Mind and World*. McDowell discusses Wittgenstein’s remark that “When we say, and *mean*, that such-and-such is the case, we – and our meaning – do not stop anywhere short of the fact; but we mean: *this-is-so*.” McDowell elaborates what he takes to be the Wittgensteinian thought in the following way: “There is no ontological gap between the sort of thing one can mean, or generally the sort of thing one can think, and the sort of thing that can be the case. When one thinks truly, what one thinks *is* what is the case (...) there is no gap between thought, as such, and the world. Of course thought can be distanced from the world by being false, but there is no distance from the world implicit in the very idea of thought.”⁵⁰

⁴⁹ T. Carman, op. cit., 182; my italics.

⁵⁰ J. McDowell, *Mind and World*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass.–

Naturally, saying that cognition (assertoric conceptual cognition) is able to grasp its object without intermediaries of the kind designed to bridge the ontological gap involved in the subject-object dualism does not mean that such grasping is unconditioned. One of the main points of Heidegger's analysis is to make clear that any piece of understanding depends on a great deal of structured practical activity on our part, involving practical skills, embodiment, habits, conceptual apparatuses, beliefs, etc., and that all this is largely determined by culture and history. The point is, however, that Heidegger does not conceive all these conditions as intermediaries between us and a Dasein-independent object. If he did, he would be driven to the conclusion that, in the best case, these conditions afford us *indirect* access to a Dasein-independent entity, and that they partly constitute *the direct object* of understanding. This naturally opens a huge question about what the Dasein-independent entities really are in themselves and invites skepticism. In the worst case, such conception collapses into full-blooded idealism. But my claim is that Heidegger's philosophy doesn't run into these alternatives. The way of thinking he urges is in my view that the framework of intelligibility that makes possible understanding constitutes *our capacity to access* the objects we understand, but it doesn't constitute the objects themselves. On my reading, this is how we should understand Heidegger's talk about 'disclosing a world,' 'discovering entities,' and in general all the terminology that characterizes the relation between understanding and entities or the world.

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