

2009

## Heidegger, aletheia, and assertions

Erin M. Kraus

*Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://repository.lsu.edu/gradschool\\_theses](https://repository.lsu.edu/gradschool_theses)



Part of the [Arts and Humanities Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Kraus, Erin M., "Heidegger, aletheia, and assertions" (2009). *LSU Master's Theses*. 2197.  
[https://repository.lsu.edu/gradschool\\_theses/2197](https://repository.lsu.edu/gradschool_theses/2197)

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at LSU Scholarly Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in LSU Master's Theses by an authorized graduate school editor of LSU Scholarly Repository. For more information, please contact [gradetd@lsu.edu](mailto:gradetd@lsu.edu).

**HEIDEGGER, ALETHEIA, AND ASSERTIONS**

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts

in

The Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies

by  
Erin M. Kraus  
B.A. Salisbury University, 2006  
May 2009

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	iii
CHAPTER 1: THE PRIMORDIAL PHENEMON OF THE WORLD.....	1
1.1: Introduction.....	1
1.2: Dasein and Its World.....	7
1.3: The Correspondence Theory and Aristotle.....	18
CHAPTER 2: PRIVILEGING THE PRESENT-AT-HAND.....	22
2.1: Heidegger’s Critique of Descartes.....	22
2.2: Presence-at-Hand and Assertions.....	29
CHAPTER 3: TRUTH, KNOWLEDGE, INTUITION, AND ASSERTIONS.....	33
3.1 Heidegger’s Analysis of Truth.....	33
3.2 Heidegger’s Characterization of Assertions.....	40
3.3 Dahlstrom’s Reading of Heidegger.....	42
CONCLUSION.....	51
REFERENCES.....	53
VITA.....	55

## ABSTRACT

This essay is interested in Heidegger's radical reconception of truth as disclosure and how this reconception relates to truth as it operates in assertions. This concept of truth derives from his interpretation of the ancient Greek work for truth, *aletheia*, which means unhiddenness or disclosure. Heidegger appropriates this notion of truth to criticize post ancient Greek philosophy, which advocated the correspondence theory of truth. This theory contends that the locus of truth lies in an assertion's correspondence with states of affairs or facts in the world. In contrast, Heidegger contends that, although correspondence is a way of accessing truth, it is not the only way, or even the most fundamental way we encounter truth. Rather, truth is most fundamentally accessed through our everyday Being-in-the-world. This everyday Being-in-the-world discloses instrumentality, which operates through the readiness-to-hand of beings, as the primordial phenomenon which makes anything like assertional truth possible. Being-in-the-world grounds correspondence theory; therefore, it is mistaken to posit correspondence theory as the sole bearer of truth. True disclosures arise prior to the assertions that make them explicit. In order to demonstrate Heidegger's contention that Being-in-the-world is the fundamental state of humanity, the first section of the paper is devoted to clarifying and explicating Heidegger's argument. The second chapter focuses on Heidegger's critique of presence-at-hand, and illustrates how assertions operate within the founded mode of the present-at-hand. The third chapter provides an in-depth analysis of sections 33 and 44 of *Being and Time*, in which Heidegger offers his take on assertions and truth.

## CHAPTER 1: THE PRIMORDIAL PHENOMENON OF THE WORLD

### 1.1 Introduction

Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time* is both a radical critique of the philosophical tradition and an explication of the most fundamental ways we understand our world. In it, Heidegger contends that the tradition, ranging from Plato to Hegel, has passed over our most originary understanding of the world by (1) locating the locus of truth in the assertion which has led to the mistake of (2) conceiving of the world first and foremost in terms of the present-at-hand. It is for this reason, Heidegger maintains, the tradition has heretofore been unable to account for the most primordial ways we experience the world. Explicating this primordial experience is Heidegger's task in *Being and Time*, and, in order to do so, he begins his argument with drastically different premises than the ones we find in most traditional philosophical works.

The question of Being is Heidegger's starting point, because it is a question that, for the most part, the tradition has overlooked, taken as self-evident, intentionally ignored, or misunderstood.

“It is said that ‘Being’ is the most universal and emptiest of concepts. As such it resists every attempt at definition. Nor does this most universal and hence indefinable concept require any definition, for everyone uses it constantly and already understands what he means by it” (Heidegger 21).

Heidegger agrees that the concept of Being evades definition, but, rather than ignore the question altogether, “The indefinability of Being...demands that we look that question in the face” (Heidegger 23). In order to appropriately explicate the meaning of Being, Heidegger grants himself the task of examining the various ways there are to be (Braver 165). In *Being and Time* his focus remains limited to Dasein's Being-in-the-world, because Dasein is unique in that it alone is able to raise the question of Being.

“Dasein, in its Being, has a relationship towards Being—a relationship which is itself one of Being. And this means further that there is some way in which Dasein understands itself in its Being, and that to some degree it does so explicitly...*Understanding of Being is itself a definite characteristic of Dasein's Being*” (Heidegger 32).

Thus, *Being and Time* is an examination into the being that has a relationship to Being.

Throughout this examination it is important to bear in mind that Heidegger is a phenomenologist, or one who studies phenomena. A phenomenon, in Heidegger's context, is a being which comes to show itself or is brought to light. “Thus we must *keep in mind* that the expression ‘*phenomenon*’ signifies *that which shows itself*, the manifest” (Heidegger 51).

Phenomenology, then, is the study of that which shows itself. This self-showing is contingent upon the type of access we have to the entity in question, and, in some cases, Heidegger notes an entity might show itself as something it is not. When an entity seems to be something that it is not, this is known as semblance. I might see an entity that I take to be a bush but, upon closer inspection, I might realize that it is actually a garbage bag. Heidegger also wants to make a distinction between phenomena and what he calls appearance. Appearance, he tells us, indicates phenomena which does not show itself but should not be mistaken for phenomena. To illustrate, consider how physical symptoms are indicative of a particular illness but are not to be confused with the illness itself (Heidegger 52). Similarly, appearances may indicate a hidden phenomenon, but this appearance should not be confused with the phenomenon itself.

Semblance and appearance are only possible based on the existence of phenomena as a self-showing. The three terms: phenomenon, semblance, and appearance are all intricately connected, and the latter two are grounded in the first; without the notion of phenomena it would be impossible to have the notions of semblance, as a showing of what it is not, or appearance, as an indication of what is. Additionally, an understanding of any of these concepts is contingent upon existence in a world in which phenomena ‘are’.

In the process of examining phenomena and the various ways there are to be, Heidegger must also examine the nature of truth. Since the ancient Greeks, truth and Being have been intricately related because truth has been equated, starting with Parmenides, with an understanding of Being (Heidegger 256). It is the phenomenon of truth that discloses various modes of Being to Dasein. One of the tradition's most fatal mistakes was the assumption that truth belonged solely to the assertion. Through this assumption the tradition limited itself to one way understanding of Being: presence-at-hand. Heidegger staunchly maintains, however, that presence-at-hand is only one way of Being-in-the-world and it is not the most originary way Dasein understands the world.

This was not how it began; Ancient Greece, the birthplace of Western philosophy, conceived of truth as *aletheia* which Heidegger interprets to mean the uncovering of beings.<sup>1</sup> Considering Heidegger's phenomenological method, it is unsurprising that truth conceived as *aletheia* appealed to him. *Aletheia* uncovers phenomena, thereby allowing beings to show themselves. *Aletheia* is the negation of the verb *lath*, to cover over. Thus, for Heidegger, truth means the uncovering of beings and untruth would be the covering over of beings. Truth in this context is seen as a derivative of untruth, as its negation.<sup>2</sup> "Here truth is synonymous with the manifestation of Being and is cast in the context of the human experience as a whole"

(Macomber 151).

"The 'Being-true' of the *logos* as *aletheia* means that...the entities *of which* one is talking must be taken out of their hiddenness; one must let them be seen as something unhidden;

---

<sup>1</sup> Arguably it was the Roman translators of Greek philosophy who perverted the meaning of *aletheia*. Regardless of who the blame falls upon, however, we know that by the time Aquinas was interpreting Aristotle, he definitively located the locus of truth in the assertion. "Now we do not judge of a thing by what it is accidentally, but by what is in it essentially. Hence, everything is said to be true absolutely, insofar as it is related to the intellect from which it depends; and thus it is that artificial things are said to be true a being related to our intellect" (*Summa Theologica*, by St. Thomas Aquinas).

<sup>2</sup> This is in stark contrast to truth as 'veritas', the adequation of the intellect with the thing, which is positive and underivative. Those who conceive of truth as *veritas* can possess truth, while those who conceive of truth as *aletheia* are in its throe.

that is, they must be *discovered*. Similarly, ‘Being-false’ amounts to deceiving in the sense of *covering up*: putting something in front of something (in such a way as to let it be seen) and thereby passing it off *as* something which it is not” (Heidegger 56-57).

The original meaning of truth for the Greeks was the movement of beings from the hidden into unhiddenness. For the Greeks, then, truth retained an air of mystery and wonder; the ancient Greeks were in the throes of truth, not the possessors of it. Aletheia is a phenomenon which is not inherently tied to assertions but is inherently tied to concrete Being-in-the-world. This uncovering provided access to Being itself which was *not* limited solely or even primarily to presence-at-hand (although presence-at-hand is a means of uncovering). Heidegger appropriates this notion of uncovering in his analysis of truth in *Being and Time*. A term which is closely related to truth is disclosure.<sup>3</sup> Heidegger characterizes disclosure as a ‘laying open’ or ‘the character of having been laid open’ (Heidegger 105). Though Heidegger waits till later in his argument to introduce the concept of disclosure, it seems to mean something very similar to aletheia, and, often in this discussion, the term disclosure will be used to signify uncovering.<sup>4</sup> Just like aletheia, disclosure seems to uncover beings or, at least, aspects of beings. After introducing this new term, Heidegger seems to use the words uncovering and disclosure interchangeably and argues that beings in the world can be uncovered or disclosed in certain ways based upon our Being-towards them. This Being-towards can manifest itself in various ways, but it comes first and foremost through our pre-reflective, ready-to-hand encounters that occur through our daily use of beings as equipment, which is a phenomenon that necessarily arises from Being-in-the-world.

Thus, whereas Kant begins his *Critique of Pure Reason*, “...by watching a scientist peering through the lens of a telescope. Heidegger begins by considering man—perhaps Kant’s

---

<sup>3</sup> The introduction of the term disclosure comes in his discussion on circumspective concern.

<sup>4</sup> It is questionable whether or not Heidegger uses the terms interchangeably, and, later in the thesis, this ambiguity will be addressed.



scientist—shaving, answering the doorbell, shifting his newspaper from one hand to the other in order to get out money for the bus” (Macomber 34). The argument is: it is these simple everyday encounters that disclose the Being of the world which makes anything like theoretical knowledge possible in the first place. Kant, along with the rest of the tradition, failed to acknowledge the vast importance that simply existing in the world plays in understanding the world at all, let alone on a theoretical level. Part of Heidegger’s purpose in *Being and Time* is to bring philosophy down from the clouds of theoretical speculation back to the world and the understanding that arises simply from Being-in-the-world.

To make his case, Heidegger begins his argument with the phenomenon of Being-in-the-world. This phenomenon discloses beings primarily as ready-to-hand equipment which aids us in accomplishing our daily tasks, whether it be building a house or writing a master’s thesis. Heidegger goes on to explain how assertions are derivative of the phenomenon of Being-in-the-world, and, although they operate as a form of disclosure, they logically cannot be the primary means of disclosure through which we understand the world. Hence, by claiming that the assertion provides the first encounter with truth, the tradition has made an egregious error because it has covered over the more primordial ways in which we encounter truth.

This essay has two purposes: (1) it seeks to explain the relationship between Being and truth, or truth as world disclosure, rather than mere assertions, and (2) this essay attempts to understand where and how assertions fit into Heidegger’s overall scheme of Being-in-the-world. Heidegger argues that assertions are derived from our ready-to-hand encounters that arise from Being-in-the-world. The ready-to-hand is the most fundamental way in which Being gets disclosed. Presence-at-hand, which is grounded in the ready-to-hand, is also a disclosure, but this type of disclosure is only possible *based* on the ready-to-hand. Assertions most often arise

from present-at-hand disclosures and are disclosive in their own right. Hence, Heidegger is not anti-assertion or anti-presence-at-hand by any means. He simply wants to relegate these phenomena to their proper place as founded modes that arise from the ready-to-hand, which is a phenomenon that has been passed over time and time again by the tradition.

What I am specifically interested in examining in this essay is the truth of assertions as they are characterized by Heidegger. Using Heidegger's claims, I will illustrate the derivative nature of assertions, and I will try to fill in some of the gaps Heidegger leaves in his somewhat brief analysis. To aid me in my efforts, I will closely examine sections 33 and 44 of *Being and Time* which respectively provide analyses of assertions and truth. Additionally I will compare my findings with Heidegger scholar Daniel Dahlstrom's reading of *Being and Time* to see if his arguments can help elucidate Heidegger's somewhat minimal analysis. Many of mine and Dahlstrom's claims will have to go above and beyond what Heidegger argues in *Being in Time* for he never explicitly makes some of these distinctions, and his examples are minimal and lack context.

To set up Heidegger's argument for the derivative nature of assertions it will be necessary to examine some of the fundamental structures of Dasein laid out in the first division, for it is these structures which make anything like asserting possible in the first place. Also, it will be necessary to explain Heidegger's critique of the tradition's passing over these fundamental structures because it was this passing over which led us to privilege the assertion as the locus of truth in the first place. Additionally, I will discuss Heidegger's renegade interpretation of Aristotle and how this interpretation informs his understanding of truth and assertions. When we discuss Heidegger's analysis of truth it will also be necessary to discuss

Husserl's notion of intuition and judgment for this is the context Heidegger is working from. Finally, the last section of the essay will deal with assertions as derivative disclosures of truth.

## 1.2 Dasein and Its World

To begin, it will be helpful to represent some of the claims Heidegger makes in *Being and Time* that inform his understanding of assertions. Heidegger thinks that the tradition has passed over the most primordial way we understand and encounter the world. Therefore, much of the first division of *Being and Time* is spent critiquing the tradition and providing what Heidegger considers a more appropriate analysis of our most fundamental experiences with the world. The following chapter will focus on explicating the aspects of Heidegger's analysis that are relevant to his understanding of assertions as a derivative form of disclosure.

First of all, when Heidegger speaks of man he avoids using any reference to a self or an ego; instead he uses the term 'Dasein'. Dasein signifies our most primordial mode of Being: immersion in a world of circumspective concern. Heidegger refuses to use the words most commonly designated to refer to humans because these words are tied too closely to the tradition and its privileging of the present-at-hand. To assert an 'I' is already to have passed over the primordial phenomenon of Being-in-the-world, because when Dasein is wholly engaged in its world, there is no ego. The ego only comes into play when we begin thinking of ourselves theoretically as present-at-hand.

"If we carefully describe our normal experience of engaged daily dealings, we find no ego there; it is only theoretical speculation on what we assume must have been the case that retrospectively injects a doer back into the deed...the 'I' is not a primary phenomenon but only arises from specific situations and assumptions" (Braver 209).

The argument is that Dasein, primordially, is immersed in its world. The phenomenon of Dasein manifests itself, most often, when it is using an entity as a ready-to-hand tool; it loses itself in the operations it is performing. However, this claim should not be taken to mean that Dasein is first

conscious of itself as a self and then becomes lost in the world of circumspective concern, through the ready-to-hand; this characterization too closely resembles the subject/object distinction that Heidegger is trying to escape. Rather, Dasein is immersed *first and foremost* in its world, meaning that the ready-to-hand is the first encounter with the world and notions of the self can only arise after and as a result of this immersion.

Dasein is also that being that is “there with it” (Macomber 30), meaning that Dasein is the being that is there alongside the world that not only experiences the world but makes the world possible through its various states of Being-in-the-world. Dasein’s existence is completely and utterly wrapped up with its concrete Being-in-the-world; it is defined by its Being-in-the-world, not by some lofty ideals about what it might mean to be a self. Moreover, Dasein is not so much a particular being that exists in the world in the same way a mineral exists (Heidegger 82). Rather, Dasein is a way of Being, and this way of Being is constituted by a dynamic relationship to Being. Dasein is an active knower, not a passive one (Braver 209).

“In essence Dasein is not a particular being but a relation to Being itself. It is not primarily a *what*. *What* is the primary characteristic of all the beings discovered within the world, but it does not apply to the being whose Being consists in the activity of discovery itself” (Macomber 31).

What makes Dasein unique from other beings is that Dasein is the only being capable of engaging in an inquiry into the nature of Being. This fundamentally changes the relationship Dasein would have to any other being in the world, because Dasein alone is capable of interpreting and contextualizing beings. Dasein could have an attitude to a rock, for instance,<sup>5</sup> but a rock cannot have an attitude towards another rock.

---

<sup>5</sup> It is irrelevant whether this is an attitude of fascination, frustration, or indifference; the key point is Dasein’s capability of having any attitude at all is distinctive of its existence in the world.

Additionally, it will be helpful if we examine what precisely Heidegger means by the term 'world' since it will be used frequently in this discussion. In division one of *Being and Time*, Heidegger establishes four different ways in which the term 'world' might be used. The first and perhaps most common way 'world' is defined is as the, "...totality of those entities which can be present-at-hand within the world," (Heidegger 93). This is how many thinkers in the tradition conceived of world. World can also be used to designate various hermeneutical frameworks. For instance, we could talk about the world of philosophy, the world of zoology, or the world of politics. Each of these worlds operates under different presuppositions about reality and the term 'world' serves to reveal the various viewpoints in operation within each respective 'world'.

Thirdly, we might conceive of the world simply as the place where Dasein resides. This denotation includes within it all the hermeneutical frameworks mentioned in the second definition. Additionally, this signification does not merely refer to the fact that Dasein is in the world; it also refers to the way in which Dasein structures its world through dynamic interaction. In light of this it might be a little misleading to assert that Dasein is in the world. This claim might lead us to think that Dasein is in the world in the same way a shoe is in a closet or a spoon is in a drawer, but this would be an inaccurate characterization (Heidegger 79). Rather, Dasein is in the world in the sense that it interacts with and is actively concerned about the world. "Dasein is in the world in the sense in which the broker is *in* stocks and bonds" (Macomber 33, his emphasis).

And, finally, 'world' can also be conceived of as the, "...ontologico-existential concept of *worldhood*" (Heidegger 93, his emphasis). The notion of worldhood is intimately tied with the third signification of world because it is worldhood that constitutes the world's various ways

of Being in the third sense. For instance, when operating in the world Dasein is capable of perceiving entities within it as either ready-to-hand or present-at-hand. Worldhood is the ontological structure that makes it possible for Dasein to switch back and forth from ready-to-hand to present-at-hand (concepts that will be elaborated upon momentarily) while world in the third sense is the ontic structure which comprises the entities that are either ready-to-hand or present-at-hand. Thus the fourth signification grounds the third signification.

The distinction between world in the third and fourth senses will become clearer if we distinguish between the ontological (the worldhood of the world) and the ontical (the world). Heidegger begins *Being and Time* with the argument that the entire tradition of philosophy has been guilty of conflating Being with beings (Heidegger 31). In other words, the tradition has assumed that Being as an abstract notion can be equated with beings that exist concretely. Heidegger contends that, on the contrary, Being is not a being; in fact, Being is not a thing at all (Braver 165). Rather, Being is the dynamic ‘how’ of beings that pervades and grounds the way everything in the world, including Dasein, ‘is’. Heidegger characterizes the difference between Being and beings as ontological and ontical. The ontological refers to the way in which Being structures the world, while the ontical refers to actual concrete beings that exist in the world. For instance, the notion of equipmentality as ready-to-hand or present-at-hand is ontological, while the notion of a particular item that is operating as either ready-to-hand or present-at-hand is ontical.

Heidegger establishes that he will invoke the term ‘world’ to mean the third signification: the place in which Dasein resides and actively participates in its surroundings.

“The world in Heidegger’s sense is not the name of a place or a term signifying some imaginative totality of things. It is more a generic notion than a name and it refers to the field in which human activity takes place...[it is] the necessary implication of Dasein’s most immediate daily preoccupations” (Macomber 42).

His purpose for using ‘world’ in this manner is to phenomenologically explicate how Dasein exists in the world by exploring disclosure as it operates at its most fundamental levels (Heidegger 91-95).

The possibility for experiencing truth as disclosure arises out of Dasein’s Being-in-the-world. Being-in-the-world is the term Heidegger coins to designate a ‘unitary phenomenon’ which helps to constitute the uniqueness of Dasein’s existence (Heidegger 78). This term expresses that Dasein is first and foremost in a world of circumspective concern from which it cannot divorce itself. Rational thought presupposes this existence in the world, because it is Being-in-the-world that provides Dasein with the possibility of rational thought. Dasein is defined and limited by its Being-in-the-world; it is not free-floating souls that just happen to be attached to a body which just happens to exist in the world (i.e. like Descartes’ pilot in the ship). Dasein’s existence and its Being-in-the-world are inseparable. Therefore an understanding of the world is only possible on our basis of Being-in-the-world. This is why Heidegger implements dashes between words; the dashes signify the interconnectedness of the terms, which, in turn, signifies the interconnectedness of Dasein’s existence to the world.

“Dasein is never ‘proximally’ an entity which is, so to speak, free from Being-in, but which sometimes has the inclination to take up a ‘relationship’ towards the world. Taking up relationships towards the world is possible only *because* Dasein, as Being-in-the-world, is as it is (Heidegger 84).

Our understanding of beings arises out of the ‘as’ structure; a structure which makes ready-to-hand and present-at-hand disclosures possible and sets the stage for assertions. The ‘as’ structure signifies a primarily tacit way of understanding entities in the world, and it is this tacit understanding which provides the foundation for making assertions (Dahlstrom 187). The idea is that our understanding of our day-to-day world is covert; it is covert in the sense that we are so

accustomed to the entities we encounter on a daily basis that we seldom find it necessary to overtly devote our thoughts to them. Instead our overt thoughts remain focused on the projects that are important to us. Dahlstrom refers to this understanding as pre-predicative and pre-reflective (Dahlstrom 187). We tacitly take entities to be ‘as’ whatever they need to be (and are capable of being) in relation to our context. Thus, when I walk through the door of Coates Hall, I tacitly understand the door ‘as’ an entryway. The term ‘as’ denotes the way in which I seize upon an entity *as* a means of accomplishing some task or achieving some end (Dahlstrom 187). Heidegger’s argument is that this is the most original way we experience the world. “The things that one deals with are always already uncovered on the basis of ‘what they are for’ or ‘where they are supposed to help us get to’” (Dahlstrom 186).

It is this original experience which provides the basis for assertions. However, because our understanding of the world is primarily tacit, we often find it unnecessary to verbalize the disclosures we gain from the experiences we have with the entities we encounter in our day-to-day life. One might find it odd, for instance, if they saw me stop and say, “This door is an entryway into Coates Hall”. Because my understanding of the doorway as an entryway is so fundamental to my everyday existence, there is no need to explicate it (Dahlstrom 187).

“Interpretation is carried out primordially not in a theoretical statement but in an action of circumspective concern—laying aside the unsuitable tool, or exchanging it, ‘without wasting words’. From the fact that words are absent, it may not be concluded that interpretation is absent” (Heidegger 200).

Under this view, then, the most sensible way to express my understanding of the door to Coates Hall is not to make an assertion but simply to open it up and walk through.

As Being-in-the-world, Dasein, for the most part, encounters entities as ready-to-hand equipment; this is the phenomenon of instrumentality that arises from the ‘as’ structure. When Dasein operates in a ready-to-hand mode of Being, it is not able to perceive of things in the



world in a vacuum. Rather everything in the world works together in a contextual network, or a totality of equipment (Heidegger 98). For example when one walks into a room, “What we encounter as closest to us is the room; and we encounter it not as something ‘between four walls’ in a geometrical spatial sense, but as equipment for residing” (Heidegger 98). Thus, when I walk into my bedroom, I do not encounter each entity in my bedroom separately and theoretically. Instead I perceive of the contextual whole of my bedroom. Each item works together in a circumspective network to form the equipmental totality of my bedroom. Like the ‘as’ structure, the ready-to-hand approach to understanding entities is pre-reflective, pre-predicative, and pragmatic. It is pragmatic in the sense that we primarily understand entities as ready-to-hand because we need them for some practical purpose. I need my lamp in order to light up my bedroom; I need my table in order to set the lamp on; I need my bedroom in order to have a place to put all my stuff. Moreover, because our focus tends to remain on a larger project, these ready-to-hand entities are very seldom thematized in our thoughts or our words. “The kind of dealing which is closest to us is as we have shown, not a bare perceptual cognition, but rather that kind of concern which manipulates things and puts them to use...” (Heidegger 95).

To illustrate the ready-to-hand, imagine a college freshmen diligently taking notes in an introductory level philosophy course. This young woman is not only a good student; she is also very taken by the thought provoking material. The entities which are physically closest to her are her pen and her notebook, both of which she needs in order to take notes. However, even though these objects are closest to her, they are also the last thing on her mind; they are ontologically farthest from her (Heidegger 96). This woman is so caught up in the lecture material and in her project of taking notes, that she is not overtly aware of her pen or her notebook; these items are ready-to-hand. She has taken them up as useful tools or equipment in

order to achieve her end of taking notes. Subsequently, her relationship to the pen and the notebook has become primordial, and she has encountered these beings as hidden in their usefulness (Heidegger 96, 98). It would not be accurate to say that the woman perceives of the pen and notebook as things; her use of the pen and notebook for some larger purpose precludes her from thinking of these objects as objects (Heidegger 96). They are simply tools she takes up with only a tacit awareness, and these tools operate in terms of a contextual whole; each item being utilized (i.e. the pen, the notebook, the desk, the classroom, the building, etc.) works together to create this whole. Despite the physical presence of all of these entities the woman's overt awareness remains focused on her larger project. "In dealings such as this, where something is put to use, our concern subordinates itself to the 'in-order-to' which is constitutive for the equipment we are employing at the time..." (Heidegger 98).

Now suppose further, that about half-way through the class this young woman loses interest in the lecture. To entertain herself she begins to closely examine her pen. She takes note of the brand, the shape, the color etc. At this point, the pen is no longer ready-to-hand; instead it has become present-at-hand. In other words, the pen is no longer operating as a tool for some larger purpose. It has become an overt object of interest, meaning that it has been taken out of its ready-hand-context and conceived of as a present thing in the world. Heidegger maintains that one of philosophy's biggest oversights has been to disregard the phenomenon of the ready-to-hand and to focus solely on the present-at-hand (Heidegger 122).<sup>6</sup> This oversight has been to our detriment because, as a result, we have failed to recognize the most primary way that we encounter objects in the world. As Heidegger points out, we tend to remain focused on some larger project, and we take up objects as ready-to-hand to serve this project. Thus, just as

---

<sup>6</sup> For example, when Descartes discusses his perceptions of the wax candle on his table in the *Meditations*, he conceives of the wax as a present-at-hand, theoretical object.

assertions are grounded in primordial disclosure, the present-at-hand is grounded in the ready-to-hand.

As Heidegger characterizes it, the phenomenon of viewing objects as present-at-hand most often occurs when our project is interrupted for some reason, or when the tool ceases to serve its intended purpose.

“When we concern ourselves with something, the entities which are most closely ready-to-hand may be met as something unusable...When its unusability is thus discovered, equipment becomes conspicuous...Pure presence-at-hand announces itself in such equipment...” (Heidegger 103).

Present-at-hand entities can also make themselves known by being absent in a time of need. The moment I need a pen, for instance, and am unable to find one, I have conceived of the pen as present-at-hand. Moreover, the thing I need the missing tool for will also become present-at-hand. In this case, suppose I need to sign a form and I do not have a pen. Now the pen and the form have become present-at-hand to me as I am left to throw my hands up in frustration at my inability to complete my project.

“The more urgently we need what is missing, all the more obtrusive does that which is ready-to-hand become...It reveals itself as something just present-at-hand and no more, which cannot be budged without the thing that is missing...”(Heidegger 103).

Finally, the presence-at-hand of beings can announce itself as something that stands in our way and demands to be dealt with before continuing with one’s project.

“That to which our concern refuses to turn, that for which it has ‘no time’, is something *un-ready-to hand* in the manner of what does not belong here, of what has not been attended to” (Heidegger 103).

From these three types of presence-at-hand, Heidegger concludes that, “...the presence-at-hand of which makes itself known is still bound up in the readiness-to-hand of equipment” (Heidegger 104). Each of these types of presence-at-hand arises from what was encountered primordially as ready-to-hand, which makes it appear as though Heidegger is positing that

presence-at-hand is only possible based on readiness-to-hand. He goes on to argue that what makes presence-at-hand, in all three of the cases cited, possible is the interruption of Dasein's projects. These interruptions occur when the equipment Dasein is utilizing breaks down, and, when this happens, "...the constitutive assignment of the 'in-order-to' to a 'towards-this' has been disturbed"; the ready-to-hand is then taken from its context (Heidegger 105). Subsequently, the project which Dasein is engaged in becomes explicit as a project and the present-at-hand comes to the fore. Presence-at-hand "lights up the world", but, if the world is lit up, then, Heidegger avers, it must have been disclosed, and it has been disclosed through the ready-to-hand which is accessible through circumspective concern (Heidegger 106). Consequently, Heidegger concludes that readiness-to-hand is a fundamental aspect of Being-in-the-world, as it is readiness-to-hand that signifies a familiarity with the world, while presence-at-hand is generally only possible based on the breaks in the referential totality of circumspective concern that comprise the ready-to-hand.

The above analysis strongly suggests that presence-at-hand can only arise directly from a ready-to-hand experience in the world, and, in paragraphs fifteen and sixteen of *Being and Time* this is seemingly the argument Heidegger makes. But, if presence-at-hand only arises through the breakdown of a tool, this would imply that thinkers like Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas and Descartes' philosophies all arose due to a breakdown in equipment. This seems like a very strange, counter-intuitive argument to make, and if we examine Heidegger's earlier portrayal of Being-in-the-world we can see that presence-at-hand is a bit more complex. In this section, Heidegger speaks of a presence-at-hand that arises, not from a concrete experience with a ready-to-hand tool that breaks down, but from Being-in-the-world more generally.

"When concern holds back from any kind of producing, manipulating, and the like, it puts itself into what is now the sole remaining mode of Being-in, the mode of just

tarrying alongside...this kind of Being towards the world is one which lets us encounter entities within-the-world purely in *the way they look*, just that; *on the basis* of this kind of Being, and *as* a mode of it, looking explicitly at what we encounter is possible” (Heidegger 88, his emphasis).

This passage suggests that presence-at-hand views of the world can arise for a multitude of reasons other than the experience of simply having a tool break down. One’s holding back from the ready-to-hand and tarrying alongside could arise from other phenomena such as boredom, wonder, or reflexivity. All of these attitudes towards beings can result in a present-at-hand view of Dasein’s world. However, one must always bear in mind Heidegger’s key point: regardless of how it manifests itself, present-at-hand views of the world are only possible based on the originary phenomenon of Being-in-the-world, a phenomenon which, in turn, most often manifests itself in terms of readiness-to-hand.

“When Dasein directs itself toward something and grasps it, it does not somehow first get out of an inner sphere in which it has been proximally encapsulated, but its primary kind of Being is such that it is always ‘outside’ alongside entities which it encounters and which belong to a world already discovered” (Heidegger 89).

All experiences Dasein has with the world whether it be a ready-to-hand or a present-at-hand encounter, are based on the unitary phenomenon of Being-in-the-world.

The structures Heidegger lays out in division one of *Being and Time* are indicative of a radical yet stunningly simple insight: theoretical knowledge is only possible based on our concrete Being-in-the-world. Heidegger contends that by ignoring the ready-to-hand, the tradition has failed to recognize our most fundamental encounters with the world. As a result, “We have become disconnected from the deep structure that defines us...the point of the book is to put us back in touch with the meaning of *our* Being in addition to the meaning of Being per se” (Braver 164). In other words, when the tradition conceives of the world first and foremost as

present-at-hand, they completely and utterly pass over Dasein's most fundamental experience with the world as ready-to-hand.

### 1.3 The Correspondence Theory and Aristotle

Much of Heidegger's argument in *Being and Time* arises out of his belief that the correspondence theory of truth mistakenly privileges the assertion as the locus of truth. It should be noted that Heidegger does not outright disagree with the notion of the correspondence of the world with an assertion; correspondence is quite useful when operating in the realm of presence-at-hand and theoretical knowledge. However, traditionally, correspondence theorists have wanted to claim that correspondence provides our sole access to truth, and Heidegger thinks that this view is mistaken because it closes us off to truth as it occurs through the ready-to-hand.

Generally speaking, the correspondence theory of truth refers to the correspondence of the thing with the intellect (Marian). In other words, if what is stated in the assertion corresponds to the way the world actually is, then it can be said to be a true assertion.

“It [correspondence theory] *defines* truth as the correspondence between thoughts, ideas, beliefs, words, propositions sentences, or languages on the one hand, and things, objects, states of affairs, configurations, reality, or experience between the other; that is, between something on the side of the mind or language and something on the side of the world” (Braver 15, my emphasis).

Although Heidegger acknowledges correspondence as a legitimate encounter with truth, he does *not* define it as correspondence because this definition would limit truth to the above characterization. The problems with correspondence theory are the metaphysical presuppositions that underlie it. In order for one to claim that a state of affairs corresponds to a proposition, one must be conceiving of the world primarily as present-at-hand, and, as has been established, this is not the most primary way the world is experienced; it is a founded mode.

Thus to restrict the definition of truth as the correspondence of the subject with its object is to simultaneously deny or forget truth as it occurs through the ready-to-hand.

In contrast to traditional correspondence theory, Heidegger claims that assertions are only possible based on more fundamental disclosures of being. It is our Being-in-the-world and our everyday, ready-to-hand encounters that are entailed in Being-in-the-world which make propositional truth possible. "...just as the present-at-hand is grounded in the ready-to-hand, so its correlate assertional or propositional truth is also parasitic on a more fundamental form of truth" (Braver 200). For Heidegger, propositions do not insert themselves into our primordial experiences of truth; they only arise after truth has already been encountered through the Being-in-the-world. Uncovering beings in the most primordial sense is not a matter of discovering a true proposition; rather, it is a matter of taking up ready-to-hand tools as equipment, a phenomenon which precedes the very possibility of something like propositional truth.

This theory of truth is usually traced back to Aristotle's *Metaphysics* 1011b25 where he says, "To say of what is that it is not, or of what is not that it is, is false, while to say of what is that it is, and of what is not that it is not, is true" (Marian). Although this definition does not specifically lay out the correspondence theory, (it merely invokes a relation between truth and assertions) it has been traditionally taken as its foundations (Marian).

Part of what enables Heidegger to provide such a drastic critique of the tradition is that he also traces his version of truth back to Aristotle.<sup>7</sup> He claims that his interpretation of Aristotle is more faithful to the Greek conception of truth, *aletheia*, and, by mistakenly interpreting Aristotle as a correspondence theorist, the tradition has been perverting truth for centuries.

"If, as has become quite customary nowadays, one defines 'truth' as something that 'really' pertains to judgment, and if one then invokes the support of Aristotle with this

---

<sup>7</sup> Actually, he traces it back to Parmenides but in Section 44 he invokes Aristotle to support his claims for truth as uncovering.

thesis, not only is this unjustified, but, above all, the Greek conception of truth has been misunderstood” (Heidegger 57).

Aristotle, Heidegger tells us, never explicitly located truth in the assertion. Rather, in *Book Theta* of the *Metaphysics* he says that logos, “...is that of Being in which Dasein can *either* uncover *or* cover up,” (Heidegger 268, his emphasis). All assertions, therefore, which come out of rational thinking contain a “double possibility”; they can conceal or they can reveal. Making a theoretical assertion about a pen might reveal a definite aspect of the pen while simultaneously covering over another aspect. Heidegger thus concludes that, like himself, Aristotle determined the assertion in view of the truth and not vice versa (Dahlstrom 181).

Additionally, the question of the truth or falsity of an assertion can only be meaningfully posed to someone who already understands what it is for something to be true or false; hence, Aristotle’s very definition of assertions presupposes a more primordial concept of truth (Dahlstrom 181).

“According to Aristotle, a sentence’s possibility of being true or false presupposes that it contains a synthesis. The basis of this synthesis lies not in some combination of words or concepts, but what the sentence or assertion is about: the entity itself...its manner of making itself present” (Dahlstrom 211).

This is akin to Heidegger’s claim that Being-in-the-world is a pre-condition for the ability to make assertions. It is only through Being-in-the-world that entities are capable of Being present; hence we can see that, contrary to what the tradition has contended, Heidegger and Aristotle seem to be in agreement on this issue.

Despite Aristotle’s recognition of truth as uncovering, he ultimately falls prey to the same privileging of presence as his predecessor (Plato) and his followers (Roman, Medieval, and Modern thinkers) because he still conceives of being in its most pure sense as what is actual as opposed to what is not-yet actual (Dahlstrom 214).



The highest level of ontological consideration is attained by Aristotle in the second part of the chapter [Book Theta Chapter 10] as simple fully actual (on hand) being is identified with truth (uncoveredness)” (Dahlstrom 214).

Thus, Aristotle is still thinking of Being and therefore truth, in its most pure form, as a matter of deriving the essence from something that is on hand. As we have seen, this is not the case for Heidegger. For Heidegger, Being and truth are most primordially encountered through the ready-to-hand use of tools as equipment. When we use tools as equipment they are not present to us in the sense that Aristotle means. What is most present is the project which we are working towards; the physically present beings which are encountered are understood in terms of the project and not in terms of their essences. Though, according to Heidegger, Aristotle recognizes the necessity of the uncovering of beings in regard to understanding their truth, he only conceives of uncovering in the sense of uncovering something that is on hand; thus he fails to recognize or account for the uncovering that comes from taking up tools to aid us in our projects.

## CHAPTER 2: PRIVILEGING THE PRESENT-AT-HAND

### 2.1 Heidegger's Critique of Descartes

Philosophers have been conceiving of the world primarily as present-at-hand since Plato<sup>8</sup>; Aristotle, the Romans, and the medieval philosophers carried on this tradition. Part of Heidegger's purpose in *Being and Time* is to illustrate what is lost in this understanding of the world, namely the ready-to-hand mode of Being which is the primary way the world is experienced by Dasein.

Elsewhere in his works, Heidegger places blame for the oversight of the ready-to-hand in favor of the present-at-hand on Plato, Aristotle, and the medieval thinkers<sup>9</sup>, however, in *Being and Time* Heidegger places the blame for the privileging of the present-at-hand most decisively on Descartes' shoulders. It is Descartes, he argues, that helped to provide the basis for our belief that the world is primarily encountered as present-at-hand (Heidegger 128). This is because Descartes, taking his cue from medieval thinkers<sup>10</sup>, first and foremost conceived of the world as present-at-hand and completely passed over the phenomenon of the ready-to-hand.

Descartes thought that we understood the world in terms of bodily things (*res corporea*). He referred to those bodily things in the world as substances (Heidegger 123). In the *Principles of Philosophy*, Descartes establishes that substance refers to both the Being of an entity and the entity itself (PP 52). Moreover, in order to determine the essence of substance one must elucidate things insofar as they are substances, which, for Descartes, means that we must

---

<sup>8</sup> For instance, in Book 10 of *The Republic*, when Plato discusses appearance vs. reality he uses the example of a stick placed in water. "And the same object appears straight when looked at out of the water, and crooked when in the water; and the concave becomes convex, owing to the illusion about colors to which sight is liable." This is just one instance of Plato conceiving of a being in the world as first and foremost present-at-hand. He has covered over the readiness-to-hand of the stick.

<sup>9</sup> See his essay on *The Essence of Truth* or his *Lectures on Parmenides*.

<sup>10</sup> For a thorough explication of Descartes' use of medieval ideas see Francois Raffoul's *Heidegger and the Subject*, chapter three.

examine a thing's attributes. It is only through a thing's attributes that the thing itself becomes accessible.

“And though substance is indeed known by some attribute yet for each substance there is pre-eminently one property which constitutes its nature and essence, and to which all the rest are referred” (PP 53).

Attributes are only able to make themselves present in terms of extension. In other words, a substance must have spatial dimensions in order to be grasped, and it is these substances, that are apprehended through extension, which make up the world. “Extension—namely, in length, breadth, and thickness—makes up the real being of that corporeal substance which we call the ‘world’” (Heidegger 123). Thus the world can be characterized not only as bodily things (*res corporea*) but also as extended things (*res extensa*). Extension is “assigned” to the corporeal thing in order to make it graspable to the ego or the self. For Descartes, extension and substance mean the same thing for material things.

Descartes claims that just because a corporeal body in the world changes in location does not mean that it changes in extension. For instance, consider the second meditation in *Meditations on First Philosophy*, where he discusses the piece of wax. As the wax melts from the fire it will change in shape, length, and depth, however, its extension will not change.

“Take, for example, this piece of wax; it is quite fresh, having been but recently taken from the beehive; it has not yet lost the sweetness of the honey it contained...In fine, all that contributes to make a body as distinctly known as possible, is found in the one before us...let it be placed near the fire--what remained of the taste exhales, the smell evaporates, the color changes, its figure is destroyed, its size increases, it becomes liquid, it grows hot...Does the same wax still remain after this change ? It must be admitted that it does remain; no one doubts it, or judges otherwise” (M 2.11).

Although the wax has the capacity to completely change in appearance, Descartes decisively concludes that it remains essentially the same; it remains an extended, bodily thing. The question then becomes: how can he know that the wax is still wax if its corporeal properties are

constantly changing? He concludes in section 54 of *Principles of First Philosophy* that it is through his rational intuition that he can discern the being of corporeal things through their extension.

In *Principles of Philosophy* section 51, Descartes defines the Being of a substance, “as an entity which *is* in such a way that it needs no other entity in order to *be*” (Heidegger 125, his emphasis). Pretty clearly this definition can only refer to God, or *ens perfectissimum*, since all other substances are derived from some other substance (Raffoul 57). God, then, represents substance in its most perfect form, while other substances fall under the category of needing to be “produced” and “sustained” either by God or by man. Descartes has now conceived of being within the widest possible range; it, “...ranges from the production of what is to be present-at-hand to something which has no need of being produced” (Heidegger 125). The difference between the wax candle and God is infinite and, yet, we still characterize them both as entities that *be*. “We are thus using ‘Being’ in so wide a sense that its meaning embraces an ‘infinite’ difference” (Heidegger 125).

The different types of being, for Descartes, become even more pronounced when we bring in his notion of man as *res cogitans* (thinking thing). At this point in the argument, we have three types of substances: (1) corporeal or extended substance (things) (2) a thinking thing which is *causa sui* (God) and (3) thinking things which are *causata* (man). As I mentioned above, the problem with characterizing all three of these substances as being is that it makes it difficult to distinguish between the way God *is*, the way the world *is*, and the way man *is*. Clearly these various uses of the term ‘is’ are not univocal because if that were the case, “...then what is created would be viewed as it were uncreated, or the uncreated would be reduced to the status of something created” (Heidegger 126). Descartes gets around this difficult by refusing to

get around it. He says, “No signification of this name [substance or being] which would be common to God and his creation can be distinctly understood” (PP 51). Descartes refuses to engage the question of Being because he thinks that it is beyond human understanding. This evasion leads Heidegger to accuse him of ignoring the question of Being altogether, which turns out to be problematic because his discussion of substance demands that he address the question of Being.

“This evasion is tantamount to his failing to discuss the meaning of Being which the idea of substantiality embraces, or the character of the ‘universality’ which belongs to this signification... Thus the possibility of a pure problematic of Being gets renounced in principle, and a way is sought for arriving at those definite characteristics of substance which we have designated above” (Heidegger 126).

Descartes is discussing Being even though he admittedly does not really understand it. Since he claims that Being is not accessible through an entity, he must claim that it is accessible through an entity’s attributes. Entities’ attributes are only made apparent through a present-at-hand examination of them.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, Descartes’ ontology requires him to posit the world first and foremost as present-at-hand.

Moreover, Descartes privileges mathematical and scientific approaches to the world which also favor presence-at-hand over readiness-to-hand. “Mathematical knowledge is regarded by Descartes as the one manner of apprehending entities which can always give assurance that their Being has been securely grasped” (Heidegger 128). He privileges math because he privileges intellect. In the second meditation Descartes argues that neither the senses nor the imagination are able to grasp the nature of the body; since the wax can subsist through physical changes, only the mind or intellect is up to such a task. “I must therefore admit that the nature of this piece of wax is in no way revealed by my imagination, but is perceived by the

---

<sup>11</sup> When I am approaching entities as ready-to-hand I am only concerned with an entities’ attributes insofar as they are useful to helping me complete my project. Thus it is only when I examine an entity as present-at-hand that I can devote my focus to the entity’s attributes.

mind alone” (M 2.12). Thus, “The appropriate mode of access that Descartes grants to beings, determined on the basis of *extension*, is *intellectio*, in the form of the ‘kind of knowledge we get in mathematics and physics’” (Raffoul 66). The privileging of mathematics arises from Descartes’ desire to conceive of entities in their essence or as they subsist (Raffoul 66). In other words, for Descartes, “That which remains really *is*. This is the sort of thing which mathematics knows” (Heidegger 128).

“...he prescribes for the world its ‘real’ Being, as it were, on the basis of an idea of Being whose source has not been unveiled and which has not been demonstrated in its own right—an idea in which Being is equated with constant presence-at-hand. Thus his ontology of the world is not primarily determined by his leaning towards mathematics, a science which he chances to esteem very highly, but rather by his ontological orientation in principle towards Being as constant presence-at-hand, which mathematical knowledge is particularly well suited to grasp” (Heidegger 129).

Heidegger asks at the beginning of paragraph 21:

“...does this ontology of the ‘world’ seek the phenomenon of the world at all, and if not, does it at least define some entity within-the-world fully enough so that the worldly character of this entity can be made visible in it?” (Heidegger 128).

Heidegger determines that the answer to both of these questions is no. By conceiving of the world first and foremost as extended things, Descartes has privileged the present-at-hand and completely covered over the more primordial phenomenon of the ready-to-hand. What Descartes has failed to understand, Heidegger tells us, is that the extension of an entity in the world can only be grasped if one has encountered it first and foremost as ready-to-hand.

This criticism can best be illustrated through Descartes’ use of the wax as an example for clear and distinct knowledge of Being. In the second meditation Descartes takes a present-at-hand approach to the wax when he attempts to characterize its essence. What Descartes failed to consider was his usual, everyday approach to the wax. When he was writing the first meditation, for instance, he was probably making ready-to-hand use of his wax candle. He probably had lit

it so that he would be able to see what he was writing, which means that he was approaching the wax candle as a ready-to-hand piece of equipment which was aiding him in his project of philosophizing. As he wrote the first meditation, he was undoubtedly aware of the candle on some level, but only insofar as it was useful for his project of writing his philosophy. It was not until he needed to discuss the wax candle in order to help him in his second meditation that it became present-at-hand. Thus Descartes' primary way of dealing with the candle as a source of light and warmth was so fundamental to his everyday projects that, in writing his ontology, it did not even occur to him that he should address this everyday manner of Being.

Were Descartes to attempt to provide an account for the ready-to-hand, he would do so by speaking of it in terms of the present-at-hand. He might try and argue, for instance, that the wax is grasped in its present-at-hand essence prior to its possibility of its being utilized as a tool. This, however, is a poor phenomenological account of how Dasein actually interacts with its world. Heidegger's account of the ready-to-hand, in paragraph 15 of *Being and Time*, more aptly illustrates Dasein's actual, everyday dealings with beings in the world. A simple reflection on one's own encounters with ready-to-hand equipment should reveal that conceiving of beings in their essences is hardly a prerequisite for using them as tools for some practical end. Recall the experience the woman had with her pen when she was taking notes. There was no need for her to conceive to the pen in its essence in order for her to take notes. In fact, had she conceived of her pen first and foremost in its essence, her note-taking project would have been hindered as she would have been unable to think theoretically about both her pen and the material being taught simultaneously. Thus Descartes' argument is left feeling somewhat hollow, as it does not provide as rich an account of the human experience in the world as Heidegger's. In failing to address the ready-to-hand grounds for beings, Descartes also failed to understand the primary

way in which humans grasp reality, meaning that his ontology, which reduces all concrete beings to present-at-hand, provides an utterly inadequate understanding of the human experience of Being-in-the-world.

“...his [Descartes’] Interpretation and the foundations on which it is based have led him to *pass over* both the phenomenon of the world and the Being of those entities within the world which are proximally ready-to-hand” (Heidegger 128).

Ultimately, what makes Heidegger’s framework more appealing is its ability to provide a richer and therefore phenomenologically superior account of the human experience. Descartes’ starting point in his *Meditations on First Philosophy* requires him to posit a mind/body dualism, a distinction which has caused a philosophical quagmire for centuries. Philosophers who have inherited Descartes’ legacy have struggled with the questions of how the mind and the body relate and how we can know there is a world at all. Because Heidegger posits Being-in-the-world as more primordial than the rational self, he is able to avoid many of the philosophical pitfalls Descartes finds himself in. Subsequently, Heidegger is boldly dismissive of Descartes’ approach:

“The question of whether there is a world at all and whether its Being can be proved, makes no sense if it is raised by *Dasein* as Being-in-the-world; and who else would raise it? Furthermore, it is encumbered with a double signification...But the world is disclosed essentially *along with the* Being of *Dasein*; with the disclosedness of the world, the ‘world’ has in each case been discovered too” (Heidegger 247).

In Heidegger’s view raising the question of the external world is absurd when it is Being-in-the-world that makes rational thought possible in the first place. Perhaps the main difference between Descartes and Heidegger is that Descartes begins with metaphysical claims he thinks he can know due to his rationality whereas Heidegger begins with what he can know based more simply on Being-in-the-world. Descartes is up in the clouds theorizing about the world as though it is first and foremost present-at-hand while Heidegger is down on earth discussing the



structures that make Descartes' philosophizing possible at all. In the end, Heidegger is the more appealing thinker because he is able to provide an account of the human experience that Descartes' dualism and radical skepticism simply cannot match.

## **2.2 Presence-at-Hand and Assertions**

Descartes inherited his privileging of the present-at-hand from his predecessors, we have inherited it from him, and it is this privileging of presence which has, in turn, led us to privilege the assertion over more primordial disclosures of truth. All assertions operate by making the 'what' of the assertion present. "When an assertion has given a definite character to something present-at-hand, it says something about it *as* a 'what'; and this 'what' is drawn *from that* which is present-at-hand as such" (Heidegger 200). I often make assertions about things which are already present. For instance, when I experience the entity directly in front of me in the founded mode of the present-at-hand, I might assert that, "My computer is on." I know this statement to be true because my computer is sitting right here in front of me and I am typing on it, therefore, it must be on. I most likely, however, would not make such an assertion to myself or to someone who was sitting right beside me because that would be stating the obvious. So suppose I make this assertion over the phone to my mother. The computer is not present to my mother so she cannot confirm or deny anything about my computer, but, if I tell her that my computer is on, my assertion serves the purpose of pointing out and making present for her an entity which is not actually present.

"Thanks to this articulation, the understanding of what is said becomes public but in such a way that one acquires a certain access to the subject matter of the talk without the subject matter itself having to be handy or on hand" (Dahlstrom 284).

There is nothing problematic about any of this until we try and claim that the locus of truth lies in the assertion. If that were the case, it would be like claiming that my mother has equal access

to the truth of the Being of my computer as I do. This, however, is not the case. The primordial disclosure of the state of my computer was disclosed only to *me* because I was the only one who was present to have my computer disclosed to me. My mom simply has to take me at my word when I tell her that my computer is on. The problem with claiming that the locus of truth lies in the assertion is that it would require us to also claim that my mother and I have equal access to the truth of the Being of my computer.

Let's complicate the argument by using a more relevant issue. Suppose I claim that a particular contemporary political figure is racist. When asked how I know this to be true, I say, "Well, I read in an article that someone heard her use a racial slur in reference to persons of African descent." I do not know this politician; I have never been in her presence, and I, therefore, have never heard her say anything that might be considered racist. Hence her allegedly racist remarks were not disclosed to me personally. I am trusting that the article I read is providing a faithful representation of what was disclosed to the writer of the article; the writer of the article is, in turn, trusting that her source is accurately characterizing what was disclosed to her. It is in this way that we come to believe that the locus of truth lies in an assertion. We simply take others at their word because we either do not want to or are unable to go through the process of having the issue in question be disclosed to us primordially. So when I call my mom and say, "Mom, Political Figure X is racist," she might assume the truth of my statement and respond by saying, "Oh my, that's terrible." As the story gets passed further and further along, the assertion will become detached from what it was actually about and, once this detachment occurs, truth comes to be identified with the assertion and not the original disclosure (Dahlstrom 285). "That which is put forward in the assertion is something which can be passed along in 'further retelling'" (Heidegger 199).

Heidegger would argue that privileging the assertion is problematic even when it comes to the realms of math and science. Every child in this country is taught certain things that they are required to take on faith because they have not experienced the original disclosure themselves. For instance, as children we all learned Newton's three laws of motion; we all learned that the earth was round, and we all learned that area of a circle is  $A = \pi r^2$ . At one point, there were brilliant mathematicians and scientists who did the grunt work and experienced these insights in an originary disclosure. As young students, however, we often simply memorized the formulas and took them to be true. We assumed that the truth of these claims was located in the definitions we were taught. There is nothing wrong with learning Newton's laws of motion or the Pythagorean Theorem, but as we learn these theories we also need to be made aware that we missed out on that primordial disclosure. Therefore, it would be a mistake to go around assuming that we have an unmediated access to the truth of gravity because we have memorized Newton's Law's. Heidegger's claim is simply that, by locating truth most primarily in the assertion, we fundamentally misunderstand the nature of truth as disclosure.

“Assertion is not the primary ‘locus’ of truth. *On the contrary*, whether as a mode in which uncoveredness is appropriated or as a way of Being-in-the-world, assertion is grounded in Dasein's uncovering, or rather in its *disclosedness*” (Heidegger 269, his emphasis).

The tradition has passed over the primordial phenomenon of the ready-to-hand and the truth that is disclosed through that phenomenon. In passing over the phenomenon of the ready-to-hand the tradition has ended up privileging the present-at-hand. Although Descartes inherited his views and does not deserve the full blame for privileging the present-at-hand, he remains the focus of Heidegger's critique in *Being and Time* and therefore in this essay. It is the privileging of the present-at-hand which enables us to privilege the assertion as the locus of truth because assertions serve to make present what is absent. By arguing that assertions arise from Being-in-

the-world and truth as aletheia, Heidegger provides a richer understanding of truth and the human experience.

## CHAPTER 3: TRUTH, KNOWLEDGE, INTUITION, AND ASSERTIONS

### 3.1 Heidegger's Analysis of Truth

In section 44 of *Being and Time*, after Heidegger has laid out the structures of Dasein, he provides us with an analysis of truth. It is notable that this section is the first mention of truth aside from his earlier characterization of truth as *aletheia* in the introduction. Although Heidegger mentions disclosure frequently in his discussion on instrumentality, he reserves the term truth for section 44. There are several possible explanations for this. It may be that, since Heidegger has already characterized truth as unhiddenness (Heidegger 56) and unhiddenness seems to signify disclosure as an uncovering (Heidegger 105), he sees no real need to state explicitly that ready-to-hand disclosures are an encounter with truth; in fact, the most primordial encounter with truth. Perhaps Heidegger waits to bring up an explicit discussion of truth until he feels that he has adequately criticized the tradition's view of truth. After all, an in-depth criticism of the tradition's view of reality directly precedes the section on truth, and section 44 provides a critique of the correspondence theory.

It is pretty clearly the view of Daniel Dahlstrom and John Sallis (whose reading of Heidegger will be discussed in the following section) that truth is indeed in operation at the level of instrumentality. For instance, Dahlstrom claims, "Heidegger argues that the disclosedness of being-here or, more precisely, the disclosure of the timeliness of being-here, is a truth more fundamental than any propositional truth" (Dahlstrom xviii). And later in his argument he claims, "...truth is the original and concrete disclosure of things, the way they make themselves present and, in that sense, their manner of being" (223). Similarly, the very title of the Sallis essay that I will be examining in this chapter, *The Truth that is not of Knowledge* suggests that

there is a truth that precedes propositional truth, and it will become even clearer in the following paragraphs that Sallis does think that truth operates in ready-to-hand disclosures.

However, one might disagree with Dahlstrom and Sallis by taking it as significant that Heidegger waits until section 44 to bring truth back into the discussion. This might imply that, although disclosure is in operation throughout all modes of Being, truth is only in operation in the correspondence of the assertion with the present-at-hand being about which the assertion is made. In Heidegger's context, truth seems to be closely related to, or even interchangeable with, disclosure, which supports the readings given by Dahlstrom and Sallis. However, disclosure can be false. Beings can disclose themselves falsely through semblance, and one's taking an entity as something covers over the possibility of its being something else. For instance, my taking a pen as a writing utensil covers over its possibility of being a back scratcher. At the level of instrumentality, false disclosures and disclosures that cover over other possible disclosures could indicate that, while disclosure is in operation at the level of instrumentality, truth is not.

While I am inclined to agree with Dahlstrom and Sallis, we must bear in mind that this is an interesting ambiguity on Heidegger's part. Why does he wait until section 44 to bring truth back into the discussion? And, furthermore, when he does bring truth back into the discussion why doesn't he integrate the structures of Dasein into his example on correspondence (this example will be discussed in the following sections)?

In John Sallis' reading of *Being and Time*, Heidegger's claims signify a radical reconception and displacement of truth, intuition, and knowledge. Traditionally, it was thought that truth was bound to knowledge and knowledge to intuition and presence (Sallis 381). Heidegger seems to be working from Husserl's notion of intuition which claims that knowledge arises out of a first-person experience with the world (Smith). In other words, if I perceive a

table, I can intuitively have knowledge about that table based on my perception of it. Intuition for Husserl is his:

“...principle of all principles, which requires of all principles that they appeal ultimately to intuition; intuition is thus posited as the source from which all knowledge is to be legitimated” (Sallis 386).

Knowledge is thought of in terms of theoretical knowledge, and we gain knowledge about the world through a present-at-hand examination of it. Through this intuitive, present-at-hand examination we discover true propositions which we can know to be true because they correspond to the way the world actually is. Intuition presents the thing itself and is demonstrative; therefore it is bound to knowledge (Sallis 384). Thus Heidegger notes, “According to the general opinion, what is true is knowledge. But knowledge is judging” (Heidegger 259). It follows, then, that according to general opinion, truth has its locus in judgment (Sallis 389). Husserl takes this position on judgment and adds that, when one judges, “...one must distinguish between the real psychic process and the ideal content of judgment, the latter (in the case of a true judgment) standing in relation to the real thing judged about” (Sallis 389). In other words, when I see what I perceive to be a box, this represents the ideal content of my judgment. But I might be wrong; I might actually be looking at a table, in which case the ideal content might stand in contrast to the actual thing about which I am judging (McGreal 426).

For Heidegger, Husserl is mistaken to grant intuition such primacy and to distinguish between the ideal content and the real content of judging. Unlike Husserl, Heidegger recognizes that the fundamental structures of Dasein play a role in what exactly is present for Dasein. Intuition is linked to consciousness and presupposes a focus on what is bodily present, but, as Heidegger has pointed out, when Dasein is engaged in its world, bodily presence is disregarded as the focus remains on a larger project. Intuition and judgment, as Husserl characterizes them,

would consist in a present-at-hand examination of the things which we perceive through consciousness. Rejecting Husserl's privileging of consciousness and bodily presence, Heidegger posits the notion of Dasein as immersion in the world and argues that things are not primordially had in their bodily presence because of Dasein's ready-to-hand, circumspective concern. The ready-to-hand, "...is a matter not of just perceiving (as it is in intuition) but rather of apprehending things and others in their involvements in the world" (Sallis 388). Hence, the world is not first and foremost understood in term of intuition, rather it is understood in terms of apprehending a larger context which is primordially understood through everyday Being-in-the-world.

Recall that the woman taking notes in her philosophy class was more focused on the lecture than on her pen and notebook. Even though, physically, her pen and notebook were closest to her, they were less present to her than the lecture material that she was writing down. Similarly:

"Heidegger's example: while writing at a table, one feels the resistance of the table, which to the extent that it is given in the flesh; and yet, in the strict sense it is not the table that is there in the flesh, present to the writer, but rather the words that he is writing and the meaning of what is being written" (Sallis 384).

If the woman taking notes or the man writing on the table were to shift their focus towards what was bodily present, they would have switched over from the primordial ready-to-hand to the founded mode of the present-at-hand, but, as long as they remain in a ready-to-hand mode of Being, their projects are more present to them than what is actually physically present.

Subsequently, if intuition is conceived of as a direct apprehension through a conscious awareness of what is present, Heidegger would claim that intuition is also a founded mode of Being that goes along with the present-at-hand. Hence, Heidegger's introduction of the structures of Dasein serves to displace the primacy of intuition and presence. He argues that the



objectifying entailed in intuition is the founded phenomenon of presence-at-hand. Therefore, if knowledge arises out of intuition, knowing can be defined as presenting (Sallis 388). Knowing is judging, and to judge is to distinguish between the actual physical object and the ideal content of the judgment.

It is with this background in mind that Heidegger proposes his analysis. He asks, “When does truth become phenomenally explicit in knowledge itself? It does so when such knowing demonstrates itself as true” (Heidegger 259). Now Heidegger’s task is to provide his analysis of the demonstration in which truth comes to show itself as true.

Heidegger provides us with an example to illustrate his point. Suppose that a man standing with his back to the wall makes the true assertion that the picture on the wall is askew. When he turns around and sees that the picture on the wall is indeed askew, the truth of his assertion is demonstrated. When the man turns around and actually sees the picture, he perceives the truth of his assertion.

“What comes up for confirmation is that this entity is being pointed out by the Being in which the assertion is made—which is Being towards what is put forward in the assertion; thus what is to be confirmed is *that* such Being *uncovers* the entity towards which it is...In carrying out such a demonstration, the knowing remains related solely to the entity itself” (Heidegger 261).

In other words, when we make assertions about beings in the world what we have in mind is the concrete being of the ‘what’ of the assertion and nothing more. Moreover, although Heidegger concedes that we do have mental representations of entities, he argues that it is mistaken to posit a disconnection between the real and the ideal content of judgment. Once again, Heidegger is trying to pull philosophy down from the clouds back to the concrete experiences of the world. In doing so, he must dispel the belief that assertions are true based on their agreement of the mind’s

intuitive representations with the way the world actually is. Rather, it is the assertion's accurate uncovering of the Being of the painting that demonstrates the truth of assertion.

“...the truth of the assertion consists in saying the thing itself just as that thing comes to show itself, in its uncovering that thing just as that thing proves demonstrably to be, in short, in its being-uncovering” (Sallis 390).

This example illustrates Heidegger's claim that assertions can only arise out of Being-in-the-world. We cannot make assertions about things in the world without having first encountered them on some more fundamental level. In other words, the man who claims that the picture on the wall is askew cannot make any such claim without, first, having encountered the picture as a present being in the world that exists within his circumspective concern. He is not mentally representing the notion of crooked pictures in his mind; he is simply thinking of the picture that has been presented to him on the wall. Heidegger's point is that the reason the man was able to make an assertion about this picture was because the picture, in its presence, disclosed itself to him. This example sounds pretty similar to some claims made by correspondence theorists, and that's because it is; however, Heidegger is not contradicting himself. According to Heidegger, correspondence between an assertion and a state of affairs is a perfectly acceptable form of knowing the world theoretically in the realm of the present-at-hand. The man who makes the assertion about the picture has already conceived of the picture as present-at-hand; therefore, there is nothing problematic about invoking correspondence to display the truth of his assertion. What is missing in this example is the twist Heidegger provides for correspondence. Assertions about beings in the world are not made in vacuums. They are made by people who have certain orientations in the world, and, in particular, regarding the beings about which the assertion is being made. Strangely Heidegger does not throw this twist into this particular example but it is implied by his earlier analyses of Being-in-the-world.

The man's orientation in the world undoubtedly impacted this disclosure. Heidegger could have made this example more relevant to his claims about Being-in-the-world if he had provided some context for the man making the assertion. For instance, suppose this man was an interior decorator. It makes sense that an interior decorator would notice an askew picture almost immediately because much of his circumspective concern is oriented towards the project of hanging picture on walls. If the man were a philosopher, meditating on Being, however, it would stand to reason that he might not notice a crooked picture. His orientation in the world may have heightened his ability to think critically, but also limited his ability to notice things like crooked pictures on walls.

“Heidegger could have extended the analysis and integrated it more radically in the analysis of Dasein, had he gone on to introduce another example, one in which the self-showing of the thing spoken of would have taken the form, not of perception, but of circumspective concern. For at least to this extent truth would, then, have been detached from knowledge as intuition” (Sallis 390).

Heidegger fails to contextualize his example perhaps because he thinks it is already implied by his earlier analysis of Being-in-the-world which, it is important to note, sets the stage for this analysis. However, as I mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, it is also conceivable that he did not contextualize this example on purpose. It all depends on whether or not Heidegger thinks that truth is in operation at the level of circumspective concern. The above quote makes Sallis' position clear, but one might contend that it was not an oversight on Heidegger's part to exclude circumspective concern from his example. If Heidegger does want to reserve truth for assertions, it was most likely an intentional omission on his part.

Nevertheless, in this reading, Heidegger's analysis in section 44 still signifies a turn away from truth as it is most often thought of in terms of knowledge, intuition, and judgment towards truth as being-uncovering. Sallis posits the move Heidegger makes in section 44 as a doubling

of truth, "...doubling truth as being-uncovering, doubling it with the originary phenomenon of truth, which is the ontological condition of possibility of truth being-uncovering" (Sallis 390). Particularly if we impute a context of Being-in-the-world onto Heidegger's example of the man making an assertion about an askew picture it becomes clear that Heidegger is claiming that the truth that is disclosed through the assertion is only possible based on a more concrete Being-in-the-world. In Sallis and Dahlstrom's reading of Heidegger, what makes the uncovering of the picture possible, namely Being-in-the-world, should be considered true in a more originary sense than truth as it is conceived of as knowledge, intuition, and judgment. Disclosedness as it occurs through circumspective concern and ready-to-hand dealings with the world is, therefore, "...a matter neither *of* intuition nor *for* intuition. The originary phenomenon of truth, truth, as disclosedness, is a truth that is not of knowledge" (Sallis 390, his emphasis).

### **3.2 Heidegger's Characterization of Assertions**

Once Heidegger has adequately characterized the different modes of disclosure, namely the ready-to-hand and the present-at-hand, he is ready to explain how the assertion fits in within his overall scheme. An assertion is the form of discourse which gives beings a definite character. For Heidegger, there are three significations to the term 'assertion' all of which are made possible on the basis of ready-to-hand encounters with the world.

First, the most primary signification of asserting is pointing out (Heidegger 196). This signification lets the entity, "be seen from itself" (Heidegger 196). To illustrate, Heidegger provides us with the assertion, "The hammer is too heavy". Seemingly, this assertion allows the hammer to remain within its ready-to-hand context if we interpret the assertion as a means of saying, "This hammer is too heavy for me to use in the project that I am currently engaged in". In other words, I need another hammer. Furthermore, this statement would only make sense to

someone who understood the context in which I was operating because it assumes knowledge of that context. If one construction worker were to make that assertion to another construction worker, for instance, the other construction worker would know precisely what she meant. However, if the construction worker were to call her husband and make that assertion, he might wonder, "...too heavy for what?"

The second signification of assertion is predication (Heidegger 196). Assertions predicate thereby giving the object of the assertion a definite character. The assertion, "The hammer is too heavy" gives the hammer the character of heaviness. In this assertion it is not the predicate that is put forward but the hammer itself; however, it is a narrow conception of the hammer that is brought into view and this limits our understanding of the hammer to the definite character of heaviness the assertion gives it (Heidegger 196). Heidegger contends that the second characterization is grounded in the first. "Within this pointing-out, the elements which are Articulated in predication—the subject and the predicate—arise" (Heidegger 197). It is not through the predication that the hammer shows itself; it is through the pointing out. When we predicate we actually limit our view of the hammer to what we have predicated.

The third signification for assertions is communication (Heidegger 197). Assertions are a way of communicating something about a being to someone else. This signification is grounded in the first and second significations because they provide the basis for communication. "It is letting someone see with us what we have pointed out by way of giving it a definite character" (Heidegger 197). When I assert to someone else that the hammer is too heavy, I share my way of Being-towards what has been pointed out. The person does not necessarily have to be there with me for me to share this assertion. In sharing the events of my day, I might explain that the

hammer I was using earlier was too heavy, and this is a way of communicating my Being-towards-the-hammer to someone who was not physically there to share in it.

At the end of this analysis Heidegger provides his final definition of assertions. An assertion, he says, “is a pointing-out which gives something a definite character and which communicates” (Heidegger 199). He goes on to argue that it is necessary to recognize that assertions are not, “...a free-floating kind of behavior which, in its own right, might be capable of disclosing entities in general in a primary way: on the contrary, it always maintains itself on the basis of Being-in-the-world” (Heidegger 199). Hence, I cannot make an assertion about a hammer being too heavy if I have not encountered the hammer through my Being-in-the-world, or if I have had someone else disclose the hammer to me by pointing out that it is too heavy. When I do make the assertion that the hammer is too heavy, it is implied that I have a fore-conception of the hammer based on my encounter with it through Being-in-the-world.

### **3.3 Dahlstrom’s Reading of Heidegger**

The above analysis of assertions helps to elucidate Heidegger’s argument that assertions are possible based on ready-to-hand encounters with Being-in-the-world. However, in light of the radical claims that provide the backdrop for this analysis, it is disappointing that Heidegger does not engage in a more in-depth discussion of assertions. For instance, if assertions can operate as a pointing-out this would suggest that they can arise from the ready-to-hand as well as the present-at-hand, whereas assertions as predication seemingly only arise through present-at-hand modes of Being. Additionally, Heidegger claims that assertions communicate uncovering to others. Does this imply that the sole purpose of assertions is to communicate more primordial disclosures to others? Does the person doing the asserting already have knowledge of the uncovering or is the act of assertion an uncovering in itself? If we conceive of assertions as

verbal utterances it would seem that communication would be their main objective (i.e. communicating one's disclosure to others); however, if we conceive of assertions as occurring through thought, as well, then we can still claim that they operate as a disclosure to the person doing the asserting. These are all distinctions Heidegger fails to make and so we are left to our own devices in our attempt to flesh out precisely what his analysis implies. A discussion of Daniel Dahlstrom's reading of Heidegger's analysis of assertions might shed some light on the subject. Dahlstrom expresses the same frustration I have conveyed with Heidegger's scanty analysis of assertions: "Heidegger leaves a great deal to be desired in elaborating the relations among these three [significations]" (Dahlstrom 203). Like myself, Dahlstrom is left to make conjectures about what Heidegger may have meant.

Whereas Heidegger uses the same assertion, "The hammer is too heavy," to characterize all three significations of asserting, Dahlstrom opts to use three different assertions to characterize the differing significations involved in asserting which he characterizes respectively as unthematic, circumspectively thematic, and theoretically thematic; these characterizations seem to correlate to assertions as pointing out, predication, and communication (Dahlstrom 204). Additionally, Dahlstrom interprets the different significations of assertions as operating on different levels, and reads Heidegger as doing the same.

"In keeping with this brief synopsis of the characteristics of assertions, Heidegger observes that they can be made on different levels, between the extremes of full 'absorption in some preoccupation' and 'pure determining,' that is, a strictly theoretical assertion" (Dahlstrom 203).

An example of an unthematic/pointing-out assertion would be, "The pen is out of ink." This assertion reveals or points something out about the pen, without explicitly thematizing it. In other words, this statement does not view the pen from a present-at-hand perspective. Through my assertion, I am revealing the pen *as* out of ink. I am not describing what the pen is or what

its purpose is; the statement already presupposes knowledge of the pen. Instead I am pointing out something about the pen in relation to its usefulness as a ready-to-hand tool. Although, in this case, I am actually pointing out the cessation of its usefulness as a ready-to-hand tool.

An example of a circumspectively thematic/predicative assertion would be, “The pen writes on the paper.” This type of assertion does thematize the subject, namely the pen, but it only thematizes it circumspectively. In other words, the pen is only thematized in relation to the purpose it serves, and in relation to the context in which it operates (Dahlstrom 204). Furthermore, unlike the first assertion, this statement provides some definite character as to what precisely the pen is; it reveals the pen *as* a tool for writing, and it takes the pen out of its ready-to-hand, hidden context in order to do so.

An example of a theoretically-thematic/communicative assertion would be, “The pen is purple.” This statement thematizes the pen, not circumspectively and in relation to a larger context, but theoretically and as purely present-at-hand (Dahlstrom 204). It removes the pen from its usual context in order to examine it on a more theoretical level.

Dahlstrom’s characterization of assertions seems to suggest that there are actually three different types of assertions rather than one type of assertion with three differing significations. He goes on to argue that the first level of asserting always pervades the others, suggesting that, at least some, assertions are capable of operating simultaneously at more than one level (Dahlstrom 205). The first level of assertion would thus disclose an original meaning, and the theoretical asserting contained in the second and third levels would remain dependent upon that first level.

If we conceive of assertions, like Dahlstrom, as being able to operate simultaneously at more than one level then it would seem that an assertion can be ready-to-hand or present-at-hand and maybe even both at once. It would also follow that assertions, if they are to be conceived of



as an original disclosure, must be capable of occurring silently, through thought and not just through speaking or writing.<sup>12</sup> Once again, Heidegger could have made his explication clearer had he chosen to provide context for his examples.

Let's imagine for example that I am alone in my apartment building a book shelf. In order to do this, I have purchased a tool kit that, among other things, contains two hammers of differing sizes. I removed the larger hammer and some nails and began working. Suppose that after about thirty seconds of futile hammering I stop and think to myself, "This hammer is too heavy." I have made an assertion, although silently and to myself. This assertion discloses the hammer to me in that it points out that the hammer is too heavy for me to be using. Prior to the assertion, the heaviness of the hammer had not yet been disclosed to me; it was only through my silent assertion that I came to see the hammer as too heavy. Now that I have made my assertion that the hammer is too heavy, I have another option open to me. I can cast aside the heavy hammer in favor of a lighter one. Assuming that I knew all along that the lighter hammer was my fallback option, my assertion could be conceived of a ready-to-hand means of saying, "I need another hammer." Thus, this assertion, in this particular context only invokes the first level of asserting.

Now suppose that the tool kit I had purchased only had one hammer, the very same hammer that is too heavy. Again, I begin to hammer and about thirty seconds later I give up and assert, "The hammer is too heavy." At this point, I must view the hammer as present-at-hand because my project of building my bookshelf has been completely interrupted. Now I am left staring at slabs of wood and a hammer that is too heavy for me to use. The first level of asserting is still in operation here because I have still pointed out something about the hammer through my

---

<sup>12</sup> Wittgenstein makes a similar distinction in his discussion of private language in *Philosophical Investigations* Paragraph 243

assertion. The second level must also be in operation because I have made a predication about the hammer, and I have limited my view of it. Now when I look at the hammer my view is limited by my assertion that it is too heavy. The third level is not in operation, because there is no one around for me to communicate with.

Finally, suppose that I take my hammer back to the store to return it. When I speak to the cashier, I explain to her that it was too heavy. Here all three levels of asserting are in operation. I am pointing out something about the hammer, by predicating it, and I am also communicating by inviting the cashier to share in the disclosure about the hammer which I have had. Thus, in this particular context, all three levels of asserting are being utilized simultaneously.

Ultimately, however, it seems that I must reject the first example (in which the assertion about the hammer leaves it in its ready-to-hand context) if I am to maintain my earlier definition, from section 2.2, that all assertions operate by making the ‘what’ of the assertion present. If that is the case, then all assertions serve to make the subject of the assertion present-at-hand.

Heidegger seems to agree with this view as he also characterizes assertions as a making present-at-hand:

“If this entity [the hammer] becomes the object of an assertion, then as soon as we begin this assertion, there is already a change-over in the fore-having. Something *ready-to-hand with which* we have to do or perform something, turns into something *about which* the assertion that points out is made...When an assertion has given a definite character to something present-at-hand, it says something about it *as* a ‘what’; and this ‘what’ is drawn from what is present-at-hand as such” (Heidegger 200).

It seems, then, that we cannot characterize assertions as ready-to-hand. I must conclude that the statement, “The hammer is too heavy,” cannot possibly operate as ready-to-hand because it necessarily involves positing an ‘about which’ in regards to the hammer. Even if only momentarily, before I cast aside my hammer in favor for a smaller one, my assertion, “The hammer is too heavy,” has made the hammer present. Now the ‘as’ of the hammer no longer

references a totality of involvements, because I only see the hammer, in a definite way, through presence-at-hand.

Moreover, in light of Heidegger's definition of assertions as "a pointing-out which gives something a definite character and which communicates," it seems that we ought to reject Dahlstrom's levels theory altogether. At no point does Heidegger characterize assertions in terms of levels; rather, he characterizes them in terms of significations, and although he does grant priority to the first signification, since it grounds the others, in the end, he defines assertion using all three significations. If we examine the assertions used to illustrate Dahlstrom's three levels of asserting, we can see that all three significations are actually in operation in all three assertions.

The assertion, "The pen is out of ink," for instance, not only points something definite about the pen, it also predicates the pen to a particular way of being: unready-to-hand. Moreover, just as Heidegger claims, this predication restricts my view of the pen to being out of ink. Finally, if we conceive of assertions as self-communication in addition to communicating to others, then we can also claim that the third signification is in operation. Regardless of whether I am alone and aver to myself that the pen is out of ink, or make the assertion to someone else, I am communicating a definite character of the pen. Heidegger never makes a distinction between self-communication and communicating with others, and his passage on communicative asserting seems to suggest that he is only thinking in terms of communicating with others. However, if we are to conceive of assertions as disclosive in their own right, it seems to me that we must also conceive of assertions as a means of self-communication. Assertions about present-at-hand beings can communicate a particular aspect of a being to myself.

Similarly, the assertion, “The pen writes on the paper,” can also be seen as utilizing all three significations. This assertion points something out about the usefulness of the pen, predicates it for a specific purpose (once I conceive of the pen as a tool for writing I am restricted from viewing it, say, as a tool for scratching my back), and communicates a useful way in which to use the pen. Finally, “The pen is purple,” also can be viewed as using all three significations; it points something definite out about the pen, it predicates the pen, and it communicates something about the pen regardless of whether it is to oneself or to another. Heidegger’s final definition of assertions as an invocation of all three significations simultaneously, strongly suggests that Dahlstrom is mistaken in his characterizing assertions as operating on levels.

However, before we give up on Dahlstrom completely let us examine another distinction he makes that might be a bit more helpful. Dahlstrom’s analysis aptly points out that Heidegger’s account of assertions switches back and forth (without clarification) between talk of the “assertion” and talk of the “asserting”. “...’assertion’ stands at times for the act of asserting (along with the distinctive intentional character that Heidegger accords it), at other times for what is asserted (in the sense of the means, object, or even the result of asserting)” (Dahlstrom 201). Dahlstrom goes on to claim that this ambiguity points to a distinction Heidegger seems to want to make:

“While an assertion might be confused with a sentence or word-complex and treated as something handy or on hand, the asserting remains at bottom an existential, albeit derivative of the basic discursiveness of being-here” (Dahlstrom 201).

If Dahlstrom is right, the act of asserting itself can be a form of disclosure similar to, but derivative of, the ‘as’ structure discussed in chapter one. Just as taking a certain entity to be a door or a pen uncovers that entity as such, the act of asserting also invokes truth as aletheia in

that it points out or uncovers something definite about a being through the three significations of asserting: pointing out, predication, and communication.

Dahlstrom is less clear regarding his claim that the assertion itself can be handy or on hand, however, he seems to think that assertions become ready-to-hand when they are used *ad infinitum* to hold a particular disclosure open. This claim hearkens back to my argument in chapter two. Recall that I argued that students are taught certain principles that they must take on faith because they did not have the luxury of experiencing the original disclosure that gave birth to the principle. For instance, Sir Isaac Newton once asserted that, “Whenever a particle A exerts a force on another particle B, B simultaneously exerts a force on A with the same magnitude in the opposite direction.” This assertion was made based on a particular disclosure, experienced by Newton. However, suppose the students learning this material do not experience the same disclosure that engendered Newton’s insight; rather, they memorized the assertion and took it to be true based on faith. In this case, the assertion itself, but not Newton’s act of asserting can be seen as ready-to-hand.

Newton’s act of asserting was an existential act which made the ‘what’ of his assertion present. “As a manner of Being-in-the-world, making an assertion is a way of taking (uncovering) things, specifically by pointing them out and thus making it possible to see them, perhaps even for what they are” (Dahlstrom 202). This act of asserting, however, must be distinguished from the assertion itself which can be taken as ready-to-hand as it becomes a tool for holding open an original disclosure. When the assertion gets passed along, “...things that are used and thus originally (hermeneutically, interpretively) understood in a tacit nonthematic interaction with them are flattened into things merely on hand” (Dahlstrom 206).

After a close reading of Heidegger's analysis of assertions and Dahlstrom's interpretation of Heidegger's analysis, we can make several conclusions regarding assertions. (1) They always involve making the 'what' of the assertion present-at-hand. (2) Assertions have three significations: pointing out, predicating, and communicating. (3) Asserting can be done as a form of communicating to others or as self-communication, through thought. 4) The act of asserting is a modification of the primordial 'as' structure of understanding; this can be contrasted with the assertion itself which can operate as a ready-to-hand tool which holds certain disclosures open.

## CONCLUSION

Heidegger's interest in the question of Being led him into the largely unexplored terrain of the most primordial ways we interact with our world. In chapter one, I show how he successfully illustrated that the disclosure of beings are most fundamentally encountered through the phenomenon of the ready-to-hand, a phenomenon which has been largely overlooked by the tradition. Chapter two provides a criticism of Descartes' ontology in which I demonstrate how Descartes' view of the world led him to privilege present-at-hand views of the world, leading him to ignore the phenomenon of the ready-to-hand.

The first two chapters (1) outlined Heidegger's basic project in the first division of *Being and Time* and (2) showed how his views comprise a radical critique of the tradition. In section 3.1, I show how Heidegger's recognition that presence-at-hand is a founded mode of Being enabled him to critique the correspondence theorist's claim that truth belongs solely to the assertion. Truth only belongs to the assertion insofar as assertions are a modification of the 'as' structure, a structure that only arises from Being-in-the-world in general.

Having established that truth can only arise from Being-in-the-world I went on to discuss Heidegger's analysis of assertions. Just like the ready-to-hand, assertions take entities 'as' such and such, thereby pointing them out, predicating them, and communicating disclosure about them. Correspondence theory can and should play a role in the disclosures that happen through assertions, but one must always bear in mind that this phenomenon arises from the structures inherent in Being-in-the-world. In other words, assertions and the truth that comes from them do not occur in a vacuum. They are based on the structures of Dasein and Dasein's particular orientation in the world.

Because Heidegger's section on assertions is somewhat brief, I also examined Daniel Dahlstrom's interpretation of Heidegger. I concluded that he was mistaken to claim that assertions operate on different levels. Heidegger never characterizes them as such; rather he contends that assertions have three significations which are in operation in every assertion. However, Dahlstrom does make another distinction that I conclude is correct. He distinguishes between the act of asserting and the assertion itself. The act of asserting is always an existential act, performed by Dasein, which makes the 'what' of the assertion present. In contrast, the assertion itself can be ready-to-hand if it is used to hold open a certain disclosure.

One difficulty that was raised by my paper was the question of whether or not truth is in operation at the level of the ready-to-hand. Clearly, Sallis and Dahlstrom think that it is, but they seem to have overlooked the fact that Heidegger never uses the word truth in his discussion of circumspective concern. Instead he uses the word disclosure, and he is quite explicit that disclosures can be false. One might defend Sallis and Dahlstrom by arguing that disclosure is synonymous with aletheia, and Heidegger's omission of the word 'truth' is his way of trying to radically redefine truth. However, this might be a dubious claim considering that Heidegger does not explicitly link the terms aletheia and disclosure. Although this question is not problematized in great detail in this essay, it is a fascinating question that could be the object of future research.



## REFERENCES

- Aquinas, Thomas, and The Fathers of the English Dominican Province. "Summa Theologica." Summa Theologica. <<http://www.sacred-texts.com/chr/aquinas/summa/index.htm>>.
- Barnes, Jonathan. Metaphysics Book Theta. Complete Works of Aristotle Set : The Revised Oxford Translation. New York: Princeton UP, 1984.
- Braver, Lee. A Thing of This World : A History of Continental Anti-Realism. New York: Northwestern UP, 2007.
- Dahlstrom, Daniel O., and Robert B. Pippin. Heidegger's Concept of Truth. New York: Cambridge UP, 2000.
- Descartes, Renee. Trans. George MacDonald Ross. The Principles of Philosophy. The Principles of Philosophy. 1998. Leeds. <<http://www.philosophy.leeds.ac.uk/GMR/hmp/texts/modern/descartes/principles/dcprinc.html>>.
- Descartes, Renee. Trans. John Veitch. Meditations on First Philosophy. Descartes' Meditations. 27 July 2007. David B. Manley and Charles S. Taylor. <<http://www.wright.edu/cola/descartes/intro.html>>.
- Glanzberg, Michael. "Truth." The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. 6 June 2006. Stanford University. <<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/truth/#CorThe>>.
- Great thinkers of the Western world the major ideas and classic works of more than 100 outstanding Western philosophers, physical and social scientists, psychologists, religious writers, and theologians. New York, NY: HarperCollinsPublishers, 1992.
- Heidegger, Martin. Being and time. New York [etc.]: Harper and Row, 1962.
- Macomber, W.B. The Anatomoy of Disillusion. Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1967.
- Marian, David. "The Correspondence Theory." The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. 10 May 2005. Stanford University. <<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/truth-correspondence/#1>>.
- Marx, Werner. Heidegger and the Tradition. Trans. Theodore Kisiel. New York: Northwestern UP, 1982.
- "Phenomenology ()" Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. 01 Mar. 2009 <<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/phenomenology/>>.
- Plato, and Benjamin Jowett. "The Rublic Book 10: The Recompense of Life." The Classical Library. The Classical Library. <<http://www.classicallibrary.org/index.htm>>.

Raffoul, Francois. Heidegger and the Subject. Trans. David Pettigrew and Gregory Recco. New York: Humanity Books, 1999.

Sallis, John. "The Truth that is not of Knowledge." Reading Heidegger from the Start. New York City: State University of New York P, 1994. 381-92.

## VITA

Erin Kraus was born on Clark Air Force Base in the Philippines in 1983. Due to her father's career in the military, she moved often and has lived in: the Philippines, Kansas, the Azores, Colorado, Nebraska, Florida, Maryland, and Louisiana. In 2006, Erin graduated from Salisbury University, in Salisbury, Maryland, with a Bachelor of Arts in philosophy. After that she took a year off of school to work with the Notre Dame Americorps program in Baltimore, Maryland. She will receive her Master of Arts in philosophy from Louisiana State University in the spring of 2009.