

## HEIDEGGER ON REALISM AND IDEALISM

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper concerns the relation of Heidegger's thought to the traditionally opposed positions of realism and idealism: a dilemma that Heidegger explicitly addresses in Section 43 of *Being and Time*. Heidegger's attempt to forge a position 'between' realism and idealism has recently been interpreted in a number of ways, depending on whether Heidegger's affinity with realism or his affinity with idealism is prioritized. My contention is that Heidegger's realist and idealist dimensions are equally essential to his thought in view of the re-interpretation of subjectivity as 'ahead of itself,' which follows from his phenomenological analysis of immediate, everyday experience.

### I



Although the philosophy of Martin Heidegger has long been recognized as highly influential for 20th Century Continental thought, it was not until fairly recently that Heidegger's concern with Being, and the confrontation with the philosophical tradition that this concern initiated, found much of an audience among English-speaking philosophers. Of course, the translation of *Being and Time* published in 1962 followed by William Richardson's *Heidegger: Through Phenomenology to Thought* introduced Heidegger to the English-speaking world. But until Richard Rorty's *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* appeared, Heidegger-scholarship was a rather insular affair, practiced primarily by specialists who made little effort to translate Heidegger's infamous idiom into terms that could connect Heidegger with the traditional philosophical problems that the uninitiated were accustomed to addressing (Richardson's book being a notable but underappreciated exception to this rule). The obscurity of Heidegger's language, along with the adoption of this

obscurity by most of his commentators, effectively prevented Heidegger from infiltrating the mainstream of American philosophical circles. However, with Rorty's book, in which Heidegger is linked with the philosophical tradition in a way that non-Heideggerians can understand, Heidegger's thought began to find its way into the American mainstream. Since then, the effort to understand Heidegger in terms of familiar philosophical problems has been carried on by a number of American scholars. And in this paper, I would like to continue this tradition by showing how Heidegger's thought attempts to dissolve the realism/idealism dilemma<sup>1</sup>—an issue that has been raised in the recent work of several Heidegger-commentators.

Heidegger addresses the question concerning the relation of his own thought to realism and idealism in section 43 of *Being and Time*. There, he allows that both positions contain "a grain of genuine inquiry,"<sup>2</sup> and that idealism "has an advantage in principle."<sup>3</sup> But he accepts neither position. Heidegger's attempt to forge a position that is neither realist nor idealist but still preserves the 'grain of genuine inquiry' found in each has recently been interpreted in a number of ways, depending on the degree of emphasis placed on Heidegger's affinity with realism or with idealism.

Those who emphasize Heidegger's idealist aspect tend to rely on *Being and Time*'s analysis of circumspective concern, along with section 43c ("Reality and Care").<sup>4</sup> Those who emphasize Heidegger's realist aspect lean on his analysis of anxiety.<sup>5</sup> In either case, realist and idealist tendencies are both acknowledged, but one tendency is prioritized. These prioritizations presuppose that the analysis of circumspective concern and the analysis of anxiety yield essentially opposed findings. To avoid inconsistency, then, one of the analyses must be given a subordinate status. I believe that this separating and privileging of texts can be avoided by showing that the realist implications found in the analysis of anxiety are already present, albeit implicitly, in the apparent idealism of circumspective concern. Thus, the analyses are compatible and neither need be subordinated.

The advantage of my approach goes beyond the maintenance of unity within Heidegger's text. By giving Heidegger's realist and idealist tendencies an equally fundamental status, our interpretation will not depict Heidegger as primarily an idealist nor as primarily a realist. Rather, his position will undermine the very distinction between realism and idealism, as is his intention.<sup>6</sup>

Heidegger objects to both realism and idealism because of the inadequate notion of subjectivity on which both are based. Specifically, they are grounded in the Cartesian interpretation of the subject as an isolated, present-at-hand entity. Given this notion of subjectivity, objects are either in some sense 'within' the subject and so are dependent upon the subject, as idealism claims; or they are located outside of the subject and thus are independent of the subject, as the realist claims. Given the presence-at-hand of the Cartesian subject, no other options remain. Hence, the realism/idealism division and the dilemma between its opposed terms. Heidegger's unique solution to this dilemma

replaces the Cartesian subject with Dasein, which is not an isolated subject, but instead precedes itself, and so is structured in such a way that it is outside of itself. Through this reinterpretation of the nature of subjectivity—a reinterpretation that sets Heidegger's solution to the realism/idealism dilemma apart from all previously attempted solutions—the very distinction between that which is inside of Dasein and that which is outside of Dasein, between the 'subject'-dependent and the 'subject'-independent, between realism and idealism, collapses. In this way, realist claims that objects are independent and idealist claims that they are dependent are no longer incompatible. Thus, *Being and Time's* existential analytic of Dasein reinterprets the subject/object relation yielding a position that cannot be characterized as realism or idealism; objects are in a sense Dasein-dependent and in a sense Dasein-independent. And although the analysis of circumspective concern seems to privilege the sense in which entities are Dasein-dependent, the nature of this very dependence implies an equally fundamental independence.

## II

Heidegger's confrontation with the realism/idealism dilemma begins with a repudiation of realism, which occurs in *Being and Time's* account of circumspective concern.<sup>7</sup> There, Heidegger examines the relationship between the 'subject' and its objects by focusing on Dasein's "average everydayness";<sup>8</sup> he examines the way that objects appear to us in our immediate experience. And he notes that if we simply look to our immediate encounter with entities, we find that they do not appear as the inert objects of a disinterested, theoretical gaze but as things for practical use, or "equipment (*Zeuge*)."<sup>9</sup> This claim is easily defended by using Heidegger's own example of a hammer.

A hammer is not immediately experienced as a piece of wood with a piece of metal attached to it, but rather as that with which one can drive nails. The hammer, then, is "proximally given"<sup>9</sup> as an object of use. Here, it may be argued that Heidegger's characterization only describes the manner in which a certain class of entities are immediately encountered, but not the way that all objects appear in immediate experience. That is, while tools such as hammers may be experienced primarily as objects of use, there seem to be a great variety of objects that are not proximally given in this way. The types of objects that seem most resistant to Heidegger's characterization are natural objects. Natural objects seem to resist Heidegger's thesis of the primacy of the practical because, unlike tools, they were apparently not made to be used. Of course, they *can* be used for various purposes, but it seems that to do so is to impose a use on the natural object that is not intrinsic to its being what it is. However, even in the case of natural objects, Heidegger's descriptive analysis still holds. For example, a rock is not immediately experienced as an inert mass of sedimented minerals. Rather, it is experienced as that which one can throw through the neighbor's window, or that which one can absent-mindedly

kick down the street. And since the primacy of the practical encounter holds even in the case of our encounter with natural objects, we can conclude *a fortiori* that in all cases, objects are immediately experienced as objects of use, practical objects. In Heidegger's technical language, entities are proximally given as ready-to-hand rather than present-at-hand.

With the above observation, Heidegger's attack on the Cartesian subject is under way since the conception of the subject as an isolated entity implies that it is intrinsically unrelated to objects. If that were the case, then a relation between consciousness and objects would first be established when an object happens to come within the conscious being's perceptual field. The primary relationship between the subject and the object, then, would be one in which consciousness confronts an insignificant thing. Objects would be primarily experienced as insignificant, present-at-hand things—objects of a theoretical encounter. But since, according to Heidegger, objects are primarily encountered as ready-to-hand, as objects of a practical encounter, the subject/object relation, and thus the nature of subjectivity, must be re-examined. Heidegger's new notion of subjectivity is derived from his explication of the structure of the ready-to-hand.

Heidegger's discussion of the ready-to-hand's structure begins by pointing out that, strictly speaking, there is "no such thing as *an* equipment."<sup>10</sup> A ready-to-hand entity is never discovered in isolation, but as situated within a practical context since to be an object of practical concern is to be useful *for* some purpose, and thus to be referred beyond itself. It only is the useful object that it is in terms of the practical context within which it is set. And the immediate purposive context within which the ready-to-hand entity is found is itself set within a still broader, practically oriented, context of equipmental references. Ultimately, all sets of equipmental references are situated within an all-encompassing field of equipmental references. The ready-to-hand entity only is what it is in terms of this total equipmental context within which the entity is purposively situated. Heidegger names this all-encompassing context the "envirning world."<sup>11</sup>

The upshot of Heidegger's analysis is that the envirning world lends the ready-to-hand its ready-to-hand character. Without the envirning world, there could be no equipmental entities. In this sense, the envirning world is the very readiness-to-hand of the ready-to-hand, or to put it in less technical terms, the envirning world is the very usefulness of the useful.

Not only do useful things require usefulness, but usefulness requires a *user* since a useful thing could have no usefulness unless there were someone for whom it could possibly be useful. In Heideggerian terms, ready-to-hand entities cannot be without the envirning world, and the envirning world cannot be without circumspective Dasein. Heidegger points this out by designating Dasein as the "for-the-sake-of-which (*Worum-willen*),"<sup>12</sup> or ultimate purpose, of all practical involvements. Any series of practical references terminates in Dasein itself as the ultimate purpose of its purposive activities, as that for

whom the useful possesses usefulness. While ready-to-hand entities refer beyond themselves to the enviroing world, the enviroing world is anchored in Dasein.

Note that the structure of the ready-to-hand is idealistic. Practical entities do not exist independently of circumspective Dasein; things cannot be useful without someone for whom they are useful. Heidegger's analysis articulates an idealism of the ready-to-hand. But, certainly, no realist would contest this. The realist could argue that *qua* useful the useful object requires someone for whom it is useful, but it is independent *qua* object.<sup>13</sup> According to the realist, practical value is supplementary since objects are fundamentally present-at-hand, and so are primarily encountered as the inert, useless objects of the theoretical gaze. If the realist were correct in asserting the primacy of the present-at-hand, then it would follow that although there could be no useful objects without Dasein insofar as usefulness is added to objects by Dasein, there could still be objects without Dasein. Heidegger counters this realist reply with his description of the breakdown of the equipmental context, which illustrates that presence-at-hand is a "deficient mode" of readiness-to-hand.<sup>14</sup>

Entities with which we are practically involved can become objects of disinterested theoretical inspection when the ready-to-hand entity's equipmental references are somehow disturbed, e.g., when an equipmental entity breaks and so becomes unusable. In such a situation, the ready-to-hand entity becomes experienced as present-at-hand through a reduction of usefulness, and so presence-at-hand is but a minimal form, or deficient mode, of readiness-to-hand.<sup>15</sup> Since the ready-to-hand entity is not a present-at-hand entity to which Dasein has *added* usefulness, but instead the present-at-hand entity is a ready-to-hand entity from which Dasein has *subtracted* usefulness, uselessness is simply an impoverished form of usefulness. By acknowledging the priority of the practical encounter, Heidegger concludes that the structure of Dasein's encounter with the present-at-hand possesses the same basic characteristics as its encounter with the ready-to-hand. Therefore, Heidegger's idealism of the ready-to-hand extends to the present-at-hand, which allows him to deny the independence of both practical and theoretical objects.

So, Heidegger's assertion of the primacy of the practical encounter contradicts the realist's fundamental claim that objects exist independently of conscious beings. In the practical encounter, Dasein is related to equipmental entities insofar as they are useful for circumspective Dasein. The ready-to-hand is dependent upon Dasein rather than set against an isolated subject. And since present-at-hand objects are deficiently ready-to-hand, even these supposedly independent objects are essentially *for* Dasein. They are just as dependent upon Dasein as are ready-to-hand entities, although in a minimal mode of dependence. The idealistic structure of Dasein's practical activities applies equally to its theoretical activities.<sup>16</sup>

But Heidegger's point is not that Dasein is essentially a tool user or that objects are essentially tools.<sup>17</sup> Dasein cannot be simply identified with *circumspective* Dasein nor can objects be simply equated with the ready-to-hand. Rather, the examination of everydayness provides the "initial phenomenological insight"<sup>18</sup> by which the fundamental relationship between Dasein and beings *per se* can be discerned. The relation between *circumspective* Dasein and the ready-to-hand is the *ontic* manifestation of the *ontological* structure of Dasein's relation to beings *per se*. Heidegger's argument against realism culminates in this move from the *ontic* to the *ontological* level.

To move to the *ontological* level, we must discover the fundamental structure determining the basic components of our practical involvements, those components being ready-to-hand entities (the useful), the *envirning* world (usefulness), and *circumspective* Dasein (the user). Heidegger makes this move by claiming that the fundamental structure of the *envirning* world, its very "worldhood," is "significance (*Bedeutsamkeit*)."<sup>19</sup> The usefulness of the ready-to-hand entity is the *ontic* manifestation of its *ontological* significance.

To understand how readiness-to-hand is grounded in significance, recall that the ready-to-hand is distinguished from the present-at-hand insofar as the former is useful for Dasein while the latter is useless. The realist asserts that the uselessness of the present-at-hand object is tantamount to its independence from Dasein. Heidegger's analysis of the primacy of the practical, however, shows that the present-at-hand may be without use, but as a deficient mode of the ready-to-hand it is useless *for Dasein*, and so its uselessness does not constitute an independence from Dasein. Therefore, *any* object, whether it be primarily useful for Dasein and thus patently *for Dasein*, or whether it be so deficiently related to Dasein that it purport to be completely independent, or whether its relation to Dasein be found somewhere between these two extremes; *any* object is necessarily *for Dasein*.<sup>20</sup> And to be *for Dasein* is to carry *significance* since to be significant to something is to be essentially related to that thing. Therefore, the primacy of the practical implies that whatever is significant since whatever is is *for Dasein*.

To summarize, Heidegger takes practical involvement as the *ontic* clue to the *ontological* relation between Dasein and beings, and he finds the structure of such involvements to be idealistic. Beings are primarily useful, and the useful requires usefulness which requires a user. And since usefulness as well as its polar opposite are grounded *ontologically* in significance insofar as they are *for Dasein*, all entities are significant, i.e., they are *for Dasein*. Significance *is* the *ontologically* idealistic structure of usefulness.<sup>21</sup>

## III

Where is there room in the above account for a realist dimension to Heidegger's thought? Does his analysis of circumspective concern allow for a realism that might temper the idealistic structure of the ready-to-hand? Here, we must recall that the fundamental realist claim is that objects are Dasein-independent. That is, objects are not essentially for Dasein, but instead do not need Dasein in order to be what they are; they are what they are *without Dasein*. In Heidegger's terms, the realist claims that objects are fundamentally present-at-hand. With this in mind, it seems that the analysis of circumspective concern has already precluded the possibility of a Heideggerian realism since the analysis demonstrates that presence-at-hand is but a form of readiness-to-hand, whose structure is idealistic. Nevertheless, Heidegger claims that the object of immediate circumspective experience possesses a present-at-hand dimension that is just as essential as its ready-to-hand dimension.

Heidegger locates the presence-at-hand of the practical object in his description of the breakdown of the equipmental context. As we have seen, it is in this section that he argues for the deficient, or derivative, character of the present-at-hand. But he also claims that the object's present-at-hand aspect which is discovered through the breakdown was already there before the breakdown occurred; the ready-to-hand entity "has constantly been present-at-hand too."<sup>22</sup> But how can the ready-to-hand already contain a present-at-hand dimension in view of our previous exposition of the ready-to-hand's structure? How can that which is essentially for Dasein, and is thus Dasein-dependent also be what it is without Dasein, and so be equally Dasein-independent?

Before answering this question, we must examine Heidegger's case for the presence-at-hand of the object of circumspective concern. Our examination is facilitated by observing that if objects are what they are *prior to* Dasein's existence, it will follow that they are what they are without Dasein, as the realist maintains, and will so possess a fundamental present-at-hand aspect.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, a Heideggerian form of realism could be established by showing that we immediately encounter objects as already being what they are. And since, for Heidegger, objects are determined by their significance, a Heideggerian realism would arise if objects were immediately encountered as already possessing significance. This is in fact the strategy that Heidegger uses. To see how he establishes this, we return to the analysis of circumspective concern.

After arguing that the envioning world, or usefulness, is dependent upon Dasein, Heidegger characterizes the world as "that wherein Dasein as such *already is*."<sup>24</sup> With this statement, Heidegger notes that our immediate experience is of objects whose specific usefulness has already been determined. Were this not the case, then Dasein would be able to arbitrarily legislate the uses to which ready-to-hand entities could be put. But a given ready-to-hand entity has a pre-determined range of uses; to try to use it otherwise is simply

to misuse it. Therefore, the enviroing world itself precedes Dasein since the enviroing world determines the ready-to-hand's range of uses, and Dasein always finds these determinations already in place. And since the enviroing world precedes Dasein, it carries out its function of determining the ready-to-hand without Dasein. Ready-to-hand entities are what they are prior to, and thus without, Dasein. Herein lies their present-at-hand dimension.

So, as pre-determined, the enviroing world gives the ready-to-hand its present-at-hand aspect. Without the pre-determination of the enviroing world, there could be no equipmental entities since immediate experience reveals that their present-at-hand dimension, their capacity to be misused, is essential to their equipmental character. Therefore, the pre-determined enviroing world is the very presence-at-hand, the very misusability of the misusable. Now, we are prepared to see how Heidegger's analysis of circum-spective concern yields a realism of the ready-to-hand. But before doing so, notice that the misusability of the ready-to-hand is equivalent to its *uselessness*.

Heidegger connects the ready-to-hand's capacity to be misused with its uselessness, when he notes that a ready-to-hand entity "may be met as something *unusable*, not properly adapted to the use we have decided upon."<sup>25</sup> The capacity to be misused is tantamount to unusability, or uselessness, because if we try to use a ready-to-hand entity in a way that falls outside of its proper range of uses, nothing can be accomplished with it. For example, if we were to attempt to use hammers exclusively as writing implements, they would be useless. By the same token, if there were an object that had no proper range of uses, and so could only be misused, the object would be *completely* useless. Thus, the extent to which an entity can be misused is equivalent to its degree of uselessness. And since it is the pre-determination of the enviroing world that makes misuse possible, the enviroing world *qua* pre-determined functions as the very uselessness of the ready-to-hand *qua* misusable, or useless. And just as the ready-to-hand entity's usefulness is the mark of its Dasein-dependence since usefulness is *for* Dasein, its uselessness reveals an equally essential independence since this uselessness is grounded in the enviroing world's pre-determined character—its capacity to be *without* Dasein. Thus, Heidegger concludes that "Dasein, in so far as it *is*, has always submitted itself already to a 'world' which it encounters."<sup>26</sup> Dasein's submission to the world is its passivity in the face of the ready-to-hand's independence. In view of this independence, we see that the analysis of Dasein's immediate encounter with entities articulates not only an idealism of the ready-to-hand, but a realism of the ready-to-hand as well.

Just as Heidegger's idealism of the ready-to-hand articulates the ontic manifestation of an ontological idealism of beings *per se*, so his realism of the ready-to-hand leads to an ontological realism of beings *per se*. And just as his idealism of the ready-to-hand was grounded in the ontological significance of the enviroing world, so his realism of the ready-to-hand is grounded in an ontological *insignificance* of the enviroing world.



To move to the ontological level, we again look to the fundamental structure determining the basic components of our practical involvements, but now we focus on practical involvements insofar as the objects of these involvements are pre-determined and thus resist our circumspective dealings. Those basic components are the ready-to-hand entity as pre-determined (the useless), the enviroing world as pre-determined (uselessness), and submitted Dasein.

To understand how the presence-at-hand of the ready-to-hand is grounded in insignificance, recall that Heidegger's idealism turned on the claim that the usefulness of the ready-to-hand entity is tantamount to its dependence on Dasein since to be useful is to be useful for Dasein. And to be for Dasein is to be essentially related to Dasein, or to carry significance. Alternatively, the analysis of the recalcitrance of the ready-to-hand shows that its usefulness is pre-determined, and so is without Dasein. Therefore, *any* object, even the equipmental, is what it is independently of Dasein. For something to be independently of, or without, Dasein is for it to be essentially unrelated to Dasein. Insofar as the ready-to-hand is pre-determined, or useless, then, it is essentially alien to Dasein, ontologically other. And just as the ready-to-hand's fundamental relatedness to Dasein is indicative of its ontological significance, so its equally fundamental unrelatedness to Dasein reveals its ontological insignificance.

Insignificance, or the capacity to be without Dasein, *is* the ontologically realistic structure of the enviroing world *qua* uselessness, just as significance, or the need to be for Dasein, is the ontologically idealistic structure of the enviroing world *qua* usefulness. Just as to be *for* Dasein is to be ontologically significant, so to be *without* Dasein is to be ontologically insignificant.

To complete our exposition of Heidegger's realism, we must discover a textual warrant for characterizing the enviroing world as grounded in insignificance. The warrant for characterizing the enviroing world as significance was found in Heidegger's analysis of circumspective concern, which is why commentators who interpret Heidegger's thought as primarily idealistic focus on this section of *Being and Time*. Since those commentators who emphasize Heidegger's realist dimension focus on the analysis of anxiety, we should expect to find a connection between the enviroing world and insignificance in this analysis. And indeed we do.

The analysis of anxiety elucidates Dasein's relation to the enviroing world and the ready-to-hand insofar as Dasein is submitted to the world. In anxiety, the recalcitrant independence of the ready-to-hand assaults Dasein. As Heidegger puts it, "entities within-the-world are not 'relevant' at all"<sup>27</sup> to anxious Dasein; i.e., the extent to which the objects of immediate experience are essentially unrelated to Dasein comes to the fore. And as the ground of this independence, of the essential alterity of entities, the enviroing world revealed in anxiety "has the character of completely lacking significance."<sup>28</sup> Thus, the fundamental structure of the enviroing world *qua* independent of Dasein, its "worldhood," is its unrelatedness to Dasein—its insignificance. In Heidegger's words, the world is "utter insignificance"<sup>29</sup> itself.

## IV

Now we can see that the apparent idealism articulated by Heidegger in the analysis of circumspective concern and the realism of the analysis of anxiety do not indicate an inconsistency in *Being and Time*. Rather, these seemingly incompatible sections of the text are perfectly compatible since Heidegger's analysis of immediate experience reveals that the relationship between Dasein and entities is such that the claims of both realism and idealism are accommodated by the structure of our everyday encounter with objects. But if immediate experience bears out the claims of both realism and idealism, then why have these been taken to be incompatible positions? According to Heidegger, the dilemma between realism and idealism is a product of the misinterpretation of subjectivity that both positions presuppose.<sup>30</sup> Both assume the Cartesian notion of the subject as a self-enclosed, isolated present-at-hand entity. If the subject is such an entity, then objects will be either 'within' the subject or outside of the subject, either subject-dependent or subject-independent. Therefore, Heidegger's analysis of immediate experience shows that if the Cartesian interpretation of subjectivity is accurate, and so realism and idealism are incompatible, then immediate experience is incoherent. Since the consequent is clearly unacceptable, Heidegger must offer a notion of subjectivity that undermines the distinction between subject-dependence and subject-independence, and so dissolves the realism/idealism dilemma. But what, exactly, must subjectivity be in order to carry out this function?

Recall that objects are dependent upon Dasein insofar as they are significant, and it is Dasein that makes this fundamental significance possible. But they are independent of Dasein insofar as their significance is found to already be determined, and so constitutes an equally fundamental dimension of insignificance. Thus, the Dasein-independence of Dasein-dependent objects follows from the fact that the significance that Dasein makes possible precedes Dasein itself. This seems to be absurd because it requires that Dasein precede itself; Dasein must make significance possible prior to making significance possible. But the apparent absurdity of this position is a consequence of our common sense acceptance of the Cartesian notion of subjectivity. Certainly, if the subject is a self-enclosed, present-at-hand entity, it cannot precede itself. But since the findings of immediate experience justify the claims of both realism and idealism, the Cartesian subject must be replaced by a 'subject' that does precede itself. With this in mind, we turn to Heidegger's analysis of subjectivity.

Thus far, we have focused on the nature of the object by examining the way that it appears in immediate experience. We now shift our focus to the subject. And just as his analysis of objects takes its bearings from the way that they immediately appear to circumspective Dasein, so Heidegger's analysis of the subject looks to the way that circumspective Dasein appears to *itself* in its everyday mode.<sup>31</sup> He begins by pointing out that Dasein always finds itself

with Others, i.e., with Other Daseins. As Heidegger says, "Dasein in itself is essentially Being-with."<sup>32</sup> To properly understand this claim, we must discover how, exactly, Heidegger conceives of the Others with whom circumspective Dasein necessarily exists.

We approach Heidegger's notion of Others by observing that Dasein's Being-with-Others does not mean that Dasein is necessarily accompanied by other actually present people and so could never find itself to be numerically alone.<sup>33</sup> Rather, Others are essentially implicated in the structure of immediate experience, in circumspective Dasein's involvement with the ready-to-hand, or as Heidegger puts it, "[i]n that with which we concern ourselves environmentally."<sup>34</sup> Others are implicated in Dasein's immediate involvement with the ready-to-hand insofar as ready-to-hand entities are not only useful for circumspective Dasein, but are for Others as well.<sup>35</sup>

When I encounter, say, a hammer, it does not appear as useful for myself exclusively but as equally useful for anyone else that might endeavor to use it. And this would still be the case even if no other people who might actually use the ready-to-hand entity were ever in fact present. Other people need not be present in order for the ready-to-hand to refer to Others because this reference is essential to the very structure of the ready-to-hand entity. Specifically, it is correlated with the present-at-hand dimension of the ready-to-hand; insofar as the ready-to-hand usefulness is not arbitrarily legislated by Dasein, but is independent of Dasein, this usefulness is applicable to Others. But other people do not have to be actually present for this applicability to obtain. Therefore, Dasein's Being-with-Others does not preclude factual solitude. Even if Dasein were to spend its life alone, the ready-to-hand entities with which it is involved would still be useful for Others.

Since the factual presence or absence of other people does not affect the Other-referring structure of immediate experience, such factual presence, if it occurs, is merely accidental to Dasein's Being-with-Others. Dasein's primary experience of Others is not of people that are on hand beside Dasein, but rather the fundamental experience of Others is imbedded in the experience of the ready-to-hand's independence and its correlative potential to be used by other people. Others appear with the *public* character of the usefulness of the ready-to-hand. And they appear as those for whom the ready-to-hand possesses its public dimension: they *are* the public. Heidegger unfolds his interpretation of the way that circumspective Dasein finds itself in immediate experience in terms of Dasein's relation to this public.

As an actual encounter with other people is not required in order for the public to play its role in immediate experience, the public is not determinable as any actual group of people. Instead, the public is constituted by whoever could use the ready-to-hand. The Others that belong to the public "are not *definite* Others. On the contrary, any Other can represent them."<sup>36</sup> The public, then, is completely impersonal: "the neuter, the 'they' (*das Man*)."<sup>37</sup>

Correlative with the present-at-hand dimension of ready-to-hand entities, the 'they' is an aspect of the everyday manifestation of the enviroing world's

independence. In our previous examination of the ready-to-hand's present-at-hand dimension, we saw that this aspect of the object, being grounded in the independence of the environing world, rendered circumspective Dasein passive, submissive to the pre-determined range of involvements permitted by the object. The 'they', also being grounded in the independence of the environing world, wields a similar power over circumspective Dasein. The 'they', as whoever could use the ready-to-hand, is anyone that acts within the confines of the ready-to-hand's range of proper uses. And since circumspective Dasein is a user of the ready-to-hand, it must act as 'they' do. To do otherwise, to stray from the patterns of involvements exhibited by the 'they', is to fail to use the ready-to-hand, and so is to fail to be circumspective Dasein. Like the presence-at-hand of the ready-to-hand entity, the 'they' imposes restrictions on what circumspective Dasein as such can do. As Heidegger puts it, "[t]he 'they' . . . *prescribes* the kind of Being of everydayness."<sup>38</sup> Circumspective Dasein "stands in subjection"<sup>39</sup> to the 'they'. And as the form of agency that imposes restrictions on circumspective Dasein, the 'they' is an alien force. Just as the presence-at-hand of the ready-to-hand, grounded in the independence of the ready-to-hand's usefulness, constitutes the object's unrelatedness to, or estrangement from, Dasein; so the 'they' is essentially other than Dasein since the 'they', too, is grounded in the independence of the ready-to-hand's usefulness. Like the present-at-hand dimension of the ready-to-hand entity, the 'they' would be what it is without circumspective Dasein.

Still, the 'they' is not completely alien to Dasein, but "belongs to Dasein's positive constitution."<sup>40</sup> This follows from Heidegger's observation that in its immediate experience Dasein finds itself not only subjected to the ways of the 'they', but it also finds itself behaving as 'they' do. That is, circumspective Dasein finds itself already using the ready-to-hand in the ways prescribed by the 'they'. Thus, Dasein is one of 'them'. The 'they', not being a determinate group of people but rather being representable by anyone that can use the ready-to-hand, is as well represented by Dasein itself as it is by any Other. Heidegger expresses this by saying that "[t]he Self of everyday Dasein is the 'they'-Self (*das Man-selbst*),"<sup>41</sup> i.e., circumspective Dasein as a functioning member of the public. And this self of immediate experience does not stand opposed to the 'they' but "has been *dispersed* into the 'they'."<sup>42</sup>

## V

As in his analysis of the object encountered in immediate experience, Heidegger's analysis of the everyday subject yields seemingly incompatible findings. In the former analysis, objects were found to be both Dasein-independent and Dasein-dependent, both alien to Dasein and inextricably related to Dasein. In the latter analysis, the subject is found to be submitted to, and thus alien to, the anonymous agency that prescribes the kind of behavior proper to Dasein, and at the same time to be this very agency. Here, we

must recall that the apparent incompatibility between the object's Dasein-independence and its Dasein-dependence could only be remedied if the subject somehow precedes itself. Is Heidegger's conception of circumspective Dasein as 'they'-Self such a subject? To answer this question, let us connect the correlated structures of the everyday subject and the object of immediate experience.

Objects are immediately encountered as useful, or ready-to-hand. The useful object is essentially referred to the enviroing world, which functions as the usefulness of the ready-to-hand, and the enviroing world is essentially referred to circumspective Dasein, the user of the ready-to-hand. The ontological structure of the everyday object, then, is its significance. That is, objects are ontologically for Dasein, or Dasein-dependent. Hence, an idealistic dimension of the everyday object is revealed by immediate experience. However, the range of uses of the ready-to-hand is limited. The usefulness of the ready-to-hand is pre-determined, and so is imposed on circumspective Dasein, who is submitted to rules determining the proper use of ready-to-hand entities. The ontological structure of this dimension of the everyday object is its insignificance. That is, objects ontologically precede Dasein, and so are without Dasein; they are other than Dasein, or Dasein-independent. Hence, immediate experience also reveals a realistic dimension of the everyday object. Exhibiting both idealistic and realistic dimensions, objects stand in a relation of ontological dependent independence, or independent dependence, with regard to Dasein.

The subject of immediate experience exhibits a bi-dimensional structure corresponding to that of the everyday object. Insofar as objects are useful for Dasein, circumspective Dasein appears as the user of the ready-to-hand. That is, Dasein immediately experiences itself as a member of the public; circumspective Dasein is the 'they' that properly uses the ready-to-hand, and thus prescribes the ways that objects may be used. But insofar as the object's proper uses are pre-determined, circumspective Dasein is submitted to the prescriptions of the 'they'. Dasein immediately experiences itself as subjected to the 'they' as an alien force that imposes the proper uses of objects on Dasein. Both a member of the 'they' and submitted to the 'they', circumspective Dasein imposes restrictions on itself for using the ready-to-hand. And this is only possible for a subject that precedes itself.

The subject that imposes restrictions on itself must precede itself because the restrictions imposed can only serve as restrictions if they act as an alien force limiting everyday Dasein's circumspective activities. And as the analysis of the realistic dimension of the ready-to-hand shows, the alterity of the restrictions on circumspective Dasein's uses of the ready-to-hand are grounded in the *pre-determination*, and thus the independence, of the enviroing world. Both the presence-at-hand of the ready-to-hand and the alterity of the 'they', then, being correlative dimensions of the everyday object and the everyday subject respectively, are grounded in the fact that they *precede* circumspective

Dasein.<sup>43</sup> But circumspective Dasein is the 'they'; it is 'itself' this restrictive alien agency that precedes circumspective Dasein 'itself'. Therefore, everyday Dasein, the 'they'-Self, precedes itself.

If our interpretation of the findings of Heidegger's analysis of immediate experience is correct, then we should expect to find Heidegger expressing the ontological structure of Dasein as some form of self-precedence. And Heidegger does this when he names Dasein's ontological structure "care (*Sorge*)," whose most basic characteristic is its being "beyond itself" or "ahead of itself."<sup>44</sup>

Circumspective Dasein's relation to the 'they', in which Dasein is both one of 'them' and subject to 'them' and so precedes itself, is the ontic manifestation of its ontological self-precedence—its being ahead of itself. Only as such can objects be both ontologically dependent upon Dasein and independent of Dasein. In the final analysis, then, Heidegger's phenomenological turn to immediate experience yields a reinterpretation of 'subjectivity', objectivity, and their relationship, which takes him beyond the realism/idealism dilemma.<sup>45</sup>

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>In this paper, I will take realism to be the position which claims that objects exist independently of subjects, while idealism will be taken to be the position claiming that the existence of objects is somehow dependent upon subjects.

<sup>2</sup>Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John MacQuarrie and Edward Robinson, (New York: Harper & Row, 1962, hereafter BT) 250.

<sup>3</sup>BT 251. See also, Martin Heidegger, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, trans. Albert Hofstadter, (Bloomington: Indiana, 1982, hereafter BP) 167.

<sup>4</sup>Examples of such an idealistic reading are found in Theodore R. Schatzki's "Early Heidegger on Being, the Clearing, and Realism" (*Heidegger: A Critical Reader*, eds. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Harrison Hall, Cambridge: Blackwell, 1992, 81-98), and Dorothea Frede's "Heidegger and the Scandal of Philosophy" (*Human Nature and Natural Knowledge*, eds. A. Donagan, et al., Dordrecht: Reidel, 1986, 129-151). Although both acknowledge that Heidegger is not a full-fledged idealist insofar as he allows that present-at-hand objects would continue to exist even if Dasein ceased to exist, they use Heidegger's claim that presence-at-hand is itself dependent upon Dasein to argue that while Dasein need not be factually present for a given present-at-hand object to exist, Dasein must exist in order for 'independent' objects to count as independent objects. (See Schatzki 93-95, and Frede 141-143). Thus, the independent is viewed as ultimately dependent upon Dasein, which is an essentially idealistic position. Hubert Dreyfus' assessment of Heidegger as a "hermeneutic realist" (*Being-in-the-World*, Cambridge: MIT, 1991) gives what is fundamentally the same interpretation. (See esp. 252-264).

<sup>5</sup>A good example of the realistic reading is found in Joseph P. Fell's "The Familiar and the Strange: On the Limits of Praxis in the Early Heidegger" (*Heidegger: A Critical Reader*,

65-80). Fell acknowledges the idealism implied by the analysis of everyday circumspection, but argues that the independence of Being from Dasein revealed by anxiety points to a realistic element in Heidegger's thought that is more fundamental than his apparent idealism. (See esp. 68-71).

<sup>6</sup>Here, it should be noted that Frederick A. Olafson suggests a similar approach, when he attempts to lay equal weight on Heidegger's realistic and idealistic tendencies in his article "The Unity of Heidegger's Thought" (*The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger*, ed. Charles Guignon, Cambridge: Cambridge, 1993, 97-121). According to Olafson, the early Heidegger emphasizes the dependence of Being on Dasein, although with realist qualifications; while the later Heidegger emphasizes the independence of Being on Dasein, although with idealist qualifications. Olafson takes this apparent shift in Heidegger's position to represent "two radically different metaphors . . . both being qualified in a way that points to an eventual equivalence of what is to be said by means of them although there is no linguistic instrument that expresses the convergence itself"(113).

<sup>7</sup>The following argument is a condensed version of sections II and III of my article "Heidegger's Critique of Realism," *Southwest Philosophy Review*, vol. 11, no. 2 (1995): 145-159.

<sup>8</sup>BT 38.

<sup>9</sup>BT 96.

<sup>10</sup>BT 97.

<sup>11</sup>"Environing world" is Hofstadter's translation of the word "*Umwelt*," introduced at BP 164. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger refers to this environing world as the third possible sense of the term "world"—"that 'wherein' a factual Dasein as such can be said to live" (93).

<sup>12</sup>BT 116-7.

<sup>13</sup>Michael Devitt admits that, *qua* useful, useful objects require a user, when he says that it is questionable whether "artifacts like hammers" should be included in the category of 'real' objects since "something is a hammer in virtue of being used in a certain way or being designed to be so used" (*Realism and Truth*, New Jersey: Princeton, 1984, 24n.). Nevertheless, he believes that such objects are real. Although he does not say why artifacts count as real, I believe that, in view of Devitt's restrictions on the real (cf. *Realism and Truth* 12-21), my suggested reply would be satisfactory.

Samuel Alexander uses a similar argument to establish the independence of objects in his article "The Basis of Realism" (*Realism and the Background of Phenomenology*, ed. Roderick Chisolm, New York: Free Press, 1960, 186-222). As Alexander puts it, "[t]he shilling which is in my possession depends on me for its being possessed but not for being a piece of silver, a white metal with a certain atomic equivalent" (209).

<sup>14</sup>BT 103. Cf. BT 83, 88.

<sup>15</sup>As Heidegger puts it, presence-at-hand is the "Being-just-present-at-hand-and-no-more of something ready-to-hand" (BT 103, my emphasis).

<sup>16</sup>See BP 295.

<sup>17</sup>See Fell 66-67.

<sup>18</sup>Martin Heidegger, *History of the Concept of Time*, trans. Theodore Kisiel (Bloomington: Indiana, 1985) 200.

<sup>19</sup>For significance as the structure of the environing world, see BT 120. For the identification of significance and worldhood, see BT 160. For Heidegger's characterization of worldhood as the ontological dimension of the (ontic) environing world, see BT 93.

<sup>20</sup>As Heidegger says, "[w]hen Dasein does not exist 'independence' 'is' not either" (BT 255). That is, independence from Dasein is a (deficient) mode of being for Dasein, and is thus dependent upon Dasein.

<sup>21</sup>Here, we should note another possible objection to Heidegger's critique of realism. The realist could grant that the ready-to-hand is experientially primary, or that from a subjective point of view entities appear to be primarily objects of use. But Heidegger attempts to conclude from this that the ready-to-hand is ontologically prior to the present-at-hand, and that, therefore, objects are ontologically dependent upon Dasein. He seems to move illegitimately from how objects seems to us to how they are objectively, or in themselves.

However, Heidegger can argue that this realist objection begs the question at issue, i.e., whether or not objects exist independently, or 'objectively'. To say that it is illegitimate to argue from how objects appear to how they are 'objectively' assumes that the issue has been settled in favor of realism.

For a full discussion of this issue, see sections IV and V of my "Heidegger's Critique of Realism."

<sup>22</sup>BT 103.

<sup>23</sup>Schatzki notes this connection between the pre-determination of objects and their independence, when he says that "[a]n entity that, in showing itself, shows itself as having been *already* what it shows itself to be, is what it shows itself to be *independently* of its showing itself" ("Early Heidegger on Being, the Clearing, and Realism" 93, my emphasis).

<sup>24</sup>BT 120 (my emphasis).

<sup>25</sup>BT 102 (my emphasis).

<sup>26</sup>BT 121.

<sup>27</sup>BT 231. Heidegger makes the same point in his essay "What is Metaphysics?" (Martin Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, ed. David Krell, New York: Harper & Row, 1977, 95-112), when he says that in anxiety entities appear as "indifferent" (103).

<sup>28</sup>BT 231. See also "What is Metaphysics?", where Heidegger characterizes the environing world as the ground of the "total strangeness" of entities (111). Previously in the essay, this strangeness was linked to the alterity of entities (105).

<sup>29</sup>BT 231.

<sup>30</sup>This is clear from Heidegger's claim that "[o]nly with the aid of a radical interpretation of the subject can an ungenue subjectivism be avoided and equally a blind realism" (BP 175). See also BP 167; BT 246-254; HCT 222-223; MFL 142-143.

<sup>31</sup>BT, Division One, Chapter IV.

<sup>32</sup>BT 156.

<sup>33</sup>BT 156.



<sup>34</sup>BT 163.

<sup>35</sup>BT 153.

<sup>36</sup>BT 164.

<sup>37</sup>BT 164.

<sup>38</sup>BT 164 (my emphasis).

<sup>39</sup>BT 164.

<sup>40</sup>BT 167.

<sup>41</sup>BT 167. As Heidegger also says, Others are “those from whom, for the most part, one does *not* distinguish oneself” (BT 154). See also, BT 163 (“One belongs to the Others oneself”), and BT 167 (“Proximally, Dasein is ‘they’”).

<sup>42</sup>BT 167.

<sup>43</sup>Although commentators regularly note that the prescriptions of the ‘they’ precede circumspective Dasein, and so are imposed on Dasein, the connection between the precedence of these prescriptions and the present-at-hand dimension of the ready-to-hand object is often overlooked. This oversight is problematic because it fails to acknowledge that the realistic dimension of the everyday object, being correlative with the alterity of the ‘they’, is as fundamental as the everyday object’s idealistic dimension. Thus, this oversight easily leads to a one-sidedly idealistic interpretation of Heidegger.

For example, in his book *Heidegger and the Problem of Knowledge* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1983), Charles Guignon notes that “the roles that define Dasein are essentially *public*, drawn from a set of *pre-given* possibilities (105, my emphasis). But, nevertheless, he claims that “in everydayness, we do not first encounter a realm of brute objects that are then miraculously endowed with functions” (107). Our analysis shows that this is only partially correct. According to Heidegger, we do indeed encounter brute objects insofar as all objects possess an essential present-at-hand aspect. Similarly, Dreyfus recognizes that the norms for object use prescribed by the ‘they’ are “already determined” (*Being-in-the-World* 154). But he still maintains that “[i]n *Being and Time* we find no place for the resistance and reliability of equipment” (“Heidegger’s History of the Being of Equipment,” *Heidegger: A Critical Reader*, 177).

<sup>44</sup>BT 236.

<sup>45</sup>I would like to thank Mitchell Aboulafia for comments on an earlier version of this essay.