

Heidegger on Scepticism, Truth and Falsehood

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The climax of Division One of *Being and Time*¹ are two sections on the themes of reality and truth, with the former largely devoted to the problem of scepticism. After the long and complex elaboration of the unique cluster of concepts that articulate the structure of Dasein, Heidegger here draws morals for familiar and fundamental philosophical issues. But these sections are dense and difficult and these morals raise many questions of their own (only some of which I can consider here). For example, just what can the persuasive force of Sec. 43's dismissal of scepticism be, and, as Tugendhat (1969) asked, why would one think of the notion of truth that Sec. 44 spells out – and promotes as 'deeper than', and 'founding', the 'traditional' correspondence notion of truth - as a notion of *truth* at all? And why do these topics come to sit alongside one another in Heidegger's thought? As is well-known, BT was a work completed in some haste but also one which emerged from years of reflection, some of which notes for, and transcripts of, Heidegger's lecture courses document. There one finds a case for a claim which this chapter will suggest sheds much light on the puzzles of BT sec. 43 and 44: the claim that false belief is a 'founded mode' of Being-in-the-world.

1. 'The Scandal of Philosophy'

Heidegger sees scepticism about the external world as a 'sham problem' (HCT 162), one which one comes to pose only by having embraced a confused ontology. '[S]tarting with the *construct* of the isolated subject', one does indeed come to wonder how this 'fantastically

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References to Heidegger's work use abbreviations given in the bibliography, followed by page numbers. I'm grateful to Tom Sheehan and Adam Beck for access to their translations of the *Logik* and *Einleitung* lectures respectively.

conceived', 'denatured' entity 'comes out of its inner "sphere" into one which is "other and external"' (BT 249, 87, HCT 165, italics added). To refute the sceptical worry that it can't would indeed 'call[] for a theory and metaphysical hypotheses' (HCT 165). But BT famously insists that we must not answer that call:

Kant calls it 'a scandal of philosophy and of human reason in general' that there is no cogent proof of ['the existence of things outside us'] which will do away with any scepticism. ... [But the] 'scandal of philosophy' is not that this proof has yet to be given, but that *such proofs are expected and attempted again and again*. (BT 247, 249)

Rather than attempting to offer such a proof, explaining how an 'isolated subject' 'comes into' into an 'other and external' 'sphere', Heidegger instead presents an ontology in which nothing corresponding to that 'subject' and that 'sphere' can be found. Heidegger acknowledge that 'someone oriented to the traditional horizon of epistemological questions' will see his ontology as simply 'nullify[ing] the problem of knowledge'; his response is to ask 'what authority decides *whether* and *in what sense* there is supposed to be a problem of knowledge?' (HCT 161)

But it is not as if (what for simplicity's sake I will refer to here as) the Cartesian ontology is embraced without reason: rather we are driven to embrace it by seemingly innocent reflections on errors and dreams and by what many feel are intuitively compelling thought-experiments, those of the evil demon and the brain-in-a-vat. The 'isolated subject' answers to the sense that these reflections seem to make vivid, that, as Tugendhat puts it, 'our relation to beings is a specifically mediate one' (1969: 234). It is reflections such as these that seem to *prove* that there is 'a problem of knowledge'. So why think – with Heidegger - that there isn't?

Heidegger was clearly suspicious of the notion that one might compel the person of ‘traditional orientation’ to change her view through argument.² Such an argument would presumably have to be offered in terms that that person accepts; but Heidegger believes that her confusion lies precisely in accepting those terms. Nevertheless, it seems much less plausible to think that Heidegger thought persuasion of any sort impossible, that a case or argument in some extended sense might not be made for his view.

The charge he levels against the Cartesian is that her ontology is ‘indefinite’, ‘indeterminate’ (BT 249, 368)). Only a kind of ‘neglect’ - ‘the ontological indifference in which Descartes and his successors took’ the thinking subject (HCT 222, 216) - allows one to believe that one can make sense of knowing on the basis that that subject provides. That one cannot is not news, of course, if all this means is that the ontology leads to scepticism; Heidegger’s claim would instead seem to be that the ontology cannot make sense of the intentionality of belief, its power to represent states of affairs or – to point to a topic that will be central here - to misrepresent them.

Crucially, Heidegger claims that ‘[k]nowing is a mode of Dasein founded upon Being-in-the-world’ (BT 90). Our mode of being is one of *Sein-bei* the entities that the Cartesian would have us see as populating an ‘other and external sphere’. ‘*Bei*’ lacks any straight-forward equivalent in English but corresponds roughly to the French ‘*chez*’; Heidegger’s translators have offered for ‘*Sein-bei*’ ‘being-alongside’ (BT), ‘being-involved-with’ (HCT) and ‘being-familiar-with’ or ‘being-at-home-with’ (L), while Dreyfus has proposed ‘being-amidst’ (1991: xi). As we will see, such differences matter.

On any of these construals, however, the Cartesian faces the collapse of an ‘inner’/’outer’ distinction and, in its place, an intimacy of some sort to which she will naturally respond ‘What of error? What of the various ways in which we can become disconnected from the world around

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Cf. Rorty 1976: 240, Dreyfus 1991: 60, 120, BT 363’s declaration that ‘the existential analytic ... does not do *any* proving *at all* by the rules of the “logic of consistency”’ and BPP 44’s comments on ‘the exaggerated rage for method which proves everything and in the end proves nothing’.

us?’ Heidegger’s reply is that having false beliefs is also a ‘mode of Dasein founded upon Being-in-the-world’:

All delusion and all error, in which in a way no relationship of being to the entity is secured but is instead falsified, are once again only modes of *Sein-bei*. (HCT 164)³

If this is so, the sceptic’s worry about the very existence of the world based on the question of whether all of our ordinary beliefs might be false represents ‘a misunderstanding of the very questioning’: ‘For such a questioning makes sense only on the basis of a being whose constitution is being-in-the-world’ (HCT 215). My approach here will be to try to shed light on Heidegger’s reflections on scepticism and truth by considering the rarely-discussed⁴ pre-BT discussions where he explores the ‘founded’ character of falsehood at some length. Heidegger identifies a set of ‘conditions of the possibility of falsehood’ and I will argue that these point to a way of understanding, firstly, why Cartesian ontology might be thought ‘inadequate’ because ‘indefinite’, secondly, how this insight naturally leads to a notion of ‘truth’ that might be seen as deeper than - by virtue of being presupposed by – the ‘traditional’ correspondence conception of truth, and hence, thirdly, why Sec. 43 and 44 belong together; finally, it will also provide us with another way of thinking about the notions central to BT’s ‘fundamental ontology’, ‘Being-in-the-world’ and ‘*Sein-bei*’.

In the discussions to be explored, the figure Heidegger takes as his patron saint, as it were, is Aristotle. His thinking is free of ‘sham’ concerns that bedevil ours:

Kant and Aristotle have this in common, that for both of them the external world exists. For Aristotle, knowledge of that world is not a problem. He treated knowledge quite

³ Cf. also PS 416-17, 417, HCT 31, BPP 207 and EP 152-53.

⁴ One notable exception is Wrathall 2009, from which I have profited.

differently, as a clarification of the surrounding world. He can be called a realist only
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inasmuch as he never questions the existence of the external world. (PIA 5).

Heidegger claims that *De Anima* is ‘no psychology in the modern sense’ but instead contains
‘[t]he central investigation of the human manner of being in the world’ (IPR 4 , 226) and he
claims to find an anticipation of his view of truth in Book Theta of the *Metaphysics*, in the
distinguishing of two forms of ‘truth’, one which stands opposed to a form of falsehood or
‘covering-over’, and one which does not. 6
In roughest outline, falsehood is possible when we
describe ‘composite entities’: in the ‘synthetic’ work of articulating a proposition, ‘[i]f one
synthesises what is not together, there is covering-over’, and if one synthesises ‘what is
together’, there is uncoveredness’ (L 149). The ‘synthetic’ truth and falsehood of propositions is
distinguished from our grasp of ‘non-synthetic entities’, *asyntheta*, with which Heidegger
compares our knowledge of ‘colour, ... essence, movement, time, and the like’ (L 156). Here
what stands in falsehood’s place, so to speak, is a pure failure to grasp the *asyntheta*: here ‘there
is no covered-overness at all, not even deception’, but ‘only not-apprehending’, a ‘lack of
access’, ‘an utter inability to apprehend at all’ (L 154, 149). On the other hand, when the thinking
subject does grasp the *asyntheta* its ‘relation’ to them is one of *thiglein*, ‘touching’: here ‘there is
no distance’ (L 152, 153). The discussion I summarise so briefly here is difficult and Dahlstrom
claims that Heidegger’s reading of Aristotle is characterised by ‘audaciousness, ... violence and

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Of the host of issues that Sec. 43-44 raise but which I leave untouched here, the most
conspicuous is that of whether Heidegger ought to be characterised as a realist or an idealist.
McManus 2007 sets out a case (based on the model of understanding summarised in Sec. 4
below) for thinking that there may be sense to Heidegger’s claim to reject both alternatives; to do
so would be to recapture something akin to the Greek perspective for which, he insists, ‘there is
no such contrast’ (IPR 6). (Here Heidegger can be seen to have anticipated an insight into Greek
philosophy for which the Anglophone philosophical world had to wait till the 1980s and the
work of Bernard Williams and Miles Burnyeat. Cf. their 1981 and 1982 respectively.)

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For related discussions, cf., e.g., IPR sec. 2 and PS sec. 26.

even rapaciousness' (2001: 218). But, as Heidegger himself seems to have done, we will find that some of its motifs have a resonance in the reflections to come.

2. 'Conditions of the possibility of falsehood'

The 1925-26 *Logik* lectures present Heidegger's most sustained examination of falsehood. Here he identifies three related 'structural conditions of falsehood' (L 158) and elaborates upon them through an example, that of his mistakenly declaring of a bush seen while he walks through a dark wood 'It's a deer'. As in BT's well-known discussion of the understanding implicit in recognizing a hammer, Heidegger's 'unearthing' of these 'conditions' reveals a presupposed understanding that a 'traditional orientation' obscures: 'a false statement ... too [is] grounded in a prior knowledge' (L 176).

The first condition is a 'prior intending and having of the subject matter' (L 158):

It is necessary that beforehand I already have something given to me, something coming towards me. If something did not already encounter me from the outset, there would be no occasion to regard it as ... (L158, ellipsis in the original)

Now the most natural interpretation of these remarks surely takes the 'something already given to me' to be the bush, the 'it' – the 'subject matter' - of the mistaken judgment. But that construal is problematic philosophically and textually. Philosophically, it limits the applicability of this condition to judgments where there *is* a subject matter, so to speak. What would we say was the 'something already given to me' in a case where I mistakenly think I see something of a certain sort where there is, in fact, nothing at all (as I do in the case that HCT 30 mentions, that of being 'beset by a hallucination such that I now perceive an automobile being driven through the room over [our] heads')? One response would be to treat the judgment as, to use John McDowell's expression, 'object-dependent' and declare that when there is no relevant 'object' – no 'It' – the sentence in question 'fails to express a proposition', 'fails to express a thought' (Thornton 2004:

146). According to this view, one has not merely failed to depict how things are in such a case; rather it has become unclear whether anything *has* been said about how things are: ‘About which things?’, one might ask. This view has perhaps its most natural application precisely to the kind of perceptual demonstrative thoughts that Heidegger’s example illustrates:

The defining function of perceptual demonstrative thoughts is to convey information about the perceptible world – and, hence, to be assessable as true or false. So we have little reason, if any, to protest that there simply must be such a thought when there is nothing for it to be true about – that is, when the question of its truth or falsity cannot even arise. (De Gaynesford 2004: 136)

Heidegger’s Aristotelian motifs could find an application here. If it does indeed make sense to say that a claim, proposition or thought is absent in such cases, there is instead, one might say, ‘an utter inability to apprehend at all’, a ‘lack of access’; moreover, the object-dependence of my thoughts makes for a connection between my thought and its ‘subject matter’ of such an intimacy that it merits description as ‘touching’. This ‘having-present the about-which’ would indeed be a ‘direct having, and in a certain sense a *thigēin*’ (L 160).

But, as I mentioned, this interpretation sits uncomfortably with the text. Heidegger concludes the passage quoted above by saying

Always already there is a priori disclosure of world. (L158)

A similar slide away from a full-blown object-dependence to what one might call ‘context-’ or ‘world-dependence’ can be found at the point where, in the following gloss on the first ‘condition’, Heidegger attempts to put his point ‘concretely’:

In order for me to be able to be deceived, in order for something to misrepresent itself to me and to appear as something it is not, the thing that so appears has to have already encountered me. It has to appear, in some way or other, precisely “during” the

misrepresentation. To put it concretely: I have to be moving in the forest, for example, or if not in the forest then someplace else, if I am to be able to be deceived about things in the world and in the knowledge of the world. (L 178)

What then must we already ‘touch’ in making our judgment? In these passages, Heidegger seems to vacillate between identifying this with an entity judged and the setting, context or ‘world’ within which such an entity shows itself. We hear it again here:

[T]he about-which appears as something that encounters me within a persisting *thigein*, as something that is already uncovered from the outset, as something approaching in the woods. (L 160)

We will return to this vacillation; but a stress upon the need for a grasp of the already meaningful context within which an entity we might mistake might be found is echoed in Heidegger’s elaboration of his second ‘condition of falsehood’. My mistakenly taking the ‘it’ I approach as something that it is not is only possible because I take the ‘it’ in question as ... in the first place:

Only because I let whatever encounters me encounter me *on the basis of* the act of envisioning [*aus Hinblicknahme auf*] something (say, a deer), can that thing appear as a deer. (L 158)

Heidegger depicts that feat too as calling for a broader grasp of the situation in which the entity shows up:

As I approach the thing, I take it *as something* ... something that is already articulated *as something* and, as such, is expected and accepted in my way of dealing with the world. (L 158)

This ‘act of envisioning’ harbours a further complexity and a third condition must hold: taking something as ... assigns that which is so taken a particular place in what one might call ‘logical space’, a place characterised by how it is distinguished from a determinate range of other possible places: ‘Envisioning a “that as which” is possible only when there is a possible “other” (L 159).⁷ It is a further feature of the already understood situation within which we find the object we (mis)judge that it restricts that ‘space’ of possibilities. I am ready, one might say, to mistake a bush in a wood for a deer; more fancifully, I might imagine that the ‘it’ approaching is the Shah of Iran since ‘[t]he Shah is a being that *could* appear among the trees in a German forest at night’; but ‘there is not a chance that I would see anything like the cubed root of sixty-nine coming toward me’ (L 159).

In sum, these conditions seem to require that, in order for one to hold a false belief of the sort Heidegger considers, one must have a grasp of the kind of entity that is the subject-matter of that belief, of the kind of circumstances in which it can be found and the range of alternative states of affairs that might be found within those circumstances. One’s belief may be mistaken; there may indeed be nothing at all where one supposes the ‘deer’ stands; but one must grasp the space or – to adapt an expression of Heidegger’s - the ‘there’ where the ‘deer’ is thought to stand; one must grasp its place within its broader context and the kinds of entity that might come to stand ‘there’.

3. Some Implications: Truth and Being-in-the-world

A schematic rationale emerges in the preceding reflections for regarding the ‘traditional conception of truth’ as ‘superficial’ (PS 10). Heidegger identifies that ‘conception’ as

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In the discussion of falsehood in IPR, Heidegger makes a similar point: ‘A human being is the sort of entity that in its way has the world here by making things accessible to itself in setting them off from one another’, and ‘in this process of setting something off from others, what is offset becomes accessible and can be grasped as here’ (IPR 19)

maintaining that the “locus” of truth is assertion (judgment)’ and that ‘the essence of truth lies in the “agreement” of the judgment with its object’ (BT 257). He attacks this conception as ‘by no means ... primary’ (BT 56); it obscures the fact that ‘assertion is grounded in *Dasein*’s ... *disclosedness*’; quite how we ought to characterise ‘disclosedness’ is a difficult issue, not least because Heidegger states that it ‘embraces the whole of that structure-of-Being which has become explicit in the course of Division One’ of BT (BT 264). But, by virtue of the fact that Heidegger identifies this ‘most primordial “truth”’ with ‘the ontological condition for the possibility that assertions can be either true or false’ (BT 269), the previous section’s discussion promises to shed some light. What its three ‘conditions of the possibility of falsehood’ identify is a kind of familiarity with the world which must be in place if we are to entertain propositions about how things are; in identifying a form of understanding of the world that our making true or false claims about the world presupposes, we identify a way in which that world is revealed to us which outstrips and is, in a recognizable sense, more fundamental than the revelation that arises when, through successful inquiry, we replace particular false beliefs with true beliefs. If so, such a deeper revelation would seem to merit identification with (or as playing some part in) the ‘most primordial “truth”’.

While this clearly invites Tugendhat’s earlier question - why ought one to think of this revelation as a kind of *truth*? – let us note here that, if we do, we also acquire a sense of why it must be the case that - as sec. 44 gnominically puts it - ‘*Dasein* is “in the truth”’ (BT 263). Heidegger depicts the ‘prior knowledge’ in which even false statements are ‘grounded’ as realised in ‘the prior act of letting something encounter us’ and that act as ‘a comportment with which we constantly live’ (L 176): ‘we live constantly in this state of letting-things-encounter-us’ (L 176). There is one reasonably clear sense in which this might well be so. We cannot have acquired the ‘knowledge’ in question by, as it were, reading it off the world itself; we cannot have acquired this ‘familiarity’ by seeing that things are thus-and-so, because this ‘familiarity’ grounds - and hence is presupposed by – our capacity to see that things are thus-and-so. ‘The constant letting-encounter/already-having of something’, which ‘is existentially and *a priori* a *being-unto* [*Sein-zu*] and *Sein-bei* something’, is not a condition into which ‘I first must bring

myself' (L 177, 179).⁸ Without it, I am incapable of entertaining true or false propositions, of possessing views on how things are, and only in it - if I am indeed an intentional agent - can I 'live' (L 177). But – again – why think of this 'condition', in which I must stand 'insofar as I am at all' (L 179), as a form of *truth*?

And what of Heidegger's insistence that Dasein is Being-in-the-world? The rhetoric of the passages that Sec. 2 considers is one of 'having', 'givenness' and 'touch' (*thigean*); the three conditions require of us a certain understanding but it is of something immediately present to us, one might say; this is no abstract knowledge: instead there is 'something coming towards me', the thing judged 'has already encountered me', 'I have to be moving in the forest'. Is this anti-Cartesian rhetoric justified by the reflections considered so far? Supposing there is a sense in which I have to 'have' the 'subject-matter' of my judgment and the world in which that 'subject matter' is found, must I therefore be *in* that world? The notion of 'being-in' at stake here is not, Heidegger insists, the familiar spatial sense; here "'in'" primarily does not signify anything spatial at all but means primarily *being familiar with* [*vertraut sein mit*]⁹ (HCT 158). But why think of familiarity with something as a form of being *in* it in *any* sense? And to what extent does the anti-Cartesian force of these reflections depend on our continuing to hear this 'in' in 'spatial' terms and '*Sein-bei*' as 'being-amidst' rather than 'being-familiar-with'?

There remains a powerful intuition that understanding 'lies within', such that there will always remain a question (the sceptical question, *in nuce*) of how it relates to that which lies

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A natural worry here is: is this 'familiarity' learnable then, or must it instead be somehow *innate*? The model I will offer below suggests that acquiring such 'familiarity' is a feat quite unlike establishing that a proposition holds.

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Cf. also BT 80, 79 and 170.

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‘without’. We have, of course, already mentioned a view which challenges that intuition, namely, McDowell’s postulation of object-dependent thoughts. Although I think it would be wrong to ascribe that view to Heidegger,¹¹ I think we may ascribe to him a view that shares with it certain features and which ascribes a not-unnatural sense both to his insistence that we live amidst the entities that we think about and to the rhetoric of ‘touch’ witnessed in Sec. 2.

4. Two Heideggerian Models

The Cartesian who reads the *Logik* lectures’ discussion of what one might call our ‘pre-propositional understanding’ will find the charge that her own ontology is ‘indeterminate’ galling, as the most obvious feature of that discussion is its abstraction. So just what kind of ‘understanding’ does Heidegger have in mind when he tells us that ‘the statement is grounded in a prior understanding’ (L 176)?

There are many ways through the complex works that Heidegger assembles in the 1920s, this being a characteristic of BT just as of other more obviously exploratory texts: a variety of

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We see this intuition at work in what McDowell calls ‘the master thesis’, ‘the thesis that whatever a person has in her mind, it is only by virtue of being interpreted in one of various possible ways that it can impose a sorting of extra-mental items into those that accord with it and those that do not’ (1998: 270). Sec. 2.3 of my 2008 argues that Heidegger anticipated the diagnostic use to which McDowell puts this notion.

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The question of how Heidegger’s ideas relate to established brands of externalism is explored in Carman 2003, Lafont 2000 and 2005 and Wrathall 1999b.

roads lead us to recurrent motifs and most of the core claims are surely over-determined. The notion that knowledge is a ‘founded mode’ of Being-in-the-world is embedded within discussions of Dasein’s temporality, its capacity for authenticity and inauthenticity, and of what one might call its ‘practical and economic’ (BT 83) engagement with the world around it. That the latter might be key to understanding our ‘pre-propositional understanding’ is interpretively highly plausible, not least because of the interspersing of the Sec. 2 discussion with one precisely examining how statements arise out of our ‘prescinding’ from such forms of engagement (L 258). Heidegger there presents a picture of Dasein as a creature at work in the world, actually laying its hands upon and using the entities around it as it goes about its ‘practical and economic’ business; awareness that takes a propositional form enters the scene only when that business is disrupted, when the tool we are using breaks and we are forced to step back, as it were, and examine that entity in relation to the purpose it has been serving.

Without wishing to suggest that this story is not an important part of Heidegger’s thinking (or that it cannot be developed into a much more refined story than that which I have sketched here), I don’t think that it embodies his best thoughts, for reasons at which I can only gesture here. Philosophically, I believe there are some significant difficulties in store when we claim, for example, that ‘[c]ognition and knowledge [are] derivative from (“founded upon”) ... everyday practical understanding’ (Rouse 2005: 125), in particular, when we try to demarcate what ‘everyday practical understanding’ encompasses. Retrospective remarks certainly also suggest that Heidegger felt the significance of the analyses that inspire this kind of reading had been misjudged. His ‘*sole* intent’, in taking his ‘departure from what lies to hand in the everyday

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My (unpublished) presents other – though, I believe, compatible - ways of understanding Heidegger’s route to the conclusion that the correspondence theory of truth is ‘superficial’. Other valuable treatments of Heidegger’s discussion of truth can be found in Carman 2003 and 2007, Cerbone 2005, Dahlstrom 2001, Dreyfus 2001, Lafont 2000, Smith 2007 and Wrathall 1999a and 2005. Interesting discussions of Heidegger’s response to scepticism include Mulhall 2005 and Minar 2001.

realm, from those things that we use and pursue' was 'to provide a preliminary characterization of the *phenomenon of world*' (EG 121 n. 59, FCM 177)):

It never occurred to me, however, to try and claim or prove with this interpretation that the essence of man consists in the fact that he knows how to handle knives and forks or uses the tram. (FCM 177)

But aside from those worries, there is another of more 'strategic' importance given our present concerns. The Cartesian who reads the 'practical and economic' proposal may well react as follows: 'If holding beliefs about the world requires that I handle knives and forks or use the tram, then certainly scepticism is false. But does this Heideggerian story really tell me about what belief *is*? Isn't it just a 'genetic' story about how belief emerges in human life? A story about 'the order of discovery' rather than 'the order of justification'?'

In light of these worries, I will try to take a different tack and draw on a different model, one which I have used elsewhere to answer a number of questions about how Heidegger's fundamental ontology ought to be understood. It helps us escape the 'genetic' charge just

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mentioned and to keep clearly in focus our three 'conditions of the possibility of falsehood'.

The textual basis for thinking that this model has some relevance to Heidegger's own thinking lies principally in another 'strand' in his remarks on the nature of observation and of science, where he stresses the need for a mastery of certain kinds of 'praxis' if we are to observe what one

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might think of as mere natural fact.

Simple practices of measurement provide our model. In teaching a child the difference between talking, on the one hand, about large and small objects and, on the other, about objects

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A version of that charge certainly could be raised against it but Sec. 8 of my 2007 answers that charge, I believe.

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My 2007 and unpublished present that evidence and also consider many of the worries that this model naturally raises but which I will not attempt to address here.

being 2m long and 10m long, we teach them the practice of measuring length. We show them standard rulers and how to lay them against the sides of objects; we teach them to check that the ruler is straight along those sides rather than held criss-cross along them, and to check that the ruler doesn't bend or slip when the measurement is being made. We regard someone who fails to acquire these habits and concerns as having failed to understand what we mean by 'measuring length' and only once this practice has been acquired do we think of them as capable of arriving at measurements of length and as having a grasp of propositions such as 'This object is 2m long'. They may see large objects and small objects; they may, as a matter of fact, see objects that happen to be 2m long; but they will not see them *as* 2m long.

The notion of thought as 'embedded' in practices and in skills has always loomed large in interpretations of Heidegger. The above model merely lets us give that notion a new twist and a new application. But how then can this model help us here? Sec. 5 will consider how it sheds light on Sec. 2's 'three conditions' and on another important pre-BT discussion of falsehood; Sec. 6-7 will then return to the particular issues that were raised by the schematic interpretation - which we derived from the three 'conditions' - of Heidegger's remarks on scepticism, truth and Being-in-the-world.

5. Falsehood and error as 'founded modes of Being-in-the-world'

Crucially, the mastery that our model illustrates is presupposed if someone is to make *mistaken* measurements of length. Such a person is distracted at the crucial moment and doesn't notice that the ruler slipped or wasn't quite straight; without a general concern with such eventualities and a reasonable degree of success in preventing them coming about, what we have before us is not someone who makes mistaken measurements but someone who isn't measuring at all; rather we'd say they were 'playing at measuring' or just 'messing about with a stick'. So, corresponding to Heidegger's first 'condition of the possibility of falsehood', one's capacity to arrive at mistaken measurements presupposes a certain facility with the relevant practice of measurement, which itself requires a certain familiarity with the 'ways' of those entities that use

of that practice allows us to describe: ‘In a certain sense, I must already have the subject matter if I am to make a mistake about it’ (L 154).

Turning to the two other ‘conditions’, in arriving at our (potentially mistaken) judgment, we assign the object judged an already ‘envisioned’ place (‘5m’) in the ‘world’ of spatial location, one place within an already ‘envisioned’ range. This is best illustrated, just as Heidegger does in his example, by considering the range of intelligible errors one might make. In arriving at a particular measurement – in seeing the object as 5m long – there are already in place a determinate set of possible ‘other’ answers at which we could have arrived (seeing it as 4m long, 6m long, etc. etc.) and possible errors are restricted to measurements that correspond to these ‘others’: while we may mistakenly conclude the object is 6m long, we won’t end up reporting that its length is ‘a deer’ or ‘the Shah of Iran’.¹⁵

A further question, of course, is how do errors actually come about? One may well think that the ease with which the ontology of the ‘isolated subject’ can answer this question is only apparent, because one might believe – with Heidegger – that it cannot actually make sense of falsehood, let alone error. But Heidegger’s depiction of us as essentially always already amidst other entities and *in-the-world* that they populate may also seem unable to accommodate those intuitions that suggest that ‘our relation to beings is a specifically mediate one’ (Tugendhat 1969: 234). Our model suggests a simple answer: ‘our relation to beings’ is ‘mediated’ in that only

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A further interpretive benefit of my proposal that I will mention only briefly is that it naturally allows us to concur with the Greeks, for whom ‘*[p]seudos* is the *ostensive presenting of something as something*’: ‘it is more than merely concealing something without presenting it as something other than it is’ (IPR 23). Cartesianism invites one to think of falsehood as a kind of disconnection: there is nothing out there to which our proposition corresponds. Heidegger instead praises the Greek conception of falsehood as a kind of ‘covering over’, and the above proposal captures that intuition in that a failure in measuring yields not – as it were – nothing, but a measurement that presents the length as other than as it is: it covers over.

successful performance of measurement tasks yields the truth about them. But how then does that answer square with Heidegger's own remarks on how error comes about? I will look, in particular, at some difficult remarks from the 1923-24 lecture series, 'Introduction to Phenomenological Research'.

Heidegger singles out for blame two features of the world:

The world is capable of deceiving, first, by virtue of its circumstantial character and the fact that the objects with which we deal are present for us concretely in a respective setting so that an assortment of possible ways of discussing them presents itself. The world is capable of deceiving, second, by virtue of its elusive character, obscured by fog, darkness and the like. Facts of the matter of this sort are inherent in the manner of being of the world itself. (IPR 30).

Though the surrounding discussion is tricky, I take the 'the circumstantial character' of the world to correspond to the condition necessary for propositions to be capable of truth or falsehood that the entities those propositions concern are 'given in more than one way', making possible 'synthetic' claims that declare – truly or falsely - that one and the same thing is both, for example, a black-board and in the room.¹⁷ This is essentially Aristotle's requirement that propositions that can be true or false must concern 'composite entities' and, on the face of it, tells us nothing about how errors actually come about. But I will return to this matter when I consider the connection that Heidegger sees between 'elusiveness' and the 'circumstantial': '[t]he elusiveness of things comes to life by virtue of the fact that we encounter them circumstantially' (IPR 28).

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McManus 1996 developed a version of this proposal, though with scant reference to the textual basis to be found for it in Heidegger's work. (I confess that I retain that earlier paper's negative assessment of what Heidegger can tell us about how hallucination comes about.)

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Cf. also IPR 224.

Heidegger characterises the world's 'elusiveness' in the following way:

[T]he facts are here in an utterly peculiar character of not being here. Th[is] elusiveness is something that lies in the being of the world itself, the phenomena of which include the daylight and darkness with which we have become acquainted. (IPR 27)

Our model suggests the following line of thought. Different descriptive practices, which reveal different bodies of fact, face different obstacles. Fading light makes judging colours difficult but not the judging of weights; one's own temperature affects one's estimates of temperature but not of distance, pitch or style; and so on. These differences reflect, one might say, features 'inherent in the manner of being of the world itself'. Heidegger also states that '[t]he possibility of deception ... lies in the manner in which the existing entity lives and encounters the world

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itself' (IPR 27). But this also can be squared with our account: one only encounters particular possibilities of error because one engages in particular kinds of descriptive practice; but particular such practices are also necessary if one is to encounter particular bodies of fact.

But why should '[t]he elusiveness of things come[] to life by virtue of the fact that we encounter them circumstantially'? Heidegger elaborates on this by stating that '[t]he more concretely I am in the world, the more genuine the existence of deception' (IPR 28). These are certainly puzzling remarks, suggesting as they do that I might exist in the world more or less concretely. But one reason why 'the elusiveness' might be said to be 'much more encompassing' (IPR 28) when we 'live concretely' would be that, in 'concrete life', we are subject to the competing demands that can arise on the basis of 'the circumstantial character' of the world. The '*possibility of deception* is at hand' when demands that arise out of the other 'dimensions' of our 'concrete lives' dictate that we cannot execute our observational tasks with the necessary care. So we bodge that temperature measurement because our other expenses mean we cannot afford a decent thermometer; we hazard a guess at that judgment of length because

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As Wrathall (2009: 75) notes, Heidegger seems to want a much more 'equitable division of labour' in attributing blame for deception to both ourselves and the world.

our other commitments mean we cannot afford the time to measure it properly; and so on. Here '[w]e do not see the things as subject matters in the sense that they are an object of a scientific observation', as our 'concrete lives' are pulled simultaneously in many directions: the 'existence of things' that those lives encounter 'is much richer and affords much more fluctuating possibilities' (IPR 28).

6. Truth and Being-in-the-world revisited

I return now to the schematic implications that Sec. 3 set out, beginning with the notion of a 'truth' upon which the truth and falsity of propositions rests. Our model does seem to present a form of insight or understanding that 'precedes' and makes possible the entertaining of certain kinds of belief, true or false. To grasp what it is for such beliefs to correspond to the relevant facts turns out to require mastery of 'practical', 'worldly' skill, a kind of insight quite unlike discovering that a proposition holds; and one cannot acquire that mastery by amassing knowledge of the relevant facts because one cannot take in those facts prior to acquiring that mastery.¹⁹ But, to return to Tugendhat's worry, why think of this insight as embodying a form of *truth*? One reason – and we will soon encounter another - is that it seems apt to describe it as embodying a kind of insight into the world. Failure to master these practices means that a whole dimension of reality, so to speak, falls into darkness for us; an entire body of facts remains hidden; we don't know what it *is* for an object to have a length and we are incapable of making correct *or incorrect* determinations of facts of that form.

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This talk of 'priority' may give the misleading impression that learning such a practice is one feat and then, on the basis of that, one can go on to make measurements of length. But what one learns in learning the practice is - and is only - how to make measurements of length. The two feats come as a package and it might be more accurate to say not that the general practice *has* priority but that the particular measurements *don't*.

Our model also sheds some light on the notions of Being-in-the-world and *Sein-bei*. With the model of understanding as skill before one's mind, the intuition that understanding 'lies within', as I put it earlier, seems much less powerful. Most obviously, the skills in question are recognizably 'worldly': they involve picking up and manipulating physical objects, both the tools we use to measure and the objects measured. This provides an obvious-enough sense for the notion that we live amidst the entities that we think about.

But perhaps more interestingly, mastery of skills has a feature that suggests a basis for the rhetoric of 'having', 'givenness', 'touch' and 'being-amidst' which is more in line with the (for want of a much better word) 'cognitive' construal of our Being-in-the-world that Heidegger explicitly favours over the 'spatial', which the previous paragraph's gloss might instead suggest. The feature in question is one which this mastery shares with successful use of perceptual demonstratives as McDowell understands it.

The notion that someone might possess a skill but be incapable of applying it in any particular case seems incoherent; an incapacity to apply the skill in question are grounds for withholding ascription of the skill and the possession of this kind of understanding seems to require that generally one *actually* succeeds in grasping how the world around one is. We distinguish the maker of incorrect measurements from the person who messes about with a stick by reference to a background capacity to make successful measurement in the first case and its absence in the second. If a person were to lack this generally happy - if imperfect - acquaintance with the domain of facts in question, we would not see that person as holding beliefs true *or false* about those facts - just as, for McDowell, failure to identify an object with your perceptual demonstrative deprives you of the associated thought, true or false.

We also perhaps see some basis for the vacillation that we saw in Heidegger's specification of his first 'condition': we cannot distinguish neatly here between what one might call an understanding of 'the domain' - or 'context' - 'in general' from a capacity actually to judge particular occupants of that domain or context correctly in the majority of cases. The urge to depict that which we 'touch' as the particular objects judged may reflect the fact that

understanding the ‘domain’ or ‘context in general’ requires that particular occupants of it must also generally yield to our thinking.²⁰

These conclusions seem to me to provide some justification for talk of *Being-in-the-world*; the world must very largely be unproblematic, not separated from us by any gulf of difficulty. If we are driven to think of ourselves as ‘outside’ of the world by its being epistemically ‘distant’, the above considerations suggest that fundamentally it must be the case that there is ‘no distance’ after all; one might describe the relationship instead as one of ‘touch’, *thigean*. Without the world being in this sense, at one’s disposal, then one is not the intentional agent we might have supposed; faced with such a failure, no such agent withdraws back into its own ‘inner sphere’; whatever might so withdraw lacks intentional states, even false beliefs; its ‘mind’ – though why we call it that is now puzzling – is dark. Or might even that metaphor mislead? Perhaps we should speak here of ‘an utter inability to apprehend at all’ (L 149) - a ‘total absence of the faculty of thinking’, as Ross translates Aristotle’s phrase (1052a4) - or speak, as Heidegger of his *Habilitationschrift* did, of thought becoming still:

Everything that stands ‘over against’ the ego in experience is in some way *comprehended*. The ‘over against’ itself is already a definite *regard* (*respectus*) in which the ego deals with the object. ... If there isn’t this first moment of clearness, I would not even be in some sort of absolute darkness. ... I have no object at all. ... I cannot get myself mentally, intellectually in motion; thinking stands still. (DSTCM 39)

The need for a background facility *with* the world – a mastery of skills which necessarily involves the power to apply them successfully – also provides another reason to think of Sec. 44’s ‘deeper’, ‘pre-propositional’, ‘disclosive’ ‘truth’ as a form of truth. The world must actually

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This provides a response to both the species of scepticism (specifically about knowledge claims *as opposed to* more primordial forms of ‘access’) that Blattner (2006: 112) distinguishes and the worry that our Being-in-the-world may require that there be *some* world in which we dwell but not that that world be anything like the world we believe we dwell in.

reveal itself to me ‘insofar as I am at all’ (L 179, quoted above). Hence, Dasein must be “‘*in the truth*’”; as that section equally telegraphically states, ‘the presupposition of truth’ ‘has been “made” already with the Being of the “we”’ (BT 263, 271). The intimacy of the relationship between the thinker and its world is such that if this ‘touch’ is lost, then even if a sentence passes my lips, it ‘fails to express a proposition’, ‘fails to express a thought’ (Thornton, quoted above).

7. Scepticism revisited

The vision of thought as ‘world-dependent’ in the manner described here is clearly incompatible with scepticism. But how powerful a *criticism* of scepticism does it embody?

It would have power if we could tell of it an analogous story to that which Macarthur tells of McDowell’s broader conception of thought, of which his notion of object-dependent thought is a part:

The very possibility of empirical content depends on the fact that some or other of our experiences *must* be non-deceptive in the sense that the relevant objects figure in them. ... Non-deceptive experience plays, as McDowell puts it, a ‘primary role’ in the availability of empirically contentful thought quite generally, that is, in cases of *both* non-deceptive and deceptive experience. On this view, unless there are in fact *some* actual cases of veridical perception then we could not enjoy empirically contentful thought at all, so there can be no threat that we are *always* suffering from illusions, dreams, or hallucinations. (Macarthur 2003: 179)

According to Sec. 6’s account, contentful thought requires some – indeed the majority – of cases of perception to be actually veridical. So, if that account is correct, ‘there can be no threat that we are *always* suffering from illusions, dreams, or hallucinations’. But is it correct? For what it’s worth, it seems to me that the sceptic must accept some version of Sec. 2’s ‘three conditions’, fuzzily specified though they are. But the fit between those conditions and the account which

Sec. 5 offers of those conditions – and indeed the ‘practical and economic’ version I avoided - is plainly loose. Might it not then be possible to provide an account of those conditions that does not require the thinker to be ‘worldly’ after all?

Take, for example, the first condition; there is at least one answer out there for the Cartesian to give to the question of how – as that condition states – I ‘have the subject matter’ of my judgment even if it lies in the ‘outside world’. That answer is: my inner states are intentionally related to the ‘outer’ because they are mental states and such relatedness is an intrinsic property of the mental.

The most sensible response to this supposed answer for Heidegger to make is one which is very much in line with his own description of his response to scepticism. As Sec. 1 mentioned, Heidegger’s characteristic complaint about the ontology upon which scepticism rests is that it is ‘indefinite’ and the reflections we have considered here are perhaps best seen as Heidegger putting pressure on the sceptic to explain himself, to make definite what remains indefinite in his thinking. In articulating his three ‘conditions of the possibility of falsehood’, he anticipates the kinds of question that Wittgenstein, Putnam and McDowell have posed since. What the sceptic ought to worry about is ‘not ... that our contact with the external world seems too *shaky* to count as knowledgeable’, but that it is ‘quite unclear that the fully Cartesian picture is entitled to characterize its inner facts in content-involving terms – in terms of it seeming to one that things are thus and so – at all’: how can the inner states it envisages ‘be anything but dark’, ‘blank or blind’ (McDowell 1998: 242, 242-43, 249)? The kind of story told here about the ‘founding’ of knowledge and error in a necessary ‘having’ of the world expressed through our actual mastery of practices - like Wittgenstein’s discussions of ‘language-games’, which ‘bring into prominence the fact that the speaking of language is part of an activity, or a form of life’ (1967 sec. 23), and Putnam’s reflections on the ‘division of linguistic labour’ (1973: 704) - serves to build up the pressure on the kind of answer that the Cartesian gave in the preceding paragraph. Through such pressure, that answer comes to seem a ‘magical theory of reference’ (Putnam 1981: 3), its invocation of the notion of ‘the mental’ such that here ‘the word "mental" indicat[es] that we mustn’t expect to understand how these things work’ (Wittgenstein 1969: 39).

Can we not hope for more? Can we not be more aggressive here? Efforts to turn
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externalism into a refutation of scepticism seem to founder and some of its advocates distance themselves from any such attempt; so, for example, McDowell maintains that '[t]he thing to do is not answer the sceptic's challenges, but to diagnose their seeming urgency' (1998: 410); and, according to Williamson,

If a refutation of scepticism is supposed to reason one out of the hole, then scepticism is irrefutable. The most to be hoped for is something which will prevent the sceptic (who may be oneself) from reasoning one into the hole in the first place. (Williamson 2000: 27)

Such responses still face the difficulty that the thought-experiments that motivate scepticism (dreaming, being a brain in a vat, etc.) have great intuitive power and the anti-sceptic has her work cut out if she is to make her own story as - let alone more - intuitive. One might think this is a mere matter of 'presentation'; but I'm not sure that it is. One thing that is quite clear is that, if Heidegger's ideas do point to a way of 'defusing' these thought-experiments, it is yet to be
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shown how.

But I will end with one tentative suggestion which may allow us to see the pro-sceptical thought-experiments, and their intuitive appeal, in a different light. In Heidegger's description in BT of our everyday lives with 'ready-to-hand' tools, he points to the manner in which they become 'transparent'; as long as they and the practices within which they are embedded function as ordinarily required, then 'that with which we concern ourselves primarily is the work - that which is to be produced at the time', 'not the tools themselves', which 'must, as it were, withdraw in order to be ready-to-hand authentically' (BT 99). The account of 'pre-propositional

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For a summary of related discussion, cf. Bruekner 2004.

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Dreyfus remarked in 1991 that 'one can only guess what Heidegger would say about dreams' (1991: 251); subsequent publications mean we need no longer guess; but the remarks of which I'm aware (cf., e.g., IPR 28) don't suggest anything like a response to the dreaming argument.

understanding' that I have given clearly gives pride of place to what one might think of as 'cognitive tools' embedded within 'cognitive practices'. By analogy, one should expect such tools and such practices to become 'transparent' – to 'withdraw' - when functioning appropriately. There is indeed a sense in which we have to *remind* ourselves of the demands involved in mastering those practices - which become clearest when we think about bringing children to master them - and the demands that we make upon the tools involved – which become clearest when we think about possibilities such as the ruler bending or shrinking or (roughly speaking) my ruler turning out to be different from yours. But in the course of our ordinary and proficient dealings with these matters and the domains of fact that these practices reveal, all of these demands become 'transparent', such that the dependency of our thought about these facts upon those practices and tools becomes 'invisible'. If this is indeed so, one would expect to be able to imagine that such thoughts would remain even if one were a brain in a vat or dreaming. The dependency of thought on these practices and tools is not part of what one might call the 'phenomenal content' of our ordinary engagement with the facts that they allow us to uncover; indeed that engagement requires that this be so. A master of these practices effortlessly looks to the facts, one might say, not at the structures that make such looking possible. If then the Heideggerian story told here were to be true, that the pro-sceptical thought-experiments have intuitive appeal is just what one would expect.

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