AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

From Normative Commitment to Existential Commitment: Heidegger and Brandom

by
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A thesis
submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
to the Department of Philosophy
of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences
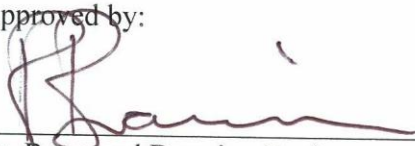at the American University of Beirut

Beirut, Lebanon
may 2016

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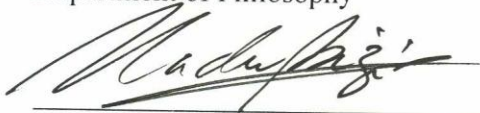FROM NORMATIVE COMMITMENT TO EXISTENTIAL

COMMITMENT: HEIDEGGER AND BRANDOM

by
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Date of thesis defense: May, 2, 2016

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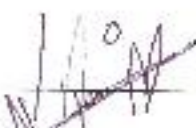## THESIS, DISSERTATION, PROJECT RELEASE FORM

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

<u>Rana Mohamad Ali Al Bizri</u>   for   <u>Master of Arts</u>
<u>Major</u>: Philosophy

Title: <u>From Normative Commitment to existential Commitment: Heidegger and Brandom</u>

       This work aims to answer the question of whether an existential datum such as the confrontation with 'nothingness' poses a challenge to conceptual rationality understood in Brandom's terms or whether the difference between normative commitments and existential commitments is one that transcends rationality. I want to do so via Heidegger's *Being and Time* and Robert Brandom's *Reason in Philosophy Animating Ideas*. In Chapter one, I articulate the relationship between authenticity and inauthenticity as two modes of existing characteristic of Dasein. Chapter two elaborates on Brandom's account of inferentialism as presented in *Reason in Philosophy, Animating Ideas.* Chapter 3 uses Brandom's presentation of inferentialism to elucidate Heidegger's account of pre-understanding. As it turns out, the game of giving and asking for reasons is a condition for Being-in-the-world. In chapter four, it will be shown that acknowledgement of the nothingness concomitant with ontological transcendence CAN be factored in the game of giving and asking for reasons. IF Brandom's functionalism leaves something out it would be the encounter with nothingness or anxiety as the mood that precedes the call of conscience or the resolution to act that directly follows from it. If Death as annihilation cannot be understood using everyday vocabulary then a more sophisticated fine-grained vocabulary is needed. To say that we do not on a daily basis understand that mortality means annihilation is not argument for the claim that nothingness is a non-discursive absolute. Brandom would be willing to concede that the radicality of existential commitments outstrips the resources of discursive justifications. But this radicality requires a higher order conceptual understanding for Heidegger's account to hold. Dasein's nothingness is itself discursively articulated in Heidegger's own work. And Heidegger uses unusual terminologies with hyphen precisely to capture what cannot be captured by ordinary discourse. So is it really discontinuous with the practice of giving and asking for reasons? I am inclined to side with Brandom on this matter.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Philosophy has for long time construed humans as those beings whose sole preoccupation is to seek knowledge. What distinguishes humans from animals is the knowledge-seeking activity in the world. To define knowledge as activity is already to give this tradition credit for something it did not acknowledge at the time. The strand of philosophizing inaugurated by Kant, and later picked up by Heidegger in *Being and Time,* disputes the claim that there exists a private mental sphere. That is, only the subject can have direct access to her own mental states by means of introspection with the 'mind's eye'. The tradition affixes to human beings a fixed nature in touching on questions of how it is that something like knowledge is possible, or what the enabling conditions for knowledge are, as though knowledge is the sole activity human beings partake in. Following the traditional paradigm, our fundamental way of being in the world comes down to intelligent perceiving which grounds everything else we do. Human beings' primary way of accessing the world would be cognitive perception.

This thesis reverses the traditional order of explanation by taking issue with "representationalism". The latter view presents a naïve picture whereby truth is defined as the correspondence between thought and object. Representationalism is premised on the false assumption that humans are fundamentally isolated from their environment, or better, that there must be a medium to reconcile the subject with her world. More penetratingly, at issue for Heidegger is the reification of the mental realm. He does not deny that Dasein or human is capable of theoretical activity but rather that such theoretical activity is fundamental. Heidegger formally characterizes Dasein as "that Being which is in each case mine" or an entity "whose

Being is at issue for it." (*Being and Time*: 32)Thus Dasein is not just another way of saying human even though every human being on Heidegger's account is a Dasein. Being is that which determines entities as entities and Dasein's Being is peculiar in that it manifests itself to Dasein. For Heidegger, Dasein is always already in a world it understands effortlessly because it is able to navigate it and carry out 'worldly' activities. Dasein is such that it is merged with the world. This thesis also reverses the traditional order of thinking about knowledge. Knowledge has long been considered as the ultimate *raison d'être* for sapient beings. If one examines human practices more closely, it is plain that we do not engage in a strenuous mental activity for the world to be genuinely known. We always already find ourselves in a world. We already know what an environment looks like and how it provides us with raw materials that are ready to be put to use. In fact, our primary concern is not to accrue knowledge about objects but to deploy them as part of a web-like structure that makes up our environment. There is a sense in which activity is prior to the content found in any rich body of knowledge. To assert the primacy of events over essences or fixed natures is certainly a promissory step for future philosophical endeavors. Accepting that we exhibit a way of being rather than a fixed essence once and for all is revolutionary.

This thesis takes up the task of carving out a path from commitments that are normative in nature to existential ones. More penetratingly, the question it deals with is whether existential commitments are something over and above normative ones. If this is so, how are we to account for this difference? In other words, is the difference between normative commitments and existential commitments one that transcends rationality or is it continuous with it? To answer the latter question satisfactorily I will follow Heidegger's footsteps in *Being and Time*, which could be summed up as follows: to be authentically perplexed by Being is to resituate oneself back in

the world, that is to say, to take responsibility for one's possibilities. Taking responsibility for one's possibilities is what I call existential commitments. Normative commitments, on the other hand, are best characterized as those routinely possibilities that we opt for unreflectively as part of our quotidian going about the world. The existential analytic of Dasein delineates by means of existential categories what happens in Dasein's daily environment. As such, it is a formal characterization; for it is plain that it cannot depict what happens in each person's environment individually. I will use Brandom's inferentialism in *Reason in Philosophy: Animating Ideas* to explain what Heidegger only takes for granted in *Being and Time*. That is, average Dasein will turn out to be nothing but a normative being. One cannot be in the world without following norms or participating in what Brandom calls the practice of giving and asking for reasons. Given that, on Heidegger's account, my existential choices are conditioned by average everydayness and vice versa it is possible to stipulate that existential commitment requires normative commitment and vice versa. Thus to answer the question with which I began my inquiry, existential commitments are different in kind from normative commitments but the distinction is a conceptual one.

What prevents this thesis from being a piecing together of incompatible views is precisely that Heidegger and Brandom deem it necessary to start the philosophical inquiry with that which is the most familiar to human beings. In other words, the starting point of their inquiry is average routinely human activity. All things being equal, they have a different vision of what goes on in a daily register not so much with respect to the outcome of these practices but with respect to what founds them. Heidegger resorts to phenomenology to account for our fundamental way of being in the world whereas Brandom develops a theory of meaning that deals with all the difficulties that Heidegger's analytic runs into. To a certain extent, Both Brandom and Heidegger give the

same description for what goes on in average everydayness; the disagreement lies in the grounding point of average human activities. Brandom traces it in our verbal disposition; more particularly in our being normative through and through. Heidegger associates the natural flow of this activity with a kind of understanding that is pre-conceptual where Dasein is merged with its world. Thus, prior to raising the above stated question my thesis confronts the following dilemma: Is there such thing as a non-conceptual way of dealing with objects in the world *or* are rules requisite for such dealing to get off the ground? The distinction between content and act is salient here. In viewing concepts as rules as opposed to representations pertaining to the mental sphere Brandom does away with "representationalism". The rationale for this seems to be that rules are embedded in a practice and the latter entails that the subject is already in the world involved in different kinds of tasks. More precisely, the subject is already concerned with worldly sapient activities. Indeed, it is one thing to construe concepts as the content of our mental representations and quite another to view concepts as implicit prescriptive rules involved in perception, reasoning and action. The dilemma has ramifications on how to understand our existential commitments. That is, the motivation for assessing the question of whether or not our daily doings and dealings are normative in nature is particularly to pave the way for a more serious problem about the implications of what Heidegger refers to as the call of conscience. The latter is a state where Dasein understands its particular status in the world; namely that it does not have a nature fixed once and for all. Dasein's status in the world is peculiar precisely in that Dasein is not a thing in the world in the manner in which other beings are. Dasein's finitude or rather understanding of its own mortality ascertains its 'un-thingness'. The dichotomy between that which is 'interior' to one and that which is exterior is eradicated: Dasein is always outside of itself, so to speak, reaching out to things in its environment. Once Dasein explicitly comes to

terms with its mortality, a resolution ensues; that of taking hold of one's choices and decisions. No longer will Dasein be submissive to the dominant social norms. No longer will Dasein opt for the facile mode of living where its choices are ready-made without it having to reflect upon them. The question then arises: Does the call of conscience defy rationality or is it continuous with it? This thesis will try to argue for the latter.

The first chapter will give an expository account of Heidegger's overall insight in *Being and Time*. I will show that the whole of *Being and Time* hinges on the interplay between authenticity and inauthenticity. These are modes of existing that belong to Dasein. Inauthenticity designates Dasein's average routinely existence where everything falls in the mode of oblivion and Dasein's possibilities seem to be shaped by the dominant social norm. Authentic Being comes to the fore when Dasein complies with its ownmost nature; namely that of not having a fixed nature or essence. While Dasein mistakenly views itself as an integral part of the world, or mistakenly identifies itself with entities in the world, there emerges an authentic mode by means of which it comes to terms with the fact that it is not a thing, that it is a pure potentiality-for-Being. Indeed there are many choices that could be made or discarded. But what Heidegger is driving at is that the proper meaning of Being can only be grasped in authentic inauthenticity. It is not as if Dasein can change its world or create possibilities in the vacuum since these are constitutive parts of Dasein. Dasein's possibilities have been there all along; only now Dasein is called to attend to these possibilities, to choose them reflectively or willingly. The anticipation of one's end is coupled with a resolution, that of assuming one's possibilities. But Dasein need not anticipate its death to realize that it has decided for one possibility rather than the other. The distinction between authenticity and authenticity is carried along division one and division two

of *Being and Time.* Although the issue of temporality is a central preoccupation in Division my thesis will not explore how authenticity is temporally articulated because space does not allow it.

Chapter 2 expounds Brandom's inferentialism. Crudely, this is the claim that all there is to meaning is the deployment of inferences whose rules are socially defined. To the query "How it is that we get meaning at all?", Brandom responds that the notion of meaning is inherently linked with the practice of using a language and the latter in turn comes down to the practice of making inferences. By inferences he does not have in mind formal inferences, ones we are acquainted with in logic, but rather ones which depend for their existence on their non-logical terms. The meaning of a term is its inferential role; even empirical content is inferentially defined. Material inference constitutes empirical content and formal inference renders explicit (i.e. formalizes) relations of dependence, compatibility, and incompatibility among contentful assertions. Thus for Brandom material inferences are what ground formal inferences. In other words, content, not form, is what licenses the inferential nexus. The form is already implicit in material inferences. For instance, I remark that it is raining and infer that the streets will be wet. The inference from "rain" to "wetness" is material such that it is part of the meaning of rain that it implies wetness. Integral to this chapter is Brandom's reading of both Kant and Hegel, to whom he is indebted. From Kant he takes the notion of task-responsibility according to which the subject espouses commitments and justifies them. But something remains unexplained in the Kantian account, namely the availability of concepts. Hegel develops what Brandom calls "the social recognitive model" to account for the availability of concepts in the language-game. Roughly, this comes down to a transmission of norms across generations which will undergo changes as they are being applied. The subject recognizes other subjects as liable members of the community who comply with the norms they are trained to abide by. Norms, on this rendering, are not something

over and above the rules requisite for speaking a language; meaning is indeed exhausted by the practice of making inferences.

Chapter 3 will use Robert Brandom's presentation of inferentialism in *Reason in Philosophy* to elucidate Heidegger's account of pre-understanding of Being. It provides reasons that favor the Brandomian thesis according to which the natural flow of sapient[1] activity in whatever form it takes depends on rules. We are first and foremost normative beings. Pre-theoretical understanding is indissociable from rule-following because Dasein undergoes a training very early on in order to have this special rapport with its environment. Brandom's understanding of rules differs from the way these have been traditionally conceived and accounts for what happens in Dasein's environment, i.e., rules do not need to be internally represented in order to be applied. Brandom's inferentialism is able to resolve many of the questions regarding average everydayness that Heidegger leaves open. In short, chapter 3 shows that the inauthentic mode of Dasein comes down to a state where it abides unreflectively by social norms.

If inauthentic Being consists in being normative through and through then how are we to understand the call of conscience in light of our normative nature? Are existential commitments a threat to rationality? Chapter 4 attempts to demonstrate the two sides of the argument without really advocating one side to the exclusion of the other. I will attempt to examine in what way existential commitments might pose a challenge to rationality and then as a second step remind our reader of the notion of rationality we are dealing with. For the latter is clearly a break with the traditional understanding of rationality. When it comes down to it, even the anticipation of one's end is continuous with rationality and does not amount to a rupture with it in that such

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[1] The distinction between sapience and sentience is the distinction we inherited from Kant between knowledge and sensation. Therefore, "sapient beings" is synonymous with human beings and "sentient beings" with animals.

anticipation necessitates the practice of giving and asking for reasons, i.e., a conceptual apparatus. Furthermore, the outcome of the call of conscience is bound to be incorporated within the space of reasons. Although the final chapter does not pretend to provide a definitive or final answer on this issue, it argues in favor of the Brandomian view.

Chapter II

Disenchanted authenticity

Right at the outset of *Being and Time* Heidegger points out that the question of Being has been forgotten and emphasizes the need for its retrieval. He then goes on to develop an existential analytic of Dasein such that any reader of *Being and Time* would rightly jump to the conclusion that Heidegger is an existentialist. But Heidegger would beg to differ; his analysis focuses primarily on Being and not existence *per se*. At no time in *Being and Time* does Heidegger explicitly answer the question by say, giving a thorough survey of what Being is. All he does, it seems, is characterize what he refers to as Dasein without explicitly pinning down Being as such. The reasons for this are many, the chief of which is that Being cannot be relegated to any category on the grounds that it is neither a thing nor a property. Indeed, Heidegger insists that philosophers have long been mistaken in their discussion about Being; to be more precise, it is the absence of such discussion that seems to pose a problem for Heidegger. The interrogation is to take on a new route both as regards the questioner and the appropriate method to be adopted. Right at the outset, Heidegger asserts that the entity to be interrogated is nothing other than Dasein. Although Heidegger does not define Dasein, he gives a formal indication about it: it is "that Being which is in each case mine" or an entity "whose Being is always at issue for it". (*BT*: 32) Heidegger has something very specific in mind that cannot be conveyed by the term "human". He explicitly rejects the definition of Dasein as "human being" in the sense of "rational animal" because it is metaphysically prejudiced. Dasein means that entity which is caught up in existence and whose existence *matters* to it. The thought seems to be that any understanding of Being goes back to Dasein, whether it bears on the Being of particular entities

or its Being[2]. For Heidegger is going to contrast the two. The claim is not, however, that entities such as plants, tables and chairs lack Being. Rather, it belongs to Dasein to have its Being and the Being of other entities revealed to it – a disposition that seems wanting in other entities.

The formal characterization of Dasein includes an authentic way of relating to one's Being which is set against an inauthentic way of doing so. As we will later see there is a necessary link between 'mineness' and authenticity. This chapter will explore the relationship between authenticity and inauthenticity as articulated by Heidegger in *Being and Time*. Authenticity and inauthenticity are ways of existing characteristic of Dasein. Dasein is said to be authentic when it recognizes itself as free and takes responsibility for its own existence. Conversely, Dasein exists inauthentically when it fails to acknowledge its special status in the world and turns to prevalent social norms so as to have its choices dictated by them. While having one's choices shaped is at the end of the day the outcome of a free volition, or at least on Heidegger's account, Dasein can only be *properly* free when it attends to its freedom; more particularly by assuming or owning its acts. Moreover, existence not only implies having a world at one's disposal but also being immersed in worldly activities such that it would be conceivable to live in forgetfulness without taking responsibility for one's own actions at all. The idea is that Dasein need not act in accordance with its special status in the world according to which Dasein is not a substance. For even if Dasein, contrary to other entities, is not intrinsically part of the world, it need not constantly call to mind this particular fact. More to the point, it is not clear whether Heidegger is committed to the claim that Dasein is that entity that *must* raise the question of Being *authentically* at least once. To say that Dasein is *necessarily* the entity that raises the question of Being *authentically* is to be committed to the claim that Dasein's freedom is after all

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[2] To avoid any confusion, Dasein's Being is existence as opposed to the Being of other entities.

compromised by an "ought to". The case won't be settled unless we understand what is meant by the call of conscience as that transitory state which turns Dasein's inauthentic existence into an authentic one. Note that, for Heidegger, both modes of existence are inter-defined. On the one hand, inauthenticity is a modification of authenticity in that in average everydayness Dasein equally owns its existence, owns its choices. However, taking hold of its actions is at stake for average Dasein. In fact, Dasein never ceases to be free, but refuses to act in accordance with its freedom and chooses the facile mode of living, i.e., it disowns its existence. Indeed, Dasein insofar as it is in the inauthentic mode chooses to have everything decided on its behalf by the dominant social norms. On the other hand, authenticity too depends upon inauthenticity; the reason seems to be that Dasein cannot come up with new possibilities when confronted with the fact that it is mortal (a topic which I will have occasion to touch upon in this chapter) but chooses from the possibilities which are already ready-made in its environment.

I want to argue that to raise the question of being *authentically* amounts to resituating oneself back in the world i.e. redefining one's daily existence. The overall insight in *Being and Time* could be stated roughly as follows: To be perplexed about one's Being is to redefine one's situatedness in the world (fallenness and facticity). Heidegger's philosophy is not a denigration of the inauthentic mode in which Dasein flees from itself. Quite the contrary, it has to do with transcendence in and of the world – one that cannot rise beyond the world! The crux of the matter is that without the alleged forgetfulness characteristic of average Dasein, being oneself authentically is impossible.

The aim of this chapter is merely expository. Its foremost concern is to offer an interpretation of the overall project in *Being and Time*. I will first briefly remark on Heidegger's project seen as a whole and somewhat situate it with respect to the philosophical tradition. I will

then describe Dasein's state of Being-in-the-world so that as a second step I can interpret the moment where Dasein faces up to its death, viz., the call of conscience. Integral to this chapter are the consequences of the call of conscience, thus rendering the interplay between authenticity and inauthenticity more substantial.

A. **Preliminary Considerations**

1. The project of deconstructing traditional ontology

Heidegger begins his treatise by quoting Plato's *Sophist*: "For manifestly you have long been aware of what you mean when you use the expression "being". We however who used to think we understood it, have now become perplexed." (BT 1) Being is not something we can grasp once and for all. In fact, it is not something we can grasp at all in the sense of nailing something down. It is precisely for this reason that the question of Being needs to be raised anew. The claim is not however that it is to be raised anew full-stop; rather it is to be so incessantly. Heidegger concedes that we are quite acquainted with the conception of Being. For instance, the word Being is recurrent in our daily discourse. We are nonetheless still perplexed by the meaning of Being. Why is it that the question concerning the meaning of Being has fallen into oblivion? There exist certain underlying assumptions pertaining to the conception of Being, "prejudices" as it were, that have long held us captive. Heidegger traces traditional ontology's failure in the so-called three prejudices which have dominated the philosophical tradition: the universality of Being, the indefinability of Being and the 'self-standingness' of Being. (BT: 22-23) As a matter of fact, he seeks to dispel these "prejudices" in order to set ontology upon a firm footing. That Being is the most universal concept trivializes the question of Being. The latter

lapses and becomes null. As a result, philosophers have dismissed the project of pursuing the meaning of Being as circular. Following the same rationale, traditional ontology is prey to the assumption that the notion of Being is *undefinable* which indefinability is such that we take Being for granted. Furthermore, Being is said to be self-standing in that it is *presupposed* in any inquiry, be its subject-matter what it may. If Being is the starting point of any inquiry then raising the question of Being is a circular endeavor. Why is there a need to raise the question of Being anew if the very notion of it has been time and again assumed in almost all inquiries?

As it turns out, the universality of Being is not decisive against ontology. Quite the contrary, universality is a problem and must be treated as such. Heidegger contends that the universality of Being is precisely of such a sort as to motivate us to do the opposite; namely it incites us to ponder the question of Being. The very universality of Being should motivate an analysis of Being. That is, it is because the alleged universality renders obscure the very concept of Being that a clarification is requisite. While it may be supposed that these "prejudices" are to let us renounce the question of Being, Heidegger is at pains to show that they are arguments for the need to raise ontology anew. Heidegger's project in *Being and Time* is thus to elucidate the concept of Being by taking up the task of exploring the possibility of raising the question of Being *authentically*. These "prejudices" are a sure indication that not only were our previous answers to the meaning of Being problematic but the manner in which the question was posed was equally so.

Curiously, Heidegger will not so much focus on answering the question of Being as on the possibility of posing it properly. Two important points are to be borne in mind: First, Being is not an entity and cannot be treated as such. Second, the exposition of Being requires a logic appropriate to it, i.e., ontology insofar as it has been liberated from all three "prejudices". In

excavating the question of Being, Heidegger is not concerned with an ontology of things that abides by the subject-object distinction. Thus a different way of approaching Being is needed. Heidegger foregoes the representationalist picture whereby the subject looks for facts in the world. The claim to the effect that nature dictates facts about our world is dismissed as a nonstarter. Similarly, the view that it is the transcendental subject that contributes to nature a certain structure or a priori concepts so as to make knowledge possible fares no better than the previous one. As I said, relinquishing all the assumptions commits Heidegger to a new way of viewing Dasein's world – a world which is first and foremost proprietary, i.e., a world that Dasein must *own* by taking responsibility for its own existence.

In order to inaugurate a "prejudice-free" ontology, Heidegger examines the structure inherent in any questioning in general. He ascribes 3 poles to this structure: **(1)** that which is asked about, (*sein Gefragtes*), **(2)** that which is interrogated (*ein Befragtes*), and **(3)** that which is to be found out by the asking (*das Erfragte*). (BT: 24) What is distinctive about Heidegger's enterprise is that its starting point is itself a beginning. He is indeed laying the ground for a new way of doing philosophy. This runs in the same vein as his project of deconstructing ontology, i.e., doing away with all the "prejudices" that have led ontology astray. The aim is not to put an end to philosophical queries but precisely to stop the question of Being from falling into oblivion. Even when we are not explicitly determined to question Being from an ontological standpoint, we do nonetheless possess a pre-understanding of Being. That is, we do not know what Being means, but we nonetheless understand tacitly all the sentences in which the verb "to be" occurs. We equally understand tacitly the very question this treatise is concerned with. This tacit understanding is a *fact*, according to Heidegger. This *fact* signifies that Being is familiar to us even prior to engaging in any question about its meaning. We can draw distinctions between

entities that allow a pre-understanding of Being; the table is, the tree is, this person is. These are entities that are. Being is at least the Being of entities. Our pre-ontological understanding consists in grasping Being as the Being of entities. What we know philosophically is that Being is that which determines entities as entities and as such is itself not an entity. Our implicit understanding of Being is "pre-ontological" in the sense that it is there prior to any ontological treatment of it. What Heidegger calls pre-ontological understanding is just the tacit understanding we have of Being. (I will say more about pre-ontological understanding in section 3 of this chapter). It follows that the Being of entities is what is questioned. So in the structure of the question of Being, **(1)** what is asked about is Being; **(2)** what is interrogated is the Being proper to Dasein, the questioner; and **(3)** what is found out is the meaning of Being. These are the three structural poles of the question of Being.

2. **A preliminary characterization of Dasein**

Thus the privileged entity to be interrogated turns out to be Dasein. Heidegger wants to interpret the entity that raises the question of Being. Although Heidegger refrains from naming that entity human, it is distinctively we who question Being. Heidegger's aim is not to introduce a new entity but rather a new way of understanding ourselves:

> (…)Looking at something, understanding and conceiving it, choosing access to it—all these ways of behaving are constitutive for our inquiry, and therefore are modes of Being for those particular entities which we, the inquirers, are ourselves. Thus to work out the question of Being adequately, we must make an entity—the inquirer—transparent in his own Being. The very asking of this question is an entity's mode of *Being*; and as such it

gets its essential character from what is inquired about—namely Being. This entity which each of us is himself and which includes inquiring as one of the possibilities of its Being, we shall denote by the term "*Dasein*".(BT: 27-28)

It is clear that an inquiry is a mode of behaving characteristic of entities such as ourselves which gives way to the claim that questioning as such is a disposition which we happen to possess. This prompts the question of why it is that Heidegger refers to the questioner as Dasein rather than human, self or subject. Why does Heidegger avoid using these terms? The short answer is the following: the term 'human' is laden with inappropriate assumptions about what we are. Heidegger wants to distance himself from the way ontology has been conducted; the questioner is not a rational animal or a Cartesian thinking substance. Heidegger characterizes Dasein as 'mineness' or that "Being which is in each case mine." (BT: 27) Dasein is not like any other entity which does not seem to care about the fact that it is. Dasein's existence is an object of concern. Dasein can by no means be indifferent to the fact that it exists. Existing and caring about existence are two sides of one coin. Because Dasein is not a substance it is on each occasion its Being. In a way, Dasein is defined by the possibilities of existence that it opts for. Thus in each possibility it is itself. That Dasein is 'me' signifies that I recognize my actions in each instance. Dasein is always going about things in its environment, committing itself to certain projects. In so doing, it recognizes that it is the agent of each action, which is to say that its actions are its signature. Heidegger completely does away with the picture that posits an indivisible, substantial self. Dasein treats everything *as though* it were a thing, *as though* it had a core-matter precisely because it is traumatized by its 'un-thingness'. (*unbedingt*)

Dasein has three privileges that demarcate it from other entities in the world: **1) ontical priority, 2) ontological priority, 3) ontico-ontological priority.** (BT:34) Dasein's ontical

privilege consists in the fact that in its Being, its being is at issue for it. It is the entity to whose Being it cannot be indifferent. Dasein's Being is **existence** as a form of self-relation, as opposed to the Being of other entities which do not relate to themselves and merely are. Trees, university or animals do not exist in this specific sense. Dasein is singled out as the only entity that *cares* about its Being. To be sure, animals are not indifferent to their Being, in the sense that they want to survive. But they do not care for their own existence in the special sense used by Heidegger. To claim the opposite would be to suppose that they might start caring at some point, or that, for that matter, there has been a point in time where they cared about their Being. Heidegger states this idea clearly: other entities are neither indifferent nor concerned with their Being. Existence as care is not concern for one's survival. This is the crucial demarcating criterion between Dasein and other entities. Existence thus comes down to caring for one's Being. It is 'care for existence' that yields meaning. This is why animals' environment is poor in meaning:

> Dasein is an entity which does not just occur among other entities. Rather it is ontically distinguished by the fact that, in its very Being, that Being is an issue for it. But in that case, this is a constitutive state of Dasein's Being, and this implies that Dasein, in its Being, has a relationship towards that Being—a relationship which itself is one of Being. (*BT*: 32)

Dasein has equally ontological priority in that as it exists Being manifests itself to it. Dasein is not just an entity that is. It is a peculiar entity because it relates to its Being – where other entities do not. Although Being is always the Being of entities, Dasein appears to be more primordial in that the very query into Being is conditioned by Dasein and this is so not haphazardly. What makes Dasein the privileged entity is that it always relates to other entities by way of comportment; it comports itself towards its Being and the Being of other entities

understandingly. Again, even in comporting itself towards other entities, Dasein relates to its Being. That Dasein is ceaselessly exposed to existence is what is referred to as Dasein's ontological priority. While things are not made by us – they merely present themselves to us – we are the condition for the possibility of this presentation.

Lastly, Dasein is ontico-ontologically prior in that it is the condition for the possibility of all regional ontologies. By regional ontology Heidegger means the ontology of the special sciences such as physics, biology, psychology, history, etc. Whereas regional ontologies already presuppose what it means for something to be, fundamental ontology poses the question of what it means for anything to be. Regional ontologies take up specialized subject-matters that only indirectly pertain to Being as such.

3. Pre-ontological understanding vs. ontological understanding

As part of quotidian existence, Dasein views itself as an entity among other entities in the world. In comporting itself, Dasein always already has a tacit understanding of what keeps it preoccupied, absorbed in its environment. Understanding is not knowledge, but the latter depends upon the former. It is that without which Dasein cannot even bear a minimal relationship to its world. For instance, it is that in virtue of which Dasein goes about handling its environment. Dasein is such that it always has an understanding of Being even when that understanding is improper[٣]. That is, Dasein is insofar as it is perplexed by Being. That understanding underlies our takenness with or absorption in the world, which Heidegger emphasizes is pre-theoretical. In short, we have a non-conceptual understanding when we deal with things in our environment. Dasein engages in an unmediated activity of exploring the world.

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٣ The improper understanding is thinking that it has fixed nature or a substance.

There exists a non-conceptual skillful mastery that outstrips the conceptual. Thus, Heidegger allows for no separation between Dasein and the world. In this basic form of engagement with the world, Being gets passed over – hence the need for a more sophisticated form of understanding which is to bring out the proper relationship of Dasein vis-à-vis its Being.

It is possible to distinguish yet another way of understanding and relating to oneself; namely *interpreting* oneself as something that discloses the world. Opposed to the basic form of understanding which allows Dasein to navigate a world, is the radicalization of this understanding where we interpret ourselves and our peculiar status in the world. This is what Heidegger calls ontological understanding:

> If to Interpret the meaning of Being becomes our task, Dasein is not only the primary entity to be interrogated; it is also that entity which already comports itself, in its Being, towards that which we are asking about when we ask this question. But in that case the question of Being is nothing other than the radicalization of an essential tendency-of-Being which belongs to Dasein itself—the pre-ontological understanding of Being. (BT: 35)

Being and Time exemplifies an ontological self-understanding whereby that which is implicit in our average daily existence is rendered explicit. Ontological understanding deploys concepts to shed light on that which gets passed over in average everydayness.

It is inconceivable that this merging with the world can be mediated by anything that bears the mark of the conceptual. Theory is always secondary. Scientific understanding is founded on this rudimentary form of understanding which Heidegger calls pre-ontological. Both Kant and Heidegger hold that Dasein is the condition for the possibility of there being a world. But

Heidegger defends the primacy of Dasein's dealing with the world understandingly over a rational apprehending of an external world. It follows that the Kantian scheme errs on Heidegger's account; no longer is the world conceived as nature or as that which the mind partially brings into nature. For Heidegger, it would be absurd to attempt to prove the existence of the external world as separated from Dasein. Such an inquiry is misguided on the grounds that Dasein cannot be disentangled from the world: "But to Dasein, Being in a world is something that belongs essentially."(BT: 33) Furthermore, to view the world as the sum total of all entities proves insufficient; it bypasses a number of essential features that only the method of phenomenology can account for. There is a sense in which Dasein *is* its world since the space of signification that its environment represents rests on Dasein's ceaseless activities. In a way, Dasein contributes to its environment different kinds of activities in the manner in which the Kantian subject contributes the basic concepts of the understanding. In other words, Heidegger propounds a view about humans that privileges praxis over theory. Heidegger somewhat subscribes to the Kantian insight insofar as Dasein has something to contribute to the structure of its environment. He takes issue with Kant however on what that contribution consists in. Heidegger is going to emphasize that Dasein is not superimposed onto the world or juxtaposed against it. Rather, the world is a definitive feature of Dasein: "Ontologically, 'world' is not a way of characterizing those entities which Dasein *essentially* is not; it is rather a characteristic of Dasein itself."(BT: page 92)

4. **The method of phenomenology**

Only an analysis that seizes the Being of entities in their unfolding can give a genuine account of Being. Phenomenology is set against metaphysics as a science that treats Being as a thing and is oblivious to the multifarious ways in which Being reveals itself to Dasein. Heidegger takes up the task of uncovering the Being of phenomena. What are phenomena then if not those entities that show themselves in themselves? In thus showing themselves, a way of Being gets exhibited. That which remains hidden is not the phenomenon but the Being of the phenomenon, i.e. the "how" of the phenomenon. Hence, phenomenology is to track down the Being of entities in their unfolding:

> What is it that phenomenology is 'to let us see'? (…)Manifestly, it is something that proximally and for the most part does not show itself at all: it is something that lies hidden, in contrast to that which proximally and for the most part does show itself; but at the same time it is something that belongs to what thus shows itself, and it belongs to it so essentially as to constitute its meaning and its ground.
>
> Yet that which remains hidden in an egregious sense, or which relapses and gets covered up again, or which shows itself only in 'disguise', is not just this entity or that entity, but rather the Being of entities, as our previous observations have shown. (BT:59)

Phenomenology centers around Being. Recall that Being is always the Being of Dasein or what comes to the same Dasein's way of Being. Because Dasein flees from the possibility of being itself phenomenology is needed to bring out the Being of Dasein – that Being which veils itself in Dasein's average existence. It follows that phenomenology does not seek the givenness of phenomena but precisely that which the phenomena conceal. On this model, phenomena are nothing other than entities. The entity that Heidegger is concerned with is Dasein. So phenomenology examines the way of Being of Dasein. This presupposes that Dasein has

accomplished the "ownmost" possibility of its existence: understanding itself as ek-stasis i.e. as always outside of itself or ahead of itself (I will explain what this means in my discussion of the call of conscience). All of this suggests that Dasein is never in principle this person rather than another. If Dasein assumes its individuality this is so only as a result of understanding its special status in the world; namely that of having many possibilities presented to it. For Heidegger, Dasein could be any person, could have chosen any possibility and is indeed individuated by these possibilities. Accepting this fact has implications: choosing for oneself.

For Heidegger description and interpretation are somewhat synonymous. Phenomenology comes down to a hermeneutic of the quotidian whereby Dasein will undergo a phenomenological description. Phenomenology understood in a broad sense interprets human comportment. That Dasein is the condition for the possibility of uncovering something like a world is not another species of relativism. For one thing, Heidegger repudiates the identification of Being with substance. He is making the more radical claim to the effect that the inquiry into Being does not invoke a special standpoint whereby the best account of Being is selected on rational grounds. Being cannot be defined in terms of essence that captures the 'whatness' of a thing. To be sure, it is not that the truth of certain premises establishes the truth of the conclusion. The mode of inquiry whereby a certain conclusion is privileged given certain premises is dismissed as inappropriate. Phenomenology is a science that depicts the Being of entities in their unfolding. As I have already mentioned, Heidegger is going to privilege one entity to the exclusion of others. Phenomenology is to interpret the Being of that entity. The interpretation is carried out by the same privileged entity and operates on the basis of its pre-ontological understanding of Being. Heidegger selects this method precisely because it is appropriate for portraying the absolute isolation of Dasein when faced with the fact that it is mortal. The question 'what is

Being?' is transposed into 'whom does Being address in its significance?' The rationale for this is that the inquiry into Being depends a great deal on the Being of the questioner. This is not to say that Dasein is Being but rather the entity for which Being is always at issue. But isn't Dasein that entity whose essence cannot be captured in any way possible? It belongs to Dasein to have an understanding of Being and hence to undertake a phenomenological analysis of itself.

The starting point of phenomenology is the undifferentiated existence of Dasein where Being is not manifest. What I mean by undifferentiated existence is precisely Dasein's daily existence where everything appears as given. In particular, undifferentiated existence has to do with when we go about our daily tasks and let ourselves be without really reflecting on the fact that we exist. That we exist is taken for granted such that it seems as though we exist 'effortlessly'(a feature of forgetfulness).To start off the inquiry from the average existence of Dasein is to remain in the spirit of liberating ontology from all the assumptions that have held it captive. Thus the new way of doing ontology Heidegger puts forth is employing the method of phenomenology. This starting point is somehow 'presuppositionless' and leaves no room for assumptions to be smuggled in:

> At the outset of our analysis it is particularly important that Dasein should not be Interpreted with the differentiated character of some definite way of existing, but that it should be uncovered in the undifferentiated character which it has proximally and for the most part. (BT: 69)

B. Dasein's Being in the world: both authentically and inauthentically

1. Inauthentic Dasein

Although Dasein lacks a fixed nature, it is possible to characterize it as care. Implicit in Dasein's comportment is care. But to say that care cuts to the heart of the kind of Being that Dasein possesses is not an instance of reducing it to a substance. To be sure, care breaks up into three components, but not in the sense that the parts add up to the whole. Dasein is at once factical, ahead-of-itself, and fallenness in the world. The structural items constitutive of Dasein are all instances of care. To do away with the mystery, an elucidation will be given in the remainder of this section for both the terminologies and how they hold together in the whole of Dasein.

Dasein finds itself in a world not only without having chosen its world but also without having chosen to exist. Not only is it the case that Dasein finds itself in a world without its consent but it also finds itself as having certain characteristics dictated by its 'having been'. Dasein possesses a mode of Being that presents it with contingent conditions. These have supposedly originated at the beginning of its existence. They nonetheless remain there throughout its existence. Dasein is situated in a world; certain historical, traditional, cultural legacies are handed down to Dasein. Following this rationale, a certain maturity is needed for entities like us to be Daseins. Otherwise no legacy would be transmittable and as a consequence Dasein would not be localizable within its world. Consider the following example: When a person retorts in a rebellious spirit: "Life is unfair because I find myself suffering from circumstances imposed on me without my consent, without having chosen them." This is an accurate description of what Heidegger means by facticity without the complaint. In fact the

complaint is a direct consequence of facticity. Only it is a mistake to think that Dasein's existence hinges on mere facticity: "The concept of "facticity" implies that an entity 'within-the-world' has Being-in-the-world in such a way that it can understand itself as bound up in its 'destiny' with the Being of those entities which it encounters within its own world." (BT: 82) While facticity is constitutive of Dasein and figures essentially in the structure of care, it does not exhaust the Being of Dasein. Dasein's existence cannot be just about the past. In comporting itself Dasein does not simply hark back to its past. This is far from being a species of psychological determinism where Dasein is solely determined by the past and that's all there is to understand. More is needed for Dasein to be the entity it is; Dasein does not just find itself in a world.

Being-in-the world is a fundamental state of Dasein, which cannot be in the world in the manner in which other entities are, or cannot be in the world full-stop. It is not an entity which inheres or resides in the world. It is rather coextensive with it:

> "World" can be understood in another ontical sense- not, however, as those entities which Dasein essentially is not and which can be encountered within-the-world, but rather as that wherein a factical Dasein as such can be said to 'live'. "World" has here a pre-ontological existentiell signification. Here again there are different possibilities: "world" may stand for the 'public' we-world, or one's 'own' closest (domestic) environment. (BT 93)[٤]

World in the ontical sense is the world insofar as it is presented to Dasein. We view ourselves as entities that exist in a world wherein we encounter other entities. World in the ontical sense is a habitat and a container of entities. We happen to be entities that inhabit the world. Already at this

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[٤] "Existentiell" is another way of saying "ontic".

point a certain kind of individuation is introduced; it is clear that my factical Being is different from your factical Being. Although we are all brought up in different cultures, we all have one thing in common: we are born in a world to which we accord meaning, be it the world constituted by the social norms or one's own environment where objects are manipulated. World in the ontic sense refers to our daily doings and dealings. Notice that for Heidegger the world is not nature. It is first and foremost a world of meaning.

Heidegger concedes that Dasein is a spatial being in that it is not denied a body. While Heidegger's philosophy does not dispute Dasein's having a material constitution and spatial characteristics it remains the case that this is not the be all and end all narrative of Being. Dasein is almost at all times seduced into viewing itself as an integral part of the world. However enticing this picture may be, to latch on to it is to remain untrue to oneself, or what comes to the same, to be *inauthentic.*

Dasein's facticity is precisely of such a sort as to make way for "fallenness" or existence in the present mode. In its average existence, Dasein is engrossed in the world, completely immersed in objects found in its circumspective environment and equally preoccupies itself with social encounters. Dasein is also "fallenness" in the world (that would be the second item in the above-mentioned structure of care). When Dasein finds itself with specific characteristics in a world, having a social locatedness among other factical determinations, it mistakes itself for an entity in the world alongside other entities. Dasein's puzzlement before its world yields fascination. In being absorbed in its environment Dasein refuses to take hold of its existence. Absorption presupposes that the world has been disclosed to us; Dasein navigates a world of equipment, concerns itself with things in its circumspective environment and in so doing it is open to the world. Dasein is responsible for uncovering the world; but it is nonetheless unaware

of its share of disclosure. What we encounter in our environment, what there is is a happening, an event. Things happen to us and address us in their significance. They are manifest to us in an eventful way. Care for Being is that which makes meaning possible. Meaning in its versatile nature arises only as a direct consequence of care. Heidegger's analysis gives us the impression that Dasein's world is primitive which merely encompasses things potentially used by Dasein. The reader should be careful not to take his description at face-value or somehow literally as though all there is in the world are tools. What Heidegger is driving at is that everything in Dasein's environment is "ready-to-hand" including so-called natural objects such as forests, lakes, mountains, etc. The ready-to-hand/present-at-hand distinction cuts across the metaphysical distinction between the natural and the artificial.

Dasein's average everydayness, also known as the deficient mode in which Dasein exists always precedes authenticity proper. The call of conscience by means of which Dasein comes to realize that it is pure potentiality-for-Being only comes later and presupposes quotidian existence. Realizing that one could seize to be at any moment is frightening which is why Dasein preoccupies itself with worldly things and goes about exploring its world. Even when Dasein wants to deepen its understanding of things and undertakes interpretative inquiries, the subject of its study is never Being. Dasein interprets the Being of entities and the world in general and avoid confronting the most crucial fact about its existence; namely its finitude.

At the same time our interpretation of understanding of Being has shown that, in accordance with its falling kind of Being, it [Dasein] has, proximally and for the most part, diverted itself into an understanding of the 'world'. Even where the issue is not only one of ontical experience but also one of ontological understanding, the interpretation of

Being takes its orientation in the first instance from the Being of entities within-the-world. (BT 245)

Entities in the world that are not Daseins are first and foremost things at Dasein's disposal, or what comes to the same, they are ready-to-hand [*Zuhandenheit*]. This mode of Being which is proper to entities to whose nature existence does not belong is prior to subsistence or presence-at-hand [*Vorhandenheit*]. The latter, which has been treated by traditional metaphysics as taking precedence over any other mode of investigation, is only an abstraction from that which is ready-to-hand. Entities in Dasein's environment are ready-to-hand; things become objects by becoming present-at-hand, i.e. represented. It is crucial to Heidegger's account that things do not stand out from other things unless they are abstracted from the equipmental context in which they function as items of use. When Dasein studies them and pays attention to them individually they become abstractions from the totality of ready-to-hand things. Along the same line of thought, by Dasein's Being-in-the-world Heidegger is not predicating a spatial property of Dasein. Things in the world are first and foremost of use, available to be manipulated by Dasein. On the other hand, regional ontologies provide us only with a second-hand explanation which, as it stands, is oblivious to something more fundamental. To attribute spatial properties to objects is an abstraction of their fundamental function namely readiness-to-hand. To be sure, objectified geometrical space derives from existential spatiality which Heidegger refers to as "de-severance". Dasein is spatial by virtue of being in the world, it strives to make everything around it familiar and close in terms of concern and dealings. Dasein's space is not fundamentally the geometrical space we come to grips with in physics but rather the 'subjective' space of Dasein. Heidegger is alluding to the familiarity with which we spatially comport ourselves. For instance, when one knows one's way around in a certain space; one does not pay attention to every step

when walking or navigating an environment where pieces of equipment have always already a specific place. One simply knows one's way around. We all experience this in our close environment or in places we frequently visit. In as much as we accord significance to objects in our environment while using them prior to elaborating a system of knowledge about them, we are spatially oriented prior to elaborating a metaphysics or a science of space. Such significance, Heidegger argues, is more primordial. Dasein does not just come across objects in the manner of a passive observer representing the world. Only insofar as Dasein is concerned with its environment do scientific investigations make sense. Thus, objectification is a mode of inauthenticity because Dasein flees from the fact that it is mortal and concerns itself with worldly things. When Dasein studies objects in its environment, it is being untruthful to itself because the central question about its existence is shifted onto things that do not directly pertain to the most crucial fact about its existence. That, for Heidegger, is inauthenticity *par excellence*. Note, however that authenticity does not consist in keep calling to mind that one is mortal, but rather in resolving to always create oneself anew.

2. Being-With

One of the consequences of relinquishing the subject-world model is asserting Dasein's ecstatic nature. That is, there is no gap between Dasein and its world that is somehow bridged by our apprehending of the world. For the latter is always already a shared world. Dasein is both *in* the world and *with* other Daseins. That is, things of concern and other Daseins are given in the world at once. Portraying objects as ready-to-hand makes room for them to be sharable i.e. used by other Daseins. In as much as Dasein's fundamental way of relating to its environment is by appropriating objects and manipulating them Dasein is essentially Being-with. In fact it is

because Dasein is Being-with that something like human relations are conceivable. On this account empathy is a fanciful conception that falls short of portraying the very structure of Dasein. Empathy collapses Dasein into a pure subjective interiority only conscious of itself and not yet having stepped outside of itself to be with others. The analysis of Dasein's Being-in-the-world is precisely to show that Dasein is inseparable from Being-with-others, i.e. it inhabits a shared world. Dasein is its world and thus is others as well:

> Yet one must not fail to notice that we use the term "Dasein-with" to designate that Being for which the Others who are are freed within the world. This Dasein-with of the Others is disclosed within-the-world for a Dasein and so too for those who are Daseins with us, *only because Dasein in itself is essentially Being-with.* (My italics, BT 156)

This passage shows that every Dasein co-belongs with others. It follows that Dasein is also Dasein-with for others. That is, I do not infer that other people are Daseins, the latter ensues from my very existential constitution. If the starting point of the philosophical investigation that Heidegger is engaged in were the "I" it would come across many difficulties; chief among which is to conjecture an explanation of how the subject as pure interiority would surmount such interiority to gain access to the world and be with others. Such analysis is doomed to failure because then the issue of us being a brain in a vat would arise. The latter is the contemporary analog of Descartes' argument in the first meditation. It is a sort of thought experiment according to which a scientist controls a brain in such a way as to simulate an environment. The scientist is also able to condition the person's reasoning. This is to say that there would be no conceivable leap beyond self-reflexive subjectivity. Now Heidegger's inquiry does not take as its starting point an isolated substantial self. Dasein's mineness is intimately tied to the authentic way of relating to itself, which is to say that Dasein is only a Dasein when it faces up to its death. Dasein

is essentially both individuated and 'un-individuated', authentic and inauthentic. In addition, Dasein always already finds itself in a world in which other Daseins exist.

The presence of others goes hand in hand with Dasein's mineness. Solicitude for others is an item in the structure of care, which is not as yet authentic care. The co-belonging of Dasein and others presents a risk of falling into average everydayness. For when surrounded by others Dasein is susceptible to submit to dominant norms unreflectively and as such renounces its agency. When Dasein is in the undifferentiated state of co-belonging with others, it does not as yet understand who it is in its ownmost possibility. As much as Dasein is drawn towards entities in such a way as to conduct inquiries that favor the present-mode, it interacts with other Daseins in a way that equally prioritizes the present mode. It allows for the "They-self" to shape its possibilities. The "They-self" stands for the dominant social norms that dictate behavior in a social group of factical Dasein. It is also the anonymous and impersonal social self, as opposed to the authentically individuated, radically singular existential self. The rationale for this is that if everyone follows the same norms, then they all opt for the same possibilities. Hence all inauthentic Daseins have the same impersonal social self. Consider the case of a child who has been raised in a certain way, has been trained to deploy certain resources and, as a consequence, is expected to behave in a particular way in certain situations. The child is conditioned to comport herself in a proper way – the way prescribed by the They-self. The latter is a particular mode of solicitude for others whereby Dasein mistakes itself for being in the truth, for having understood everything. This is precisely why people who conform rarely ask themselves whether or not what they think or do is true. Not asking or caring is a feature of the mode of oblivion which lures us into taking everything around us at face-value. The state of tranquility that goes with it, no doubt, pays off handsomely. This everyday co-belonging with others involves a

failure on the part of Dasein to understand who it is or grasp itself in its ownmost Being. This failure equally applies to others: "In Dasein's everydayness the agency through which most things come about is one of which we must say "it was no one". (*Being and Time,* BT 165) That Dasein is no-one, i.e. indistinguishable from others, means that singularity is wanting. Consequently, both Dasein and others are substitutable for one another. Nothing about this state of Being demarcates Dasein as singularity. All Dasein's doings are regimented by a kind of normativity. Dasein is subjected to the norms characteristic of his social community. When Heidegger explains what is meant by the "They-self" he is not alluding to a single set of social norms peculiar to all Daseins across cultures. He concedes that these norms are versatile and depend on the practice in which they are embedded. The latter is not to be mistaken for Dasein's individuality. As we will see, individuality in the proper sense springs directly from anticipating one's death.

3. The call of conscience

Dasein is perplexed before the fact of its existence when it ceases mistaking itself as something in the world. To be sure, Dasein has always been and will be perplexed before the fact of its existence. It need not be the case however that puzzlement engenders a genuine grasp of Being. Average everydayness and Dasein's questioning of Being do not necessarily go together but neither one excludes the other. As such, the question of Being is treated deficiently in average everydayness. Dasein's Being is always at issue, yet Dasein is nonetheless preoccupied with things that make it flee from its Being. *It is because Being matters to Dasein that it flees from it.* That is, it is because Dasein is care for its existence that Dasein is bound to live in the

mode of forgetfulness. On some level, Dasein already knows itself to be a what, i.e., something ready-to-hand or present-at-hand, but to confront this realization would confront it with the nullity of its own being, i.e., the fact that it is not *for* everything and hence force it to interrogate its own existence. This is why Dasein flees from itself: it flees from its own nothingness or "un-thingness", i.e. from its radical difference form things in the world. All ontical inquiries channel their focus on entities rather than Being and this is what renders them deficient in nature. It is possible however to have glimpses of genuine manifestations of Being in the quotidian and these are carried along in the relationship between privation and Being. The latter does not entail that Dasein will, as a result of dealing with a malfunctioning tool, go on to raise the question of Being genuinely. Nevertheless privation, whether as lack, absence, or dysfunction, appears to be a symptom of the ontological, a clue to the Being of that which is. The idea is that Being manifests itself in that which is **not;** namely in the frustration of intent, in the dysfunction of purpose, and ultimately in anxiety in the face of one's nothingness: the fact that existence, unlike everything in the world, is ultimately not *for* anything. While these items do not yield an authentic disclosure of Being, they announce it. This is to say that Dasein is closer to the truth in these various modes of privation which occur in an average register. But Dasein is not as yet in the truth, as Heidegger would put it. In particular, anxiety is a privileged mood whereby Dasein encounters itself for the first time as care for its own Being. It is confronted with itself for the first time as something not in the world:

> Anxiety makes manifest to Dasein its *Being towards* its ownmost possibility-for-Being—
> that is, its *Being-free for* the freedom of choosing itself and taking hold of itself. Anxiety
> brings Dasein face to face with its *Being-free-for* the authenticity of its Being, and for this

authenticity as a possibility which it always is. But at the same time, this is the Being to

which Dasein as Being-in-the-world has been delivered over. (BT 232-233)

Anxiety is an attunement that reveals to Dasein its ownmost Being for the first time. It is not the

psychological disorder where one excessively worries about insignificant things. It is not the

anxiety that causes distress but an anxiety that gives Dasein an insight into the kind of Being that

it is exposed to. Dasein is through this attunement nauseated by the contingency of its existence,

by the fact that it does not have a fixed nature. What is distinctive about average everydayness is

that Dasein misrecognizes itself as something that not only has a nature but whose existence is

for some determinate end. Dasein is free to be any person, to opt for any possibility. This fact is

burdensome in that it is hard to keep attending to one's freedom.

Right at the outset, Heidegger states that Dasein is ontically privileged in that it is pre-

ontological which is to say that its own Being is at stake for it. To pose the question of Being is a

mode of comportment between the ontical and the ontological. Dasein is the privileged entity on

Heidegger's account not only because it is capable of recognizing other entities in its

environment as well as other Daseins, but primarily because it is susceptible to pondering Being,

the world, and finitude. In short, Being is always at issue for a concernful and solicitous entity

such as Dasein. The question here arises: What is it that Dasein is to understand in questioning

its Being? Which item in the structure of care is responsible for such questioning? Dasein must

come to terms with the fact that it is pure potentiality-for-Being. To elucidate: Dasein is said to

be null insofar as it is mortal, insofar as its sojourn is finite. Dasein is not a thing precisely in

virtue of its ecstatic nature. In saying that Dasein is not a thing, Heidegger is not making the

radical claim to the effect that it is not real. Rather, he is taking issue with traditional

metaphysics. Dasein is to be differentiated from the "I" as the seat of autonomous, self-reflexive

subjectivity. The mineness of Dasein's Being as existence is to be distinguished from an ontical individuality. Dasein intends objects in its environment, dwells in entities and in so doing it always deals with things outside of itself. Existence is always a taking action in the world, a performance of a certain act which makes Dasein pure exteriority. Dasein is that entity which is in each case a pure possibility. Hence it is not a mind, a body, or a soul. Only when Dasein anticipates its own death does it realize that it is Being-towards-death i.e. something that cannot acquire a nature, something whose essence is shaped by pure possibilities.

In its everydayness, Dasein witnesses death on a regular basis and does have an experience of what death is. The latter is just an average witnessing where Dasein flees from its death by asserting the finitude of all. The proper anticipation of death, indeed the genuine encounter of one's end is when death becomes *mine,* which is to say that it is not the impersonal They-self that dies, but *me.* Dasein's existence thus appears to be dual: on the one hand, Dasein flees from its death. On the other, Dasein reaches a new level of understanding where it is overcome by the contingency of its existence. Dasein comes to realize that not only are its hooks to reality alterable but that nothing ties Dasein to its world. In other words, there is nothing about Dasein that keeps it inherently linked with its world and this is so because of Dasein's mortality. That death is the ultimate possibility that only I can undergo incites Dasein to take responsibility for its own death.

The call of conscience is tantamount to an interruption of Dasein's relation to its world. Dasein is isolated from the world and most importantly from other Daseins by its death. The call of conscience is a moment in Dasein's existence where everything about the world becomes meaningless; concern and solicitude come to disappear. Dasein faces death not merely as a possibility that might occur one day or the other but rather as *unequivocally its own death.* The

call of conscience is an existential isolation whereby Dasein stops relating to anything in the world and contemplate its death. As such, the call of conscience is a non-relation; it is devoid of content. Yet it is also the moment when it relates to itself as itself for the first time: through the call, Dasein's authentic self calls to its inauthentic self; calling it to stop fleeing from its own nothingness and to confront its own potentiality-for-being as not being anything in the world. Being-towards-death is not to be conflated with the call; they are closely related but they are distinct moments of Heidegger's analysis. It is the former that is radically individuating as a non-relation; the call is a self-relation where the terms are not things: it is Dasein as "outside of itself" that relates to itself.

No one can have a communicable experience of death precisely because it is something each Dasein will undergo on its own. The call of conscience is a kind of understanding that can only be experienced individually, or at least this is what Heidegger seems to be suggesting. This issue will come up again in the final chapter of this thesis where Brandom's inferentialist account will confront Heidegger's call of conscience. Can Being-towards-death be experienced by Dasein in the death of others? Heidegger rejects this possibility. He takes it that the death of others says nothing of one's own Being-towards-death. "No one can take the Other's dying away from him." (BT 284)

4. The paradoxical consequences of the call of conscience:

Paradoxically, it is in the authentic anticipation of my death that a relation to others is made possible. Recall that others are Daseins as well. As such, they have endured their own experience of death. Their individuality is at stake too. Hence *authentic* Being-with is one that

recognizes others as individuals. *The call of conscience does not amount to relinquishing my relationship with other Daseins. Quite the contrary, in the call of conscience I take responsibility for other Daseins as well. This responsibility consists in recognizing their individuality. Dasein's anticipation of death does not dissolve Being-with but only does away with solicitude insofar as it is substitution for others, insofar as my Dasein is indistinguishable from that of others*. I assume my individuality not by avoiding others but rather by acknowledging their individuality. Being-with properly so-called can only be made possible when Dasein accepts the fact that it is unconditionally free. For prior to the call of conscience Dasein was in the undifferentiated mode of Being with others. In an average daily existence Dasein's singularity is compromised by the They-self. Heidegger grounds Being-with in the un-substitutable singularity of Dasein. In its resolute singular Being Dasein is Being-with:

> To this lostness, one's own Dasein can appeal, and this appeal can be understood in the way of resoluteness. But in that case this authentic disclosedness modifies with equal primordiality both the way in which the 'world' is discovered (and this founded upon that disclosedness) and the way in which the Dasein-with of Others is disclosed. 'The world' which is ready-to-hand does not become another one 'in its content', nor does the circle of Others get exchanged for a new one; but both one's Being towards the ready-to-hand understandingly and concernfully, and one's solicitous Being with Others, are now given a definite character in terms of their ownmost *potentiality-for-Being-their-Selves*.
> Resoluteness, as authentic *Being-one's-Self,* does not detach Dasein from its world, nor does it isolate it so that it becomes a free-floating "I". And how should it when resoluteness as authentic disclosedness, is *authentically* nothing else than *Being-in-the-*

world? Resoluteness brings the Self right into its current concernful Being-alongside what is ready-to-hand, and pushes it into solicitous Being with Others. (BT 344)

The claim is not that when Dasein comes to its demise it will understand the meaning of Being. Dasein can understand the meaning of Being solely by being answerable to its existence. The anticipation of one's end is coupled with a resolution, that of assuming one's possibilities. But it need not anticipate its death to realize that it has decided for one possibility rather than the other. As long as Dasein is, it is Being-towards-death not in the sense that it is coming to an end or is going to die at any moment. Rather Being-towards-death implies that Dasein has chosen its possibilities one way or another:

In being towards its death, Dasein is dying factically and indeed constantly, as long as it has not yet come to its demise. When we say that Dasein is factically dying, we are saying at the same time that in its Being-towards-death Dasein has decided itself in one way or another. (BT 303)

Ontology insofar as it is indissociable from an ontical framework has in view an ethic as an ethos of existence: a way of acting not derived from a system of metaphysical prescriptions but from a new mode of understanding and self-relating. This is to say that the understanding achieved through fundamental ontology differs radically from that of merely contemplative knowledge. Thus the retrieval of the question of Being is not going to be epistemological, or merely ontological, for to inquire about what there is is merely contemplative. The question of Being arises in an ontical framework and is achieved ontically as well:

Just as little as existence is necessarily and directly impaired by an ontologically inadequate way of understanding the conscience, so little does an existentially appropriate Interpretation of the conscience guarantee that one has understood the call in an existentiell manner. (BT 341)

What is it to understand the call of conscience existentielly? Heidegger distinguishes between an ontological interpretation of authentic being oneself and an ontical one. The former is the kind of enterprise that Heidegger is engaged in in *Being and Time*. The latter involves the understanding that each one of us possesses when one's own Being is in question. In other words, an existentiell understanding pertains to our own existence and does not spring from interpreting one's Being; it suffices to exist to be in possession of an existentiell understanding of the possibility of one's death. The idea is that one could read *Being and Time* and become intellectually acquainted with Dasein's existential analytic without taking hold of one's existence and assuming one's choices in the world. Ontology as a practice would come down to an intellectual activity if our choices were not assumed in the world (i.e. existentielly). In fact, Heidegger believes that the reader of *Being and Time* is able to relate to the interpretation Heidegger elaborates precisely because we all experience this as Daseins. The only thing wanting in our experience is the conceptual categories that Heidegger deploys. He is indeed proposing a description of what it is like for beings like us to exist. Only this description is not a superficial one; its task is to render explicit what is implicit. Even when that which is implicit is rendered explicit existentielly, the task of an existential analytic is to bring this to view.

But what is authenticity properly so-called? The whole of *Being and Time* hinges on the interplay between authenticity and inauthenticity. To be sure, the latter distinction is not suggestive of any morality. Rather, it concerns two modes of Being. The 'in' in inauthentic is not

to be viewed as a negation or any less Being than authentic Being. The authentic-inauthentic distinction could be resolved into the distinction between appropriate and inappropriate. Inauthentic Being is none other than that found in factical Dasein and fallenness, in which Dasein flees from its ownmost potentiality for being. On the other hand, authentic Being is just a way of saying that Dasein is compliant with its ownmost nature; that of not having a nature or having a nature prejudged by existence. Dasein mistakenly views itself as an integral part of the world, mistakenly identifies itself with entities in the world:

> Our everyday falling evasion *in the face* of death is an *inauthentic* Being-*towards*-death. But inauthenticity is based on the possibility of authenticity. Inauthenticity characterizes a kind of Being into which Dasein can divert itself and has for the most part always diverted itself. (BT 303)

A naïve interpretation of Heidegger's work has it that to pose the question of Being is to remain in the authentic mode. But what Heidegger is driving at is that the proper meaning of Being can only be seized in authentic inauthenticity. It is not as if Dasein can do away with its facticity or change its world, since these are constitutive of Dasein. Dasein's possibilities have been there all along, only now Dasein is called to pay attention to these possibilities, to choose them reflectively or willingly. But if facticity grants Dasein a world and if projection is nothing other than a reminder that Dasein does not reside in the world in the manner in which other entities such as trees, tables, and chairs do, then this particular item in the structure of care (i.e. Pure-Potentiality-for-Being) turns out to be a negative force that individuates Dasein. As long as Dasein is, it is Being-towards-death, but not in the sense that it is coming to its demise or is going to die at any moment. Rather, Being-towards-death implies that Dasein has chosen its possibilities one way or another: The anticipation of one's end is coupled with a resolution, that

of assuming one's possibilities. But Dasein need not anticipate its death to realize that it has decided for one possibility rather than the other. The whole argument of the book hinges on the claim that authentic Dasein cannot subsist on its own terms. Recall that Dasein is three modes of Being and not just Being-ahead-of-itself:

> Death does not just 'belong' to one's own Dasein in an undifferentiated way; death *lays claim* to it as an *individual* Dasein. The non-relational character of death, as understood in anticipation, individualizes Dasein down to itself. This individualizing is a way in which the 'there' is disclosed for existence. (BT 308)

How are we to understand individuation? When Dasein *chooses to choose*, it singles out one determinate possibility as its own and this time it does so understandingly. It is not that the world comes to have a further dimension; it stays the way it is. The choice is made by authentic Dasein in the world i.e. in facticity and fallenness. It follows that the call of conscience is nothing other than a way for Dasein to resituate itself back in the world. The ontological revalidates the ontic. To put it differently, Dasein remains inauthentic through and through, only this time an authentic inauthenticity is at play. What is ultimately authentic is authentic inauthenticity i.e. individuated Dasein. In short, Dasein is bound to fall back into its world and assume its factical possibilities by choosing a possibility to identify itself with.

Heidegger's philosophy has to do with a transcendence in and of the world that cannot rise beyond the world. As such, the call of conscience is not to be viewed as a supra-worldly state of awareness; it only makes sense to speak of transcendence for finite entities such as ourselves. The call of conscience is not something that happens once and for all; Dasein's whole existence weaves back and forth between authenticity and inauthenticity. The question and the decision

have to be repeated ceaselessly. Only by repeating the question is authenticity properly so-called achieved.

Is Dasein's existence progressive in the sense that it evolves toward an appropriate understanding of what it is to be Dasein? That cannot be precisely because authenticity and inauthenticity are inter-defined. Prior to the call of conscience, Dasein is in the mode of forgetfulness. Dasein is not denied its freedom in average everydayness; it merely flees from the responsibility that free will imposes on it. The outcome of the call of conscience is that Dasein starts attending to the fact that it is free and takes hold of its existence. Once Dasein has opted for one possibility as opposed to another dictated by the social norm it is hard not to lapse back into the mode of forgetfulness.

To understand more deeply what Heidegger means by this consider the following analogy: For a long time it was commonplace to explain action in cognitive psychology as that phenomenon that starts off as unconscious and then turns into conscious action. But this is a misconception; action may start consciously and eventually turns into an unconscious performance after some strenuous training. Mastering a technique or a certain performance is no more than taking a conscious phenomenon and turning into an unconscious one. One can think of this phenomenon as follows: if every time you walk you need to be conscious of every footstep you are about to make, not only will it take you a lot of time to coordinate your footsteps but you might not be able to walk at all. The mode of forgetfulness operates predominantly. If one were to anticipate one's death regularly it would have been impossible for one to exist. One might as well await its death. The mode of forgetfulness is what allows Dasein to go on with life. All our existence is mostly forgetfulness; one can discern breaks from forgetfulness but that is bound to lapse into forgetfulness again, only this time an individuation has taken place.

C. Concluding remarks

Crucial to our discussion in the next chapter are the passages about what it is to be in the inauthentic mode or being caught up in our daily average concern and solicitude. Dasein's average existence will be treated as normative in chapter 3, be it in manipulating objects in Dasein's environment or in being submissive to the 'they-self'. For concern and solicitude to be sustainable depictions they ought to have a normative basis. Heidegger appeals to our pre-understanding of Being in order to explicate what goes on in quotidian existence. This pre-understanding itself will be re-evaluated and couched as normative functionalism. This certainly is not without impact on our understanding of the call of conscience and the relationship between authenticity and inauthenticity. The latter will be the object of the final chapter of this enterprise.

CHAPTER III

Inferentialism as a holistic account of meaning

This chapter is exegetical and will lay the way for the argumentative part of the thesis. Inferentialism is a theory that views humans as essentially normative beings, i.e. beings whose mode of living thrives on rule-following. The philosophy of language has developed accounts that are direct answers to the question of how it is that we get meaning at all. Some philosophers have explored the necessary and sufficient conditions of meaningfulness as such, others the truth-value of a sentence. For a long time, the referential model dominated Anglo-American circles such that all theories propounded by this tradition were applications of the referential model. The referential picture suggests that language is meaningful in virtue of mirroring states of affairs; more particularly words get their meaning by standing for particular objects. Brandom breaks out of this tradition by taking it that the only way to account for meaning is paying attention to our practices and seeing how language *as a practice* gets carried out. The Brandomian model starts off by considering the question of how it is that we get meaning at all. On this rendering, the notion of meaning is inherently linked with the practice of speaking a language and the latter in turn comes down to a practice of making inferences. Brandom goes on to make more of the notion of practice by saying that discursive exchanges are first and foremost inferences that any member of the community is trained to undertake. Whereas the notion of meaning is inherently linked with the practice of speaking a language, such practice is a practice of making inferences. To be sure, by inference he does not have in mind formal inferences

(inductive and deductive) – ones we are acquainted with in logic, but rather those we undertake on a daily basis when going about mundane tasks. For instance, I remark that it is raining and infer that the streets will be wet. The adequacy of a particular inference depends upon the conceptual apparatus characteristic of the social practice in which we are embedded. Perhaps the choice of the terminology "inference" is misleading; one must bear in mind that inference can also mean "transition" or "linkage" and Brandom follows Sellars in claiming that material inference primarily involves transition from the content of one concept to that of another. This is what makes the very idea of a practice possible. For suppose a practice did not involve inferential rules then this practice would yield separate moves and thus would be discontinuous. The conceptual framework a practice elaborates constitutes a certain web such that every assertion one puts on the table has implications. An inference is not dictated by causal forces or formal rules for it to be valid. An inference is valid when it answers to the relevant social norm characteristic of the practice in question.

Note that inferentialism is not a species of communitarianism according to which an inference is valid when and only when the community reaches an agreement as to what counts as the appropriate circumstances for its use. What matters for inferentialism is not *merely* the community's agreement on a particular norm or set of norms. It is not a question of consensus whether the inference turns out to be valid or not. These social practices do not thrive on a communal vote for what counts as an appropriate move in this practice. Each practice has a discursive legacy which is recognized by the current community members.° Such a legacy is not by any means set up once and for all. It involves a whole practice of recognizing the conceptual

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° Kripke affords a definition of what has come to be known as the "communitarian view" in "The Wittgenstein Paradox".

framework of our predecessors and proposes a new take on it. Inferential practices are very dynamical in that the old discursive commitments are ceaselessly subject to change. We modify our commitments and make use of them in new contexts, thus bringing about new social norms. The core matter of Brandom's thinking is that an inference is always part and parcel of a practice. Such practice is social in nature, i.e. it cannot get off the ground without the individual's adherence to the community. Not only does the member of the community obey discursive rules in order to produce meaningful speech, but also to ceaselessly generate new meaning. Assertions are warranted by social norms until they are challenged by other assertions. One could also respond to the challenge by putting forth further assertions. This is crudely what it is to engage in the practice of "giving and asking for reasons".

To be sure, the account of meaning that Brandom mobilizes extends beyond a philosophical discussion about language *per se*. Inferentialism is no doubt a theory of meaning but it does touch on many ideas worthy of philosophical investigation. I will have to say more about how a theory of language could be extended to accounting for sapience's fundamental relationship with the world. This will be the subject matter of the next chapter. For my present purposes I will confine myself to elaborating on the above sketch. I have stated roughly what Brandomian inferentialism consists in without really showing how the whole account holds together. In the remainder of this chapter, I will examine the structural components of inferentialism. In *Animating Ideas: Reason in Philosophy,* Brandom selects and reconstructs what he takes to be crucial passages in Kant and Hegel's work in view of incorporating them into his own project of inferentialism. This chapter is concerned with a genealogy of inferentialism as Brandom sees it. It is by analyzing the works of his predecessors (both Kant and Hegel) that Brandom arrived at his theory of inferentialism. From Kant he borrows the notion of task-

responsibility as a demarcating criterion between sapience and sentience. This will provide the first major tenet of his inferentialism. As regards Hegel, he reappropriates the notion of mediation found in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and applies it to semantics. The "recognitive model" Brandom draws from Hegel will provide for the second major tenet.

A. The demarcating criterion between sapience and sentience: we are in a distinctive way responsible for our doings

Brandom takes issue with the tradition that identifies meaning with predication and shows how such picture errs. It is precisely its failure to provide a demarcating criterion between that which is characteristically human and that which belongs to sentient beings that gives rise to difficulties. One version of representationalism states that sentences or propositions get their meaning by mirroring states of affairs. Such a theory of meaning restricts itself to subject-predicate sentences. Put more carefully, only subject-predicate sentences qualify as strictly speaking meaningful sentences. The traditional model presents an atomistic picture where words piled up together give rise to meaningful statements. This is so in virtue of contributing the objects for which they stand in the sentence in which they occur. In particular, singular terms contribute to the truth value of the whole sentence the objects that they designate. On this account, the referent of a sentence is its truth value. Representationalism takes meaning to be determined by truth; those aspects of meaning that transcend truth determination are deemed insignificant. This is the doctrine of extensionalism: meaning is fixed by reference, not sense. Moreover, to examine the truth-value of a sentence one should appeal to states of affairs and see whether the classification expressed by subject-predicate sentences is one picked out in the

world. Judging and predicating show up as two sides of one coin. The idea is that to be aware of something is to not only treat it as a particular thing but also to *classify* it as belonging to a general kind:

> This is the idea that to be aware of something is to take it *as* something: paradigmatically to classify something particular as being of some general kind. In its form as a theory of judgement, it becomes the view as that judging is *predicating* one concept of another: putting two concepts into a relation, marked by a copula, whose paradigm once again is bringing a particular concept under a general one, or subordinating a less general to a more general one. (RIP 9)

Two things seem to be problematic in this traditional model of judging *qua* predicating:

١- That meaning is something peculiar to humans is not as yet tantamount to giving a criterion of demarcation of what is characteristically human as opposed to sentient. For that we need to examine more closely what meaning is. Brandom points out that there are certain elements in our environment that respond to different sorts of stimuli and as such classify things. For instance, when a parrot is trained to respond to red things by say, uttering the sound "red", it is capable of *classifying* red things in the sense of discerning them in its environment. Responding in a certain manner to the environment counts as an instance of classification that is not far off from the one found in predication. The claim however is not that the parrot understands what goes on in its environment. By the same token, when an iron becomes rusty in the rain it is in a way responding to its environment, classifying things: it is the rain that caused the rust. Thus, the iron is introducing distinctions, distinguishing between what is rain and what is not, but is assuredly in no way aware of these classifications:

When an iron pipe rusts in the rain, it is in some sense classifying its environment as being of a certain general kind, but is in no interesting sense aware of it. So one must already have concepts in order to be aware of anything at all. (RIP 65)

Predicating is also classifying. Predicating consists in the sole activity of introducing classifications, i.e. what falls under what category[1]. If animals have the capacity to classify elements in their environment then how does judging *qua* predicating produce meaning? Again meaning is something characteristically human. The traditional model claims that meaning is accounted for by predication or classification. Now sentient beings which lack the capacity to understand the world and thus to ascribe meaning to it are able to classify things. Hence a theory of meaning that identifies judging with predicating falls short of providing a demarcating criterion between sapient and sentient beings. More is needed on the part of the subject in order for her to count as applying concepts in the genuine sense.

٢- It is possible to push the claim further by showing that the judging *qua* predicating thesis is inherently suspect. The notion of predication satisfies two incompatible functions: it is sometimes used to build new representational contents and sometimes merely to endorse the content. In other words, the confusion lies in the distinction between judg*ing* and what is judg*ed* (i.e. act of judging and the content judged), which the traditional model seems to be oblivious to. For it is clear that it is one thing to endorse or express one's own judgment and quite another to view judgment as the content extracted from a

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[1] The criterion is far from being a metaphysical one.

particular sentence. Wilfrid Sellars was the first to call our attention to this crucial distinction:

> For it then becomes clear that in the traditional theory, the notion of *predication* is being asked to do two incompatible jobs. On the one hand, it serves as a structural way of building up judgeable contents. On the other hand, it is thought of as a kind that has the significance of endorsing such contents. (RIP 30)

Consider the conditional paradigm where the judgement involves a predication but does not assert anything. That is, only a property is predicated of a subject without it being asserted. Indeed the very structure of the conditional paradigm involves no endorsement of propositions: If Pa then Pb. While it is the case that in the latter judgement I have predicated P of a, it remains the case that I have not asserted Pa. The notion of judgment is treated as at once the act of judging and the content judged. In the sentence "If Pa then Pb" no judging in the sense of asserting is taking place.

One could try to turn the tables by arguing that it is an open question whether I have predicated P of a in the proposition "If Pa then Pb". The whole sentence altogether is not an instance of predication. For the sake of the argument, suppose that this is true, i.e., that the sentence "If Pa then Pb" is not a predication. But if this were to be the case then the following conditional reasoning would be superfluous:

1) If Pa then Pb

2) Pa

3) Then Pb

For, in the first premise, Pa would not count as a predication but it ought to be one in the second premise. How could one and the same sentence be a predication in one instance

and not one in another? Denying that it is a predication is not a permissible option otherwise the whole reasoning would be unsound. That is, either one is willing to assert the problematic claim that 1), 2), 3) is unsound or renounce the predication model. It follows therefore that judging *qua* predicating cannot be that which distinctively characterizes sapient beings because on the one hand animals possess the ability to classify things in the weak sense of classifying and on the other the account of predication is itself inherently suspect. What is it then that differentiates between sentience and sapience? The suggestion could be awareness but such an answer fails to get to the juice of the matter. The response is already present in the above introduced distinction between content and act. While sentient beings have the capacity to classify things – notwithstanding the fact that sapient classifications are more fine-grained – sapient beings endorse, assert, and take responsibility for their doings. In other words, over and above our ability to classify elements in our environment, we take responsibility for our classifications. Kant's contribution to the overall project of inferentialism goes along the following lines: Sapient beings are those beings that take responsibility for their actions and claims. Not only do they apply concepts in the sense of classifying things but concepts themselves are what they are in a distinctive way responsible for: "What distinguishes judging and intentional doing from the activities of non-sapient creatures is not that they involve some special sort of mental processes, but that they are things knowers and agents are in a distinctive way *responsible* for." (RIP 32)

That we are responsible for our judgment yields meaning. This harks back to the question of how it is that we get meaning at all; more particularly what it is that makes us meaning

mongers in contradistinction with animals. As it turns out, we are responsible for what we do and say. The idea of a singular judgement, Brandom maintains, makes little sense; for it is part of the definition of judgments to be caught up in an inferential network. Thus, the primary unit of meaning, indeed the minimal unit of responsibility, is the judgment in the sense of asserting or claiming. That is, the fundamental utterance that counts as generating meaning is the one endorsed by the speaker. It goes without saying that subsentential expressions cannot be endorsed, for they do not count as saying anything at all. They are meaningful only in a derivative sense. What demarcates sentience from sapience is by no means an ontological question, but as Brandom puts it, a deontological or normative one. Hence Brandom's Kantianism, which contrasts with Heidegger's rejection of Kantian deontology and his rehabilitation of ontology: for Brandom, there is no ontological difference between sapience and sentience, only a deontological one; for Heidegger Dasein is the site of the ontico-ontological difference as such. Humans are sentient as a matter of having a biological constitution that allows them to respond to their environment in a certain way, but this is not the be-all and end-all account of what it is to be human. For we are beings that not only apply concepts but most importantly commit ourselves to these conceptual contents. What demarcates us from animals is not a special brain activity or distinctive physical stuff in the brain but the ability to apply concepts. It is not a matter of brain activity, or a particular property that humans possess. This is what Brandom has in mind when he glosses over the demarcating criterion as deontological as opposed to ontological.

At this point, it is fair to say that while Descartes was concerned with our grip on concepts, the Kantian tradition as Brandom interprets it construes the subject as bound by concepts. The concept is to be viewed as a rule for a certain usage of a word. The distinction between rules

construed as laws of nature and rules in the sense of social norms sheds light on the import of inferentialism in the philosophy of language. On the first model, we come up with new theories and amend them in light of the empirical evidence in the vicinity. As such, our theories are said to be at fault with respect to nature on the grounds that it is not up to us to decide what the nature of our world is. Rule-following, on the other hand, defies the first model in that the subject is at liberty to abide by the norm she sees fitting. This is to say rules do not predispose us to act in such and such a manner; we *choose* to abide by them. Be that as it may, once the subject follows the rule, it is no longer up to her what that rule implies in a broad sense:

> On this account, far from being incompatible with constraint, freedom consists in a distinctive kind of constraint: constraint by norms. This sounds paradoxical, but it is not. The positive freedom Kant is describing is the practical capacity to be bound by discursive norms. This is a capacity that is compatible with but extends beyond being bound by the laws that govern natural beings. It is by exercising this capacity that we raise ourselves above the merely natural, and become beings who live and move and have our being in the normative space of commitments and responsibilities, and so (because it is the rational relations they stand in that articulate the contents of those normative statuses) reasons. (RIP 60)

The previous passage indicates that the capacity to comply with rules is after all consistent with our being bound by natural laws but is not restricted to it. That is, as biological beings we have certain dispositions and behavioral patterns that could be delineated in the form of facts. Among these dispositions, the verbal disposition stands out. It comes down to the ability to manufacture norms and obey them. Norms do not causally condition us. We choose to abide by them. To drive the point home, our verbal disposition is a biological fact but the practice of speaking a

language is not exhausted by biological events. Biological makeup is necessary but by no means sufficient. That we have a verbal disposition is another way of saying that we are at liberty to obey norms. There is nothing about norms that force us to obey them; we choose to abide by them. However, if we refrained from following rules action would not come about. Brandom, unlike Sellars, is not too concerned about locating the junction between our biological dispositions and our normative obligations. All the same, there is nothing spooky or metaphysical about our ability to bind ourselves to rules.

Brandom talks about a task-responsibility to highlight the practical character of judgment. A person takes responsibility for a judging by a certain doing; a kind of know-how comes to the fore. The Kantian subject's task-responsibility is to integrate the judgment into the synthetic unity of apperception. This unity of apperception is the constellation of commitments the subject has previously undertaken. These are in the background in all of her endeavors. A judging, first and foremost, presupposes that certain concepts have already been mastered. As such, a certain maturity is required on the part of the subject. The alleged task-responsibility consists of three crucial moments: critical, ampliative and justificatory. The synthetic unity of apperception comprises previous commitments made by the subject such that the current judgeable content ought to be renounced if it conflicts with her previous commitments. This corresponds to the critical moment. Essential to the task-responsibility is the activity by means of which the subject draws the implications of each commitment and particularly the ones recently made. Brandom refers to it as the ampliative move. The task-responsibility is supplemented with a final step where the subject makes a case for the endorsed claim when someone else challenges it, i.e. gives reasons for her action and endorsement. The reasons employed feed into the previous commitments the subject has endorsed and continues to endorse. Giving reasons falls under the

justificatory category. Note that the three moments jointly taken together yield a synthetic unity of apperception and make the subject who she is:

> Seeking to fulfill the first sort of responsibility is aiming at a whole constellation of commitments that is *consistent* [Critical]. Seeking to fulfill the second is aiming at one that is *complete.* [Ampliative] And seeking to fulfill the third is aiming at a constellation of commitments that is *warranted.* [Justificatory] (RIP 36)

Notice that the subject is consistent in her commitments and does not expunge previous claims unless it be on rational grounds. The subject could adopt another constellation of commitments, albeit consistently. That is, the old scheme could prove invalid after a particular period of time, hence the need for a whole new scheme of commitments. The process of making new judgments, extracting new commitments from previous judgments in the form of new judgments, and so forth, is not something that happens once and for all or that happens at certain instances and ceases at others. All our doings and undertakings follow the structure of applying concepts delineated here. *Our environment is hence shaped by the commitments and responsibilities we undertake. Indeed our ability to distinguish a world and oneself as part of it is founded on the practice of giving and asking for reasons, of putting forth new commitments and relinquishing others.* This claim is central for the purpose of this thesis. For it will later on elucidate how in average everydayness the environment represents a whole of significations. This model will come to replace that of Heidegger in chapter 3.

That judgments are contentful is exhausted by our having successfully implemented new concepts. Meaning comes down to nothing but these successful doings. What I mean by successful is that they have been well mastered in such a way as to generate understanding on the side of practitioners. It is clear that Brandom privileges praxis over the conceptual within both

the theoretical and practical domains. Thus Brandom asserts the primacy of pragmatics over semantics:

> In this sense, that pragmatism consists not in the explanatory privileging of practical discursive activity over theoretical discursive activity, but in the explanatory privileging of act over content, within both the theoretical and the practical domain. (RIP 40)

The claim is that had there not been such things as the task-responsibility of applying concepts, rejecting inconsistent claims and providing reasons, semantic content would not obtain.

Brandom wants to address two central questions in his account of Kant: what the subject is responsible *for*, on the one hand, and what the *judging* is responsible *to,* on the other. In the remainder of this section, I will attempt to explicate what it is that our judgments are responsible to. The claim is the following: What our judgments are responsible to comes to the same as what it is for a representing to be *about* something, to be a representing *of* something. When new judgments are incorporated into the synthetic unity of apperception on the basis of their compatibility with previously endorsed judgments, they are treated as *about* something. Inferentialism develops a top-down account of meaning: assertions take precedence over subsentential expression. The meaning of subsentential expressions is derived from that of the assertions in which they occur. This is on a par with the idea that the minimal unit of responsibility is the judgment. The latter is of such a sort as to allow for new conclusions to be drawn and other incompatible commitments to be excluded. *Objects* emerge out of this relentless process of drawing inferences. The inferentialist stance runs contra the traditional model which states that one has to present an independent account of why words are meaningful first and on that basis account for meaningfulness as such:

the relations of material incompatibility and inferential consequence among judgeable contents that we have seen are a necessary condition of synthesizing a rational unity of apperception (which is to say judging) already implicitly involve commitments concerning the identity and individuation of objects they can accordingly be understood as representing or being about. (RIP 43)

In assessing whether a particular concept is incompatible with another we are already presupposing that there is an object. Not only are we presupposing the existence of an object but also that no two incompatible properties could be ascribed to one and the same object. In thus engaging in an inferential practice we are after all representing something; our assertions are *about* something. Put bluntly, we are beings that develop the appropriate resources – in this case rules – to be able to say meaningful things *about* objects. Consider the following reasoning:

١) That A is a dog is not incompatible with the assertion that B is a fox. For I could be committed to both assertions without falling into contradiction.

٢) That A is a dog is inconsistent with the assertion that A is a fox. The subject cannot be committed to both claims at the same time in the same place, for this is to assert two incompatible claims about the *same* particular. The subject could in principle assert them both but she loses her status of being a reliable speaker.

The same goes for the consequences of these commitments:

٣) The move from A is a dog to A is a mammal is justified. However the move from A is a dog to B is a mammal is a *non-sequitur.*

It follows from the above that the ability to draw inferences entails having the capacity to discern what property belongs to what object. This is the sense of what it is for our judgments to be responsible to objects:

> Subjects and objects are alike in "repelling" material incompatibilities and encompassing material consequences. They are different in that while it is impossible for one and the same object at the same time to exhibit two incompatible properties (or stand in incompatible relations) and necessary that it have all the properties entailed by any properties it does have, it is merely inappropriate for one and the same subject at the same time to undertake incompatible commitments, and obligatory that it acknowledge all the commitments entailed by any commitments it does acknowledge. […]

> Alethic and deontic modalities, what is expressed by modal and normative vocabulary, show up as two sides of one coin, intimately bound together by the synthetic-integrative systematizing activity that is the ultimate source of the senses of both kinds of locution. (RIP 48-49)

The point to be made in the previous passages is that while the subjects are only merely *obligated* to renounce two incompatible judgments, it is *inconceivable* for one and the same object to have two incompatible properties. On the side of the subject, judgments are assessed from a normative standpoint – one that invokes the structural components of normativity, i.e. obligation, entitlement, commitment. On the side of the object, however, claims are assessed from an alethic modal standpoint i.e., what is and is not *possible* at all for objects. Therefore, the alethic bears on a question of necessity. It is a mistake to the think of these two strata as distinct or separate from one another. On the contrary, these are part of one and the same process

examined from different angles. This is the sense of what it is for our representings to be *about* something; namely the represented. Note however that meaning is nothing over and above the activity of representing and the task-responsibility discussed in this section. Be that as it may, whence do we get concepts? At this point, have we not taken for granted the availability of concepts? In the following section, the recognitive model will provide "the desired account of concept formation".

B. A Hegelian insight: The recognitive model

It is clear at this point that Brandom's account of meaning centers around the notion of normativity in the sense of being constrained by norms. However, Brandom is not outlining something like the categorical imperative but rather the ubiquity of our being bound by conceptual norms. In other words, it is not something that pertains merely to the ethical sphere but encompasses all kinds of action. If one pays attention to the ways in which our daily practices play out, one immediately notices that they are shaped by normativity. It is not that over and above our doings normativity expedites our practices. Our doings come down to nothing but our answerability to norms. These constraints are precisely of such a sort as to allow for things to get carried out. Without this normativity we would be like domesticated cats. Our doings would not extend beyond the mere chasing of a fly or a fascination with objects in one's environment. The freedom model invoked by Brandom in *Reason in Philosophy* has it that to be free is to have at one's disposal a host of concepts such that our discursive activity turns out to be spontaneous. Indeed we naturally express ourselves through words governed by rules.

To understand more deeply the kind of functionalism that is yet consistent with freedom it is useful to contrast it with causal functionalism. Indeed there are two kinds of functionalism: normative and causal. The latter form of functionalism defines the explanandum in terms of what is caused and what it causes. Brandom is not committed to this form of functionalism. Rather than being viewed as a factual description of a determinate relation between objects, rules are normative; they tell us what ought to be done. Rules do play a causal role in that they make things happen when people obey them. Yet they cannot be reified and turned into dispositional mechanisms, such as a glass' disposition to shatter when struck. The idea seems to be that no empirical description of the causal mechanisms involved in generating rule-governed behavior is relevant to characterize what is being done by an agent acting according to a rule. To characterize someone as doing something for a reason is not to give an empirical/causal description but a deontological account, one for which it is a mistake to look for physical correlates in the causal domain. Rules are thus prescriptive as opposed to descriptive. Thus normative functionalism is first and foremost an account of freedom. Freedom is assessed as the capacity to let our acts and doings be regimented by norms. It is this capacity in question that permits humans to rise beyond the mere state of sentience to that of sapience. One might rightly object that it is inapt to characterize freedom as such. For one thing, a person's act is determined by social norms and as such it cannot be free. This is a common misconception of the notion of freedom which conflates constraints by conception of laws with constraints by laws: "Merely natural creatures, as objects, are bound only by rules in the form of laws whose bindingness is not at all conditioned by their attitude of acknowledging those rules as *binding* on them." (RIP 62) Normative functionalism is not a psychological theory that takes as its principal tenet causal dispositions. Quite the contrary, the capacity to be bound by norms is not distinct from the

capacity to bind oneself by norms. A subject is bound by a norm when and only when *she* obeys it. Thus the subject is not denied her agency. On the face of it, it does seem like the opposite of freedom – only to one in thrall to a peculiarly metaphysical conception of freedom, e.g. libertarianism. Constraint or rule-following is that without which no activity can get off the ground. The refusal to engage in these practices amounts to saying or doing nothing at all. It is such normativity that yields what Brandom calls "radical semantic novelty": "So in the conceptual normativity implicit in linguistic practice we have a model of a kind of constraint – loss of negative freedom—that is repaid many times over in bonanza of positive freedom." (RIP 75) This is to say that binding oneself by norms and recognizing the authority norms have over one is not contrary to the notion of freedom. Quite the contrary, positive freedom is possible only owing to the capacity to constrain ourselves by norms. Constraints by norms open up spaces of signification thus allowing sapience to take on various kinds of tasks. The idea is that we need not in principle comply with any norms. That is to say, that which makes us abide by norms is not intrinsic in them. There is a sense in which internalizing rules is contingent for there is no causal nexus between the rule and the subject that applies it. One could very well refrain from complying with rules, at the cost of being doomed to inaction.

If rules do make things happen when and only when they are applied then we are faced with the risk of having a relativistic world. Inferentialism does not collapse into an insuperable relativism where it is impossible to know anything about objects. The requirement that the content be independent of the subject's attitude is pivotal. While Brandom's Kant asserts the attitude-dependence of normative force, the latter necessitates the attitude-independence of content. The question then arises: where do we get concepts from? Two responses seem to suggest themselves: Either, following rationalism, concepts are innate ideas or, following

empiricism, they are derived from experience. Both these claims are unsatisfactory for someone like Brandom. It is easy to see why the innateness of concepts is an untenable thesis whereas it is not self-evident for the second proposition. Brandom adopts a pragmatist-rationalist order of explanation. There are practices that one must engage in in order to count as expressing something about objects. An empiricist take on meaning grounds meaning in the evidence base collated from experience. The meaning of sentences would on this account be none other than the sentence's verification conditions. But Brandom endorses Wilfrid Sellars' critique of empiricism which goes along the following lines: observational vocabularies are not autonomous in that one cannot make use of them without having previously mastered a particular natural language with a minimal set of inferential rules. In other words, observational reports do not constitute an autonomous stratum of the language. That vocabulary is by no means autonomous, i.e. one that could be applied without having previously applied different kinds of vocabulary. The *precedential* nature of inferential practices lies at the heart of Sellars' dissatisfaction with empiricism. Thus concepts cannot spring from experience.

Brandom solves the problem of the availability of concepts by rooting them in sociality. Concepts are norms implicit in the social upbringing of the subject. To define normativity as sociality is to associate the attitude-independence of content with the normative dependence or responsibility to the attitude of *others*. The *publicness* and *availability of concepts* thus turn out to be two sides of the same coin. That concepts are ready to hand in communal linguistic practices is what makes possible the activity of bindingness. A person is trained to employ words. Their use is precedential insofar as the subject holds others's usage of it as authoritative – though not in the sense that it is pre-fixed. Rather, Brandom's inferentialism makes room for alterations in linguistic practices over the course of time.

Brandom remarks that the Hegelian recognitive model is an advance over the Kantian scheme in that it satisfies the requirement that contents be not simply determined by *my* attitude, i.e., that the content of conceptual norms be independent of merely *subjective* normative force. The determinateness of conceptual content is by no means restricted to my attitudes:

> I motivated this social model of the nature and origin of normative force or bindingness as a response to the requirement of relative independence of the *content* of conceptual norms from their normative *force* that shows up as a criterion of adequacy for Kant's way of working out the Enlightenment idea of the attitude-dependence of normative statuses in the form of his autonomy model. (RIP 78)

The recognition model rests on two essential component-claims: The subject needs to recognize the authority of previous practitioners; more particularly, it is their authority over my authority to comply with a certain norm that provides a *standard* of correctness. Second, I let future practitioners hold me responsible for what I do. The reciprocal authority of practitioners over conceptual contents balances the authority of those contents over the individual activities of practitioners. The reciprocal recognitive model defends a thoroughgoing symmetrical authority. In a way, the recognitive model is continuous with the Kantian model discussed in the previous section in that normative statuses do depend for the most part on the subject's attitudes. The additional element is that the attitudes of others play an essential role in counterbalancing individual subjective attitude. Acknowledging others' authority over contents counterbalances an absolute subjectivity. Although meaning depends for its part on subjective attitudes, Brandom maintains, it is still nevertheless objective. The reciprocal acknowledgement of authority ensures the objective character of meaning. While the Kantian model has taken the determinacy of concepts for granted, Hegel, as Brandom reads him, re-examines the question of how it is that

our concepts are determined. He takes it that the process of acknowledging commitments by rational integration is also the process by means of which the conceptual content is determined. It is not that content is already determined and all the subject has to do is apply it. Inferential integration is constitutive of meaning, or what comes to the same, the conceptual content in its determinateness. Brandom puts the point as follows: "All there is to fix those meaning *is* our *use* of them. And what we use them to do, the kind of doing that their use is, is making claims and inferences—in effect making discursive commitments and rationally integrating them." (RIP 83)

To understand the recognitive model more fully it is helpful to examine the analogy with English and American Common law where no preliminary principles lay the foundations for future decisions made by the judges. All judges can really rely on are cases treated as *precedential*; the new situation exhibits similarities with previous legal cases. In accordance with the alleged similarities, a concept is applied. The same goes for the subjective attitudes; the community member considers previous cases that count as different applications of a particular concept and uses it in similar situations, thereby adopting the same rationale for the previous usage. However, it is a mistake to think that the content has acquired its determinateness prior to its application or as the individual is applying it:

> This the sense in which prior use does *not* close off future possibilities of development by settling in advance a unique correct answer to the question of whether a unique correct answer to the question of whether a particular concept applies to new situations. (RIP 89)

On the other hand, to endorse a claim that has been put forth before and reappropriate it amounts to recognizing oneself as equally influencing future use of it. This is, among other things, to shed light on the continuity of our practices. Brandom appropriates Hegel's work and applies it to the paradigm of discursive understanding: we use ready-made expressions in our language and apply

them to new situations, thereby introducing new content or rather sharpening its determinateness in the sense of rendering it more determinate. For it is clear that this content cannot be fixed once and for all and is always subject to amendment and modification:

> We think of Hegel as adding a complementary, recognitively dual notion alongside rational integration. *Integrating* is taking *responsibility*, making a commitment by petitioning future concept users to be recognized; *recollecting* is asserting *authority*, vindicating an entitlement, by recognizing past concept users. Together the two make up the recognitive whole. (RIP 91)

Brandom takes it that the Hegelian Vernunft model is better suited than the Kantian Verstand model on the grounds that the former works out what the latter only assumes; namely, conceptual determinateness. The Verstand model acknowledges the prior determination of conceptual contents. Applying concepts is conditioned by their being determined. On the other hand, that contents get determined by the whole activity of rationally integrating new commitments and rejecting incompatible ones is definitive of the Vernunft model. All there is to meaning are the inferential practices that one engages in. The Vernunft model does give pride of place to precedential cases of concept-use; yet notice however that prior use does not settle the content once and for all. It leaves open the possibility of making new uses of the concept and giving it new determinations. We do recognize previous concept uses; we appropriate them and create new spaces for applying them. By rejecting and endorsing their applications, the conceptual content becomes determinate.

Furthermore, in the Vernunft framework, conceptual determinateness is treated as temporally perspectival. That is, in collecting the concepts that our practices have made available for us we are in a way retrospectively reconstructing our predecessor's conceptual apparatus and

prospectively encouraging successors to reappropriate it. The norm becomes more determinate if I borrow it from a previously defined context and reemploy it in the present context. Not only am I further determining this norm but I am equally treating it as further determinable. For we are the kinds of beings that manufacture norms in order to say and do all sorts of meaningful things. Brandom is not concerned with the origins of norms in the sense of whether it is possible to identify a point in time where they have first emerged. Rather, he exhibits a particular interest in the historical movement of their recreation. Such historical activity yields representational content. Recall that for Hegel this movement is only intelligible in a bigger picture; namely on the global level of Spirit or Geist. Individual attitudes do not count as representing anything. One need only think of the history of science and how the representational content of theories has evolved over the course of numerous representings. The history of science is progressive on Brandom's account and does not consist of successive paradigms separated by a gulf between each scientific era. To elucidate: the representational content does determine our normative attitudes in the sense that we were implicitly committed to certain facts about things being thus and so and only at a later point in time do such commitments get elucidated. Science makes mistakes or is falsifiable in a progressive sense. Something about the content shapes our understanding of it. Our becoming aware of the determinateness of the content is a direct result of the historical movement delineated in this section:

> That is the lesson that the normative understanding of the representation relation teaches: what is represented is what serves as a standard for assessing what thereby, in this normative sense, counts as a representing (an appearance) of it. (RIP 100)

To be sure, there are two kinds of regularities in the properties of physical objects, and regularities in the ways objects respond to one another's properties. That is, there are regularities

in nature and regularities in the way natural objects respond to each other. Brandom calls these latter kinds of regularities "reliable differential responsive dispositions" (RDRDs). A norm is a rule and a rule can only exist if there is an RDRD allowing organisms to reliably respond to the properties of natural objects. But the norm is required in order for us to recognize any object or property as the object or property that we know it to be. Norms are concepts that allow us to categorize and determine what things are and what properties they can be truly said to possess. Brandom follows Kant here, although he moves beyond him towards Hegel by saying that the idea of unknowable or uncategorizable objects is a fiction. Moments in the whole rational movement are representings that get us closer to determining the representational content; all the same, the latter is always open to further determinations. Thus everything is knowable, as reason's march through history unfolds and phenomena acquire more and more determinations.

C. On the institution of norms

This section is continuous with the previous one in that it does not tackle new questions. Its foremost concern is to drive home the point of what Brandom, following Hegel, understands by this historical movement through which norms are instituted. A central tenet in Hegel's account of Spirit in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* is the three-stage process that has the peculiarity of being progressive. Hegel provides an elegant historical reading of the alleged transformative movement. In order to appreciate his insight, the reader must steer clear of thinking that he has resorted to a reductive account of historical events. The axis around which his thought revolves is that phenomenology is capable of explaining our human practices. In light of this, there has been a shift in the history of our practices from a traditional conception of the subject to a modern one. This has opened the door to the consideration that Modernity is an advance over the traditional form of life. The rationale for this is that Modernity brought out something that remained hidden in the traditional scheme. That is, pre-Modernity turns out to be deficient with respect to Modernity in that it does not have the right resources to tell the story about sapient practices in a thoroughgoing way. But the advent of Modernity itself comes up short with respect to the third stage and needs to be supplanted with an account that is itself an advance over the previous models:

> While Hegel does think that the transition from traditional to modern culture was expressively progressive–that it essentially involves the becoming explicit of central features of ourselves and our practices and institutions that had previously remained implicit—he does not think that that progress was either complete or unalloyed. (*A Spirit of Trust: A Semantic Reading of Hegel's Phenomenology*, Ch. 11, 4)

To be sure, it is not that the previous model needs to be supplanted with a new model that operates on completely different grounds, or that takes up new questions which eradicate the model that came before it. Rather, the new model retains the crucial elements that the failed model contained. The phenomenological characterizations that Hegel supplies gradually bring into relief implicit aspects of discursive practices. I will now turn to examining the 3 historical moments through which our understanding of norms has progressed.

The first model which stands for Sittlichkeit contains the most rudimentary understanding of norms. Sittlichkeit signifies normative community in general i.e. a community whose cement is none other than its norms. Sittlichkeit's essential feature is that of being the antithesis of a free community, which is to say that normative statuses have complete authority over sapient normative attitudes. Norms are separate from our attitudes towards them, they do not depend on those attitudes for their existence. Norms are viewed as part of the order of nature, so to speak. The members of the Sittlich community are obliged to comply with the norms that have been assigned to them in order to count as good members of the community. In Sittlichkeit, the subject is at home with the norms of her community in that she takes these norms at face value, as though they stand for *objective* truths whose violation is *unforgivable*. This necessitates a stronger notion of compliance: the subject in fact *identifies* with the norms. Indeed, it is insufficient to say that subjects who belong to the Sittlich community *merely* obey norms, for what these norms represent is decisive for them. Hence they identify with norms. What does this identification consist in? Why are we justified in saying that the Sittlich subject identifies with the norm? Members of the Sittlich community treat these norms as their *raison d'être.* They can go so far as to sacrifice their lives for the norm they take themselves to be responsible for. Such normativity could be regarded as an instance of Platonism; not in the sense that these norms are

entities for which objects stand, but rather in that these norms are viewed as making up objective reality. Norms, on this construal, are wholly authoritative over human attitudes: "The fittingnesses of things—how things ought to be and what one ought to do—are thought of as objective, natural facts." (ASOT, Chapter 11, p.13) It follows that individual attitudes or performances do not get a say in what counts as correct or incorrect. There is a prior order of explanation where the distinction between correctness and incorrectness has been pre-established, which underwrites all future applications of it. We can put the point by saying that these practices confuse the boundary between the normative and the natural. According to this way of setting things out, norms are a mere depiction of how things are in themselves independently of our grip on them. To invoke human attitudes or performances as those which mediate the process of normativity is not a permissible option. Normativity, on this rendering, is at the rudimentary stage of a one-sided relationship of authority: "The mediation that is denied by this practical conception of norms as *im*mediate is mediation by the *attitudes* of those who are bound by them." (*ASOT,* Chapter 11, p.14)

Hegel appeals to an allegorical treatment of the notion of Sittlichkeit found in Sophocles' *Antigone.* The tension arises in the play when the demands of the polis and those of the family conflict. Because it is the women's duties to bury the deceased in the family, Antigone identifies herself with the family norm: that of elevating her brother Polyneices from the state of a dead animal to being a member of the family which no doubt has the implication of recognizing him as a member of the community. In that respect, it is fair to say that she embodies the burial norm. Her uncle Creon, on the other hand, issues a royal edict banning Polyneices' burial, since he takes him to have betrayed the polis. Thus he identifies himself with the norm of the polis: his attitudes and actions exemplify this norm. It is the immediate character of the Sittlich community

that prevents the conflict from being resolved. None of the Sittlich characters is conscious of the tension that arises between these two immediate norms; only from the standpoint of the spectator is such a tension visible. Awareness of the tension requires that one be completely detached from the Sittlich community. Both Creon and Antigone see the other person as completely mad, or outside the truth, so to speak. It is precisely because such norms are not treated as an instance of role-playing where the subject has full agency but as facts that they are incommunicable across paradigms in one and the same community: "These defining normative roles are accordingly not practically conceived as roles individuals can play, but simply as facts about them" (ASOT, Chapter 11, p.22) A member of the community cannot identify herself with more than one norm, or I should say, a set of norms (i.e. the norm and its implications). To elucidate: it is because Antigone is a woman and a member of this community that she *must* identify with the burial norm. Had she been a man she would have seen things differently.

I will advert to the end-product of the Hegelian project somewhat prematurely (i.e. the third stage) so that the overall view becomes more visible. Hegel has in view a recognitive communal structure whereby two poles of authority are in play: the recognitive community and the normative attitudes of this community that shape it. No longer do members of this community sacrifice themselves and their whole existence for the prescribed norm. Members of this community both exercise authority and recognize their fellow members' authority by taking responsibility for their claims and by attributing responsibility to others. This is what his account is getting at.

The modern insight is that normative attitudes insofar as they are carried out by the practitioners are not inconsequential and as such are what establish norms: "The decisive move to modernity will be acknowledging the significance of normative *attitudes* and *practices* in

instituting norms and normative statuses." (ASOT, Ch.11, p.23) That is to say, norms are first and foremost attitude-dependent. It is worth emphasizing at this point that Hegel is not just replacing one model with another that he takes to be more adequate. Rather, the new model unravels something that was all along implicit in the previous model. That normative attitudes need to be given pride of place was implicit in the traditional model. In other words, pre-modernity was myopic to the role played by normative attitudes precisely because it does not have the means to acknowledge those normative attitudes. Rather than finding those norms and latching on to them, individuals are said to produce institutional norms. While the traditional subject who, unbeknownst to her, has full agency, confines herself to just one task—that of exemplifying the norm assigned to her '*naturally*' by the community—the modern subject is aware of her full agency, which comes down to the constant activity of instituting norms.

Another key contrast between the two aforementioned stages is that the pre-modern subject is held responsible for all her actions across the board, meaning the ones she is aware of and the implications of such responsibilities which she happens to be oblivious to: "Individuals take responsibility for their deeds under every description: the unforeseen consequential ones as well as the acknowledged intentional ones." (*ASOT,* Ch. 11, p.32) For instance, while Oedipus did not envisage murdering his father, this in no way alleviates his guilt. What makes him a parricide is that his responsibility vis-à-vis the norm outstrips his actual intention with regard to committing the crime: "That *duty* is independent of one's knowledge of how to bring about that state of affairs."(ASOT, Ch. 11, p.32) It is no wonder that Hegel's allegorical treatment invokes tragedies of all kinds. For he wants to show that the pre-modern subject is guilty come what may. One's limited knowledge of the possible states of affairs has no bearing on assuming one's duty. By way of contrast, the notion of justice that emerges in the Modern picture is one whereby the

subject is held responsible only for the actions she has intended. Modernity acknowledges the primacy of performative attitudes over norms, which is to say that norms are not pre-established independently of our doings. This is where Brandom introduces the notion of normative force. The latter is an evaluation of what one does in applying a concept. He further adds that such doings are equated with the sorts of commitment one undertakes. The subject identifies not with norms but with her performative attitudes. Alienation ensues when the subject refuses to acknowledge the authority of the norms over her attitudes. That we have full agency in action comes as a revelation in the modern scheme. Thus subjects lose their sense of obedience and bindingness. The subject is alienated because the previous values no longer represent to the subject that which is absolute and ineradicable. The intuition seems to be that if I am instituting norms then the world suddenly loses the signification it previously had. For meaning is wholly dependent on my subjective performances.

Now that the exposition of the two stages is complete, it is possible to reconcile the pre-Modern with the Modern stages in the *Phenomenology,* at least on Brandom's reading of it. Hegel wants to re-achieve Sittlichkeit while retaining the modern insight that it is our subjective attitudes that institute norms. The issue in its most basic form is that subjective attitudes cannot produce objective contents, while on the side of the pre-Modern schema, norms spring from a pre-existing order of nature that is independent of our attitudes. That which is independent underpins what is dependent on it– hence the one-sided relationship found in the first two stages. Either one has to renounce the one-sided objectivist stage in favor of the one-sided subjectivist one or vice-versa. But this is precisely the move that Brandom, following Hegel, warns us against.

What Brandom is driving at is that the one need not exclude the other. It is not the case that if norms are dependent on attitudes, attitudes cannot be dependent on norms. Both stages have one thing in common: the one-sided relationship at play, be it from norms to attitudes or vice-versa. The Vernunft model Brandom proposes as an alternative for the two previous ones is *holistic*. What is characteristic of it is that both dependence and independence are reciprocal. Practitioners do generate norms or rather generate them anew by the mere performance of applying them. But whence do norms stem? Human practices are first and foremost social. It is by virtue of recognizing both oneself and others as authoritative, as having a say in what these practices look like, that conceptual contents are brought to light. It is up to the practitioner to follow a certain norm but it is not up to her what the norm implies, what other contents are packed into it. This pushes the mystery further, for it is not sufficient to say that norms take shape in the social realm. Something more is needed to sustain this holistic account of meaning. The missing ingredient is the condition that the community itself be socially situated. Practitioners do not produce norms ex-nihilo, but appeal to precedential cases and adjudicate between whether or not the compliance with this particular norm is appropriate in this particular circumstance. The novelty springs from the fact that circumstances always create themselves anew. It is such particular choices of compliances at particular instances that determine the conceptual contents of normative commitments. Sapient doings have the ability to take practices to a new level of contentfulness. Underlying those commitments is the recognition of authority between members. This renders the conceptual contents objective, for my subjective attitude is counterbalanced by that of others.

D. Concluding remarks

Brandom provides a rationalist picture of humans which itself is a break with metaphysical rationalism. Metaphysical rationalism claims that nature is intelligible because reasons are in things as well as in us. Brandom's Critical (post-Kantian) rationalism claims that nature can be intelligible even if reason is only in us. According to the new form of rationality Brandom propounds, our social constitution is such that it gives pride of place to positive freedom. This is somehow our mode of being in the world as socially and biologically evolved beings. What demarcates us from animals is that we institute norms and follow them in order to be in the world and carry out all sorts of human activity. There are no mysterious or supernatural facts about us; this is simply our way of being human.

Sapience is in the world and it is by virtue of partaking in linguistic practices that we fulfill our sapient nature. We enjoy a capacity to commit ourselves to certain claims or judgments as to how things are and how they ought to be. What we do when we behave sets us apart from sentient beings. In order for us to engage in all sorts of activities we abide by norms generated through our practices. As a consequence, our world becomes a space of meaning. To say that we are discursive beings is to say that the normativity which regulates our activity is inferentially based. That is, a practice of giving and asking for reasons comes to the fore as a result of our constant deployment of assertions. Even the most banal conversations invoke inferences. For instance, when I say I am going to a coffee house I commit myself to going to the coffee house as opposed to the grocery store. By the same token, to say that there is a man outside my door commits me to the claim that it is not a woman that is standing outside my door. I cannot change my mind and say that it is a cat, unless a change in the state of affairs occurs and obliges me to amend the claim I made. If these consistencies are not taken into account meaning would not

come about. If I keep violating norms as I am going about a certain task or do not preserve the inferential nexus between the claims I am making then I will not be taken as a rationally responsible member of this community, or a competent speaker of the language. That we understand each other is a matter of what we have committed ourselves to by saying and doing. Each time we give a reason or we make a claim, our commitments change. Brandom does not deny that we alternate between opinions and project plans. Again, the key claim is that we do so *rationally*. Hence our daily existence as humans is caught up fundamentally in the practice – so the slogan goes – of giving and asking for reasons.

In the next chapter, the practice of making inferences will be confronted with Dasein's average everydayness or more particularly Dasein's dynamical environment. Both exhibit points of resemblances, but there exists a fundamental difference in what grounds the practice or the environment as such. The outcome of both views is somewhat the same: both of them give the same description of what goes in our environment, the disagreement lies in what founds such description. Heidegger makes the claim that Dasein has a pre-ontological understanding of the world and as such it is familiar with its circumspective environment. For Brandom, the reason the practice of making inferences is thus and not otherwise is, as we have seen above, not a matter of ontology but of deontology, i.e., it needs rule-formation and subsequent application to get going. I will argue in favor of Brandom's account of discursive commitment, i.e., average everydayness will turn out to be normative.

Chapter IV

Is our pre-understanding founded on implicit concept-use?

In this chapter, I want to argue that inferentialism as construed by Brandom is more fundamental than Heidegger's analytic of Being-in-the-world. To be more precise, Brandom's account develops the appropriate resources to explain what Heidegger characterizes as "primordial" and "originary" in such a way as to make its emergence unfathomable. Brandom, by way of contrast, does provide leeway for reconciling inferential competence with biological inheritance. In other words, Heidegger's fundamental ontology renders Dasein discontinuous with everything else in nature, while Brandom's inferentialism arguably does not require an equivalent break between sapience and sentience. I want to claim that the game of giving and asking for reasons is the *condition* for Being-in-the-world, whereas Heidegger seems to imply the contrary. What emerges over the course of the analytic of the ready-to-hand is that at the heart of any understanding is the pre-understanding of Being, which is another way of saying Dasein's everyday coping activity. This pre-understanding assumes an implicit use of concepts, or so I would like to argue. Heidegger refuses to concede this point on the grounds that it is reminiscent of intellectualism – a thesis that he wants to undermine. The rationale for this seems to be that if one drops the notion of concept then one is definitely on a sure path against intellectualism. However, Brandom has shown that there is a way to appeal to the notion of concept that reverses the traditional order. This is so by giving primacy to pragmatics over semantics. If Heidegger maintains that our environment in its pre-givenness is orderly and structured then he must provide an account of how that is. He must provide an account of how it

is that Dasein understands all its commitments. Brandom can propose an explanation on behalf of Heidegger: it is because our doings are first and foremost discursive that the quotidian coping activity emerges. I will first explore certain resemblances between the two frameworks and then in a second step examine whether Heidegger's pre-ontological understanding is discursive in nature. For both philosophers the outcome of the analysis is the same: Dasein's environment is very similar to the language-game Brandom portrays – the major difference is that for Heidegger the *pre-understanding* of Being is responsible for the way Dasein's environment is, while according to Brandom, *discursive* understanding results in our environment being thus and not otherwise. Put differently, it is in virtue of our capacity to speak a language that our environment becomes meaningful. I will then go on to show that Brandom's account is more fundamental in that it answers certain questions that Heidegger leaves unexamined; particularly as regards Dasein's ability to discern between pieces of equipment and using them *as something*.

A. A common insight

This thesis is not a piecing together of two conflicting frameworks. What justifies the kind of rapprochement I am undertaking are precisely certain common features between the Brandomian category of sapience and that of Dasein's Being-in-the-world.

1- Both accounts are critical of representationalism. For Heidegger, in as much as Dasein is not an isolated subject that by means of a certain exercise of the mind reaches out to its world, Dasein does not contemplate objects in its environment as its primary mode of being. Objects – if the very idea of an object is to make sense – are first and foremost to be dealt with and not be apprehended: "the kind of dealing which is closest to us is as we have shown, not a bare

perceptual cognition, but rather that kind of concern which manipulates things and puts them to use; and this has its own kind of knowledge." (BT 95) Objects are not separated from us such that we need to get a grip on them by means of cognitive perception. In our primary mode of being, we do not merely perceive objects; we make use of them. Because we are constantly concerned with our environment, objects are manipulated and not represented. In other words, objects are only accessible because they are close to us when we dwell in the environment. The way in which we dwell in our environment does not require drawing a barrier between ourselves as subjects and the objects we perceive, such that as a second step we can only encounter objects through our cognitive apparatus:

> This is the way in which Dasein always *is*: when I open the door, for instance, I use the latch. The achieving of phenomenological access to entities which we encounter, consists rather in thrusting aside our interpretative tendencies, which keep thrusting themselves upon us and running along with us, and which conceal not only the phenomenon of such 'concern', but even more those entities themselves as encountered of their own accord *in* our concern with them (BT 96)

Dasein does not reflect about its doings and dealings prior to going about a certain task. Tasks are somehow executed without 'further ado'. We need not closely calculate our steps for a certain doing to get off the ground. It follows that elaborating a system of knowledge is a kind of interpretation which is made possible only owing to our 'natural' ability to deal with things. Navigating a world of equipment swings free from any theorizing. That is, to make use of an object and treat it as equipment for a particular end is not by any means shaped by the theoretical knowledge one has of the object. A kind of knowing-how is prior in the order of explanation. Knowledge of *what* the thing is is a mere abstraction from *how* the thing is being used.

Brandom is equally a critic of representationalism. He takes it that if the notion of meaning is to make sense, we must jettison any reification of meaning as an entity, regardless of its nature. Meaning is not a thing. In other words, inferentialism excludes an explanation of meaning using extra-linguistic terms. Brandom does not want to adopt the traditional scheme whereby propositional meanings are supposed to mirror states of affairs in the world. This entails rejecting the notion that the meaning of subsentential expressions reduces to the contribution they make to the sentences in which they occur. Singular terms do not contribute to the truth-value of whole sentences by virtue of the particular objects they designate: this is not how meaning emerges. Since on the traditional model meaning is equated with reference, it follows that to know the meaning of a sentence is to know its truth-value. Inferentialism, by way of contrast, does not abide by this traditional scheme whereby the structure of thought mirrors the structure of reality and as a result sentences express propositions, propositions correspond to states of affairs. The latter either obtain as facts, making the proposition true, or fail to obtain, rendering it false. Inferentialism affords an explanation of meaning in terms of rules. The meaning of an assertion is constituted by all the assertions that it implies as well as all the assertions that imply it. For this to be the case, meaning must be a matter of discursive *doing*. Only with reference to use is meaning defined. There is indeed a primacy of representings over representations. By representing here I mean "perceiving", "thinking", "acting" as active, adverbial modes. An inference is not a theoretical relation between words and things, it is a *practical activity.*

2- Because everything about our environment is an activity stimulator, every element of our environment will be taken as part of a network. Our environment is indeed nothing other than a network of concern whereby all things are interrelated as objects of concern:

Taken strictly, there 'is' no such thing as *an* equipment. To the Being of any equipment there always belongs a totality of equipment, in which it can be this equipment that it is. Equipment is essentially 'something in-order-to. A totality of equipment is constituted by various ways of 'in-order-to', such as serviceability, conduciveness, usability, manipulability. (*Being and Time,* page 97)

The objects we encounter within our environment are called equipment. Hence equipment is not to be taken in the narrow sense. On the contrary, it is anything Dasein manipulates and makes use of. It is not restricted to the pieces of equipment found in a tool box. Any entity at Dasein's disposal is equipment and as equipment comes in handy in its environment. The claim in the preceding passage is that there cannot be a free-floating piece of equipment because each item of equipment is part of an "equipmental totality" that presents a chain whereby every item is defined with reference to a "towards-which" implicating every other item. Every item has a definite purpose that refers to another item. For example, a hammer is for hammering and the act of hammering itself presupposes something that is hammered; namely a piece of wood. What is hammering for? It provides a shelter for Dasein and protects it from the bad weather. All items in the structure of equipment are co-constitutive. Heidegger goes on to make more of the web-like structure of equipment by introducing a new terminology: entities within-the-world are said to be "involved". As such there cannot be an isolated entity from the context in which it is embedded:

But the totality of involvements itself goes back ultimately to a "towards-which" in which there is no further involvement: this "towards-which" is not an entity with the kind of Being that belongs to what is ready-to-hand within a world; it is rather an entity whose Being is defined as Being-in-the-world, and to whose state of Being, worldhood itself belongs. (116)

What Heidegger is driving at in the previous passage is that there is no infinite regress in such a structure where every item refers back to another item. As Heidegger puts the point, the ultimate "towards-which" is nothing other than Dasein itself. For this to be the case, Dasein must have "always already" uncovered the Being of those entities, i.e. understood them as part and parcel of its environment. But such understanding happens 'naturally' in the sense that it is already pre-given at a transcendental level and does not require the addition of some additional component at the empirical level in order to take place. Dasein is "always already" familiar with its environment *as a whole*, which is made up of the aforementioned web of ready-to-hand objects.

Although the primary unit of meaning, on Brandom's view, is assertion as opposed to words or subsentential expressions, meaning in general cannot be reduced to one meaningful expression. This is so precisely because the expression depends for its meaning on other expressions. As I have stated earlier, all there is to meaning is the correct application of a rule. In order for a rule to be applied correctly, a social context must already be in play; one that furnishes a criterion for distinguishing a correct application from an incorrect one. This social context involves other assertions. Thus every assertion is meaningful with regard to other assertions. To understand what an expression means is to be able to use it as a premise from which other assertions follow, and so also to know what that assertion follows from in turn. Thus inferentialism is a holistic theory of meaning that views sapient beings as operating within a certain conceptual web acquired in virtue of being a member of a particular community.

B. Understanding the difference between Heidegger's analytic and what I take to be Brandom's contribution to it

Heidegger's analysis of the ready-to-hand renders explicit the implicit understanding of things around us. The analysis is ontological: it deploys ontological categories such as "ready-to-hand", "equipment", "presence-at-hand", "world", which are already conceptual. This is not to say that they are conceptual at the level of our pre-understanding. Heidegger is taking our implicit, proto-conceptual pre-understanding and rendering it explicit at the level of his own conceptual interpretation of our Being-in-the-world. More to the point, pre-understanding cannot simply be described because it cannot be propositionally re-constructed (this is exactly why it is a pre-understanding and not an understanding); thus the meaning implicit in it requires interpretation, which is the remit of Heidegger's own hermeneutic phenomenology. Essential to understanding Heidegger's analytic is the distinction between being able to use a hammer without having the word and the ontological explicitation of that use. On the one hand, Dasein uses unreflectively a certain tool in its environment. On the other hand, it is possible to explain this eventful happening ontologically by appealing to ontological categories that are to shed light on what goes in a daily register – for it is clear that we rarely pay attention to the carrying out of a certain task when we go about it. This is also to say that Dasein already knows what an environment looks like and how it provides Dasein with raw materials that are ready to be put to use; it is already familiar with things around it precisely because they are at its disposal, available for use. Heidegger couches this familiarity as quotidian absorption in Dasein's environment. In the basic state of Being-in-the-world, all happenings seem to be there without 'further ado'. Everything seems to flow smoothly until something conspicuous occurs. For instance, a certain piece of equipment goes missing, malfunctions, and so on. When everything

flows smoothly in Dasein's environment, it seems that Dasein bears a non-conceptual relation to its world. But it is possible to discern instances where Dasein attends to a certain doing by invoking concepts. For these present themselves as necessary only in particular circumstances; namely when objects cease to be accessible, when they are unready-to-hand. Average everydayness does not hinge on concepts despite the fact that there are cases where Dasein appeals to concepts. Resorting to concepts is secondary and signals that something has gone wrong in the environment, e.g. that Dasein is faced with a malfunctioning tool.

By contrast, Brandom ascertains the implicit character of concepts in all our endeavors. It is important to emphasize that concepts are rules on Brandom's understanding. That being said, why is there a need to conceive of an unmediated state that grounds the conceptual? Would Heidegger be willing to accept the claim that practical comportment is discursively articulated? Practical comportment that presupposes discursive understanding would still be "intellectualism", or so Heidegger would urge. He insists that Dasein's coping activity is prior to anything conceptual. Our daily preoccupations and capacities do not ensue from our being conceptually equipped. They depend upon a rapport to our environment prior to any mediated one. The idea of a rapport makes sense only because Dasein relates to its Being. Dasein's practically absorbed coping is not the be all and end all of Heidegger's analysis. Being *qua* manifestness is what determines Dasein's absorbed coping with its environment. It is Being as disclosure that is the core matter of Heidegger's thinking and not Dasein's Being.

I believe Heidegger's critique of intellectualism targets not so much the use of concepts as the representationalism that goes hand in hand with intellectualism. In other words, what Heidegger wants to challenge is the Cartesian account of the mind as a private inner sanctum and the ensuing notion that there is a gulf between mind and world such that the only way to grasp

objects is by means of representation. What is at issue for Heidegger is precisely the claim that only a theoretical apparatus grants a proper apprehension of objects. The subject needs to engage in a strenuous mental activity for the object to be genuinely known. In order to reject this Cartesian view, one need not adopt the opposite extreme. Not all conceptualization is representation. In other words, one need not dismiss the claim that understanding presupposes the deployment of a conceptual web as necessarily Cartesian. This is where Brandom's move is arguably more persuasive. While Heidegger grounds the conceptual in non-conceptual coping activity, Brandom maintains that the conceptual framework is that which provides Dasein with the requisite familiarity with its environment. Again, concepts are rules that are being applied and not representations. For both Heidegger and Brandom, doing is prior to theory in the order of explanation. Only for Brandom these doings consist in applying rules. Heidegger jettisons the thesis that Dasein's relation to its world is first and foremost conceptual. In other words, his analysis denies that Dasein's average everyday coping activity is mediated by conceptual representations. Concepts belong in the mode of the present-at-hand and are mere abstractions from that which is ready-to-hand.

C. Brandom's inferentialism provides the basis for Dasein's coping activity

In this section, I am going to develop an argument to show that Brandom's account is preferable to Heidegger's. Many reasons for accepting Brandom's account present themselves at this point:

١- **Rules are prescriptive and not descriptive**: A common misconception might lure us into thinking that Brandom's inferentialism is another species of intellectualism: rules are

causally efficacious in that they determine in advance how they ought to play out. These rules, presumably, will be identified with certain laws that govern patterns of physical behavior. The consequences of accepting such a claim would be the following: All our practices would be already pre-determined. Indeed, all our doings and dealings would be dictated by objectively existing causal forces that could not go wrong. There is no room for error when it comes to laws of nature. To assume that rules are causal is to be committed to either one of the following claims: that sapient beings are invulnerable to error, or, even more worryingly, that error comes from nature. As I have already shown in Chapter 2, Brandom is precisely warning us against this move. (see Chapter 2, section III) While causal functionalism accounts for the difference between proper and improper functioning in terms of distinct causal mechanisms (one for successful function, another for dysfunction), normative functionalism requires that the capacity to correctly deploy a rule be indissociable from the capacity to deploy it incorrectly: the ground of proper function is also the ground of improper function, or error.

Brandom is careful not to lapse into representationalism. Rather than being viewed as a factual description of a determinate relation between objects (organisms and their environment), rules are normative; they tell us what ought to be done; they do not state what is done, in the manner of causal regularities. Rules play no causal dispositional role where they always turn out factual, i.e., never fail to be actualized. Contrariwise, functioning on Brandom's understanding can be correct or incorrect. Rules are thus *prescriptive* as opposed to descriptive. Inherent in any rule is a standard by means of which we discern a correct application from an incorrect one. As I have emphasized in

chapter 2, the inferences Brandom has in mind are not formal (i.e. inductive or deductive) but material: they are semantically contentful.

٢- **Concepts are implicit in our doings and need not be expressed**: For Brandom, the concept **hammer**[٧] must be part of the web of premises and implications that makes up our understanding of how to use a hammer. The concept **hammer** in turn involves a whole battery of concepts (e.g. **nail**; **wall**; **house**; **hang**; etc). Understanding is discursive in nature. In fact, there are three features of inferential understanding that are woven together:

a) Language-entry transition (Perception): Seeing that something is thus and so and responding correctly to it. In other words, having a disposition to discriminate between things being thus and so and not being thus and so by responding in a certain way to one's environment.

b) intra-language transition (reasoning): engaging in the practice of giving and asking for reason

c) Action: Language exit transition i.e. acting intentionally. Underlying such feature is the thought that all comportment presupposes a mastery of inferential proprieties.[٨]

Thus, concepts need not be expressed for understanding to be discursive. That understanding is possible because of our capacity to use a language. This capacity mediates perception and action as well as reasoning. When it comes down to it, there is no distinction in reality between non-linguistic moves in a language-game, i.e. perceiving and acting, and linguistic ones, i.e. reasoning. In other words, a move in a language-game

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[٧] Mentions of concept are marked in boldface to distinguish them from the words used to express them.

[٨] Brandom inherits this tripartite distinction from Wilfred Sellars.

need not be verbally expressed. Acting involves a discursive commitment that need not be uttered or expressed. That is, linguistic moves need not be "linguistically" expressed because for inferentialism language is a transcendental condition of perceiving-acting-thinking; not an empirical phenomenon requiring vocalization or inscription. For instance, one could make the observation that a hammer is too big for the screw, infer that we need a smaller one, and see to it that the new hammer fits the appropriate size. All this could be carried out without a single word being uttered. The person is recognized as a sapient being or reasoner and is going to give her community reasons for every move if challenged. More precisely, it is not that whenever one advances a claim in a certain practice one feels the obligation to justify it. The subject is at liberty to refrain from giving reasons even though she is justified in her belief. The idea is that sapient beings are those beings that *in principle* are able to give reasons for their actions. This brings us to the claim that, in a way, there is no rule for the rule: understanding the rule involves a kind of practical "know-how" rather than a theoretical "know-that". The knowledge required for conceptual competence is implicit and practical rather than explicit and theoretical. It is part of the very identity of the rule to involve its application. The rule is applied unreflectively precisely because action is the sort of thing that is carried out 'naturally'. Just as I do not ponder the nature of my action every time I go about a task, the same goes for applying a rule in a 'language-game'. We simply apply the rule; we can describe our doings and give detailed reports about our reasons for doing this or that. Detailed accounts of our doings do not intervene in our doings, all the same; they take shape after our having successfully applied the rule. Or better, we do not and cannot report how we go about applying the rule.

٣- **Inferences are responsible for the holistic structure of Dasein's environment**: It is fair to say that Heidegger assumes, unbeknownst to him, that the familiarity with one's environment does after all involve concept-use. To manipulate a ready-to-hand object is to use it *as* something, to discern it *as* something for a certain purpose as opposed to another. The question arises: how can a pre-understanding of Being grant such orderly structure and a determinate content if it does not involve an account of normative functioning on the part of Dasein? What stands out in Dasein's environment is the interrelatedness of things. When Dasein manipulates things it does so for a specific purpose and is able to distinguish between them. Heidegger describes Dasein's environment as having a holistic structure. The question arises: whence do we get the holistic structure? Brandom's suggestion is that one learns how to use many statements by learning the necessary conditions for using a statement and the implications of it. Brandom picks up this notion of introduction and elimination rules from Dummett. (See *Articulating Reasons*) The first rule stands for the necessary circumstances under which the use of an expression is licensed. The second rule stands for knowing what the use of such statement commits the reasoner to, i.e., the consequences of applying this statement under the relevant circumstances. These steps could be translated into action talk since perception, action and reasoning are all inferentially articulated. Disregarding one of the two rules is failing to understand the meaning of the statement or the meaning of one's action. Meaning or the content of these statements is determined by applying the expression under the right circumstances and weighing the consequences of its application. That we are able to speak a language meaningfully in this manner, by following both the introduction and elimination rules allows us to get a handle on our

worldly engagements. When we carry out a certain task we are making material inferences whose content need not be rendered explicit. Logic is a tool for semantic self-consciousness; it allows us to become more aware of the things we do. Thus inferences account for the interrelatedness and determinateness of things in our environment.

٤- **Heidegger disregards a crucial empirical fact about sapient beings**:

"But what does it mean to say that that for which entities within-the-world are proximally freed must have been previously disclosed? To Dasein's Being, an understanding of Being belongs. Any understanding has its Being in an act of understanding." (BT 118)

What does this act of understanding consist in? Does it come about ex-nihilo such that there is a gulf between an infant and Dasein coming to its maturity? Phenomenology falls short of giving an accurate characterization of the alleged pre-understanding of Being that is characteristic of Dasein. The worry is that while our doings seem to be conditioned on the pre-understanding of Being, Heidegger leaves it at that. At no time does he give an account of how it is that we are so unquestioningly familiar with our environment; how it is that things are thus and not otherwise. Lacking an elucidation of what that understanding might be, there is room for certain unacceptable claims: for instance, that understanding does not evolve with time. Pre-understanding seems to be a primordial datum that resists further explication. To the question "Why is it that we have skillful mastery of things?" Heidegger would respond it is because we have pre-understanding of Being. It goes without saying however that such datum is far from giving a full explanation of what happens when we engage in an activity. To say that what we do is grounded in inferential competence completes the story Heidegger is telling in his analytic of Being-in-the-world. Another odd claim that directly follows from tracing

skillful mastery in pre-understanding: an infant lacks Dasein's kind of understanding until the latter suddenly emerges all at once, instituting an unbridgeable gulf between infancy and Being-in-the-world; a gulf which will persist unless it is suddenly annulled as a result of neurological dysfunction or some other organic debility. Because Brandom's inferentialism construes sapient beings as subjected to a *training* that instills sapience into sentient creatures, the problem doesn't resurface. What is it to understand if not to be able to speak meaningfully or comport oneself understandingly? The point is that Brandom also insists on a discontinuity between sentience and sapience while allowing for an account of the emergence of the latter from the former. By way of contrast, Heidegger leaves no room for any account of Dasein's emergence from animality: his insistence that Dasein's existence entails transcendence retains worrying theological residues.

٥- **A demarcating criterion between sentience and sapience is wanting in Heidegger's analytic**: We are concerned with our worldly environment and in order for that concern to make sense it requires a normative basis. Heidegger invokes our pre-understanding of Being in order to explicate what goes on in our quotidian existence. But if such immersion in our environment is to be sustainable and peculiar to Daseins as opposed to other living entities then we need a criterion demarcating sapience from sentience. When it comes down to it, animals are also completely immersed in their environment. There is indeed a sense in which animals are concerned with objects in their environment. Heidegger does draw a distinction between our immersion in the environment and that of animals in *The fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*. Animals are said to be immersed in themselves and as such are captivated in their environment. They do relate to other beings but remain absorbed in themselves through and through. What this means is that

animals behave in certain ways as matter of their biological constitution whereas Dasein is always outside of itself completely drawn toward worldly things. Is this to say that animals lack a world? Because animals have the capacity to relate to other beings; for instance when a lion catches a prey, the bird builds a nest and so on it would be inaccurate to say that they are without a world in the manner in which a stone is completely bereft of world. Rather, animals are "poor in world". But to say that is not as yet to give an informative reason for why it is that we have a special rapport to the world whereas animals are "poor in world". The distinction cannot be ontological something more is needed to set animals against human beings. The demarcating criterion between sentience and sapience on Heidegger's account must explicate what pre-ontological understanding is. The latter cannot play the role of an "unexplained explainer", for it tells us nothing about how Dasein is different from other entities. It is possible to train say, a chimpanzee to use a hammer. Because it does not seem to understand *what* a hammer is, i.e., to grasp the concept of what it is to be a hammer, the chimpanzee would be said to be mimicking the use of a hammer, as opposed to truly "using it". I can train intelligent animals to carry out all sorts of sapient activities but only up to a point. It remains the case that these trained sentient beings would only be mimicking the task, for they do not know what they are doing. In other words, an animal could develop a sufficiently complex system of RDRDs that allowed it to mimic the kind of understanding characteristic of sapience, but because these RDRDs would all be causally regulated and triggered, the animal would still lack the ability to act according to a rule, i.e., to master a concept. Brandom's inferentialism is not an empirical description of how concept mastery comes about; it is a normative account of what concept mastery *is.* His account

of sapience/ sentience distinction is normative, not empirical: it is not stating an empirical fact; it is giving a normative evaluation. This is why sapience is not a natural kind for Brandom: it is not something extra existing in the world. He refuses to *ontologize* the difference as Heidegger does, or say Dasein is the difference. The difference is that while animals have the ability to draw distinctions in appropriate circumstances, they lack the capacity to infer the consequences of such distinctions.

D. A short response to Dreyfus

Dreyfus is an advocate of both Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger's "non-conceptual world of absorbed coping". He takes it that both Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty share the same insight about there being an unmediated relation between the subject and her world; the subject is said to be merged with her world. That is, absorption in one's environment is a primordial non-conceptual mode of coping that founds concepts. He takes issue with John McDowell's account of perception, which he claims involves "The Myth of the mental". The latter states that it is only by way of a conceptual apparatus that the subject comes to relate to her world; the world as we know it is pervaded with concepts. The McDowellian thesis is not far off from Brandom's inferentialism insofar as our doings are rule-governed. Our conceptual apparatus, on Brandom's rendering, boils down to implicit rules that regiment our daily doings. In the remainder of this section I will point out that while Dreyfus' critique of "the Myth of the mental" may apply to McDowell's inferentialism, it certainly does not to that of Brandom. At the heart of Dreyfus' hasty reasoning is a misconception of Brandom's notion of concept. His critique targets solely the traditional construal of the notion of concept. He is oblivious to the fact that there are other ways in which minds or concepts could be characterized.

Dreyfus' interpretation of McDowell has it that minds mediate the relationship between the subject and her world. For that to hold, minds must be couched as substances that produce thought. This is far from being on a par with normative functionalism; one can still speak about minds without construing minds as superimposed onto the world. The notion of mind Brandom defends does not conflict with Dasein's ecstatic nature. In effect, no longer is the mind viewed as interiority, it is a doing in the world. In addition, it is not as though Brandom introduces a distinction between a mind that thinks and a body that acts. For him, completing a certain task or speaking a language is a skill that cannot be confined to either side of the mind-body divide. By giving primacy to pragmatics over semantics, Brandom conceives of the mind as an activity in the world. Representational content emerges out of this *praxis*.

Dreyfus concedes that there might be cases where one learns something by applying concepts. But these come to disappear, once the subject masters the skill at hand:

> It might seem an argument for the pervasiveness of conceptuality that we often have to use concepts to find our way about in an unfamiliar situation. But as in an unfamiliar city, we have to start to find our way by using concepts, but our situation gradually comes to make sense to us in a non-conceptual way as we learn our way around in it. (*Mind, Reason and Being-In-The-World,* 18)

He appeals to the example of navigating an unfamiliar city, where the subject starts off by employing concepts so that she finds her way around. In order for the subject to come to familiarize herself with the new city, concepts are needed. Upon mastery of the task, everything comes together in a non-conceptual fashion, as though to learn one's way around the city one needed concepts only in the beginning. This leaves an open question: how is it possible for

concept-use to result in a particular action at one instance and not at another? How can concepts be dispensed with once mastery has occurred? A tension comes to the fore between the essential use of concepts for the subject to set about a certain task and the complete dismissal of concepts once the subject exhibits a good command of the task. How can something be essential to acquiring a competence but not to continuing exercise? Whether the subject attends to her steps or not, at the end of the day, these steps have to do with the same action. If concepts assist the learning process, then they are certainly still in the background once the task is mastered. This is why Brandom's story is more subtle. He thinks that all our doings are conceptual through and through; but concepts are implicit for the most part; they need not be formulated explicitly or openly stated for the subject to be able to carry on with the task. This is, in fact, what it is for rules to be implicitly followed.

Dreyfus sees social norms as non-conceptual. It is a legacy handed down to us that involves no concepts: "We are not aware of what we are doing, nor were our parents, who passed this complex skill on to us, aware that they had it." (MRB 23) Most learning activities are "unconscious" in the sense that we do not have to pause and ponder what it is that we are being taught in order for us to cotton on. The question here arises: How is our skillful action acquired? Is there a pattern-like feature distinctive of this skillful comportment that we pick up? If there is a pattern to our action then this pattern will indicate the operation of a concept. The claim is that rules are incarnated patterns exhibiting a certain degree of complexity, i.e., unpredictability, without the rule ever being identifiable with any system. If rules are implicit it by no means follow that they are not present. Dreyfus goes on to make more of the non-conceptual nature of acquired behavior. Actions, he remarks, are often picked up by *imitation* such that there are no concepts at play: imitation is to account for the non-conceptual acquisition of comportment.

Imitation would be in this case equivalent to RDRDs (see the above section). Imitation would be nothing over and above the ability to discern a certain pattern of behavior so as to pick it up. But this is to fail to give a demarcating criterion between sentient and sapient beings. If both animals and human beings proceed by imitation in the sense of making associations then what sets our comportment against the behavior of animals? Our comportment is not only complex but also meaningful to us. If it is meaningful then it must be part of an inferential network. Otherwise it would be a move alien to us or simply one that we fail to understand. Heidegger emphasizes in *Being and Time* that we are the kinds of entities that comport ourselves understandingly. Brandom elaborates a minimal notion of concept that fits well with the framework Dreyfus is depicting. Our daily dealings strike Dreyfus as completely continuous such that there seems to be no mediation between the subject and the world. Brandom is in agreement on the continuous nature of these practices, but it is not an either/or matter. The implicit nature of concepts is sufficient to preserve the phenomenological description Heidegger takes up.

Dreyfus' critique of the so-called Myth of the mental is premised on a false assumption; namely that the only way to construe concepts is as representations. What does he have to say about rules then? Perhaps something along the following lines: Certain actions, but not all, require rule-following. Once the subject masters the task, rules are no longer needed; rules are only required at the outset. They are done without once the merging activity takes place. Again, this is premised on a misconstrual of rules. As I have mentioned above, applying a rule is a kind of implicit knowing-how as opposed to an explicit knowing-that. One is often seduced into thinking that in order to secure a correct application of a given rule one needs to interpret the formulation prior to applying it. That is, the subject receives the instruction (the rule formulation) interprets or reflects upon it and goes on to apply it, as though the interpretation were a sure

guarantee that one has understood the rule. Consider the case where one appeals to a particular mental state as a mediator between an instruction and its application. It is an open question whether invoking such mediator is viable. Indeed, invoking a mediator yields an infinite regress: What is it about the mediator that guarantees the successful application? In other words, what is it about the mediator that guarantees that it is self-standing in the sense that it is not itself in need of yet another mediator? The interpretation would itself be in need of another interpretation for it to be grasped by the subject. That is, in order to ensure understanding of the interpretation we need yet another interpretation to mediate between our understanding and the previous interpretation itself and so on ad infinitum. The idea of there being an interpretation not subject to further interpretations seems farfetched. In any case, invoking a mediated application of rules runs contra Brandom's functionalism. Hence, rules are not to be mistaken for the rules found in manuals (not that the latter are any less rules). To say that rules are solely found in manuals is to misconstrue normative functionalism. The subject does not contemplate and memorize propositions in order to set about the task at hand. Furthermore, Dreyfus does lose sight of the principal tenet of Heidegger's analytic; he grants that rules are the starting point of certain undertakings – something Heidegger would not be happy with. All this is to preserve the mindless coping with the world. Indeed, Heidegger is very careful to ground the present-at-hand in the ready-to-hand and not the other way around. It is not the case for him that Dasein uses a set of rules to master a certain task and then pre-ontological understanding guides Dasein through the rest of the task. If there is to be such thing as conceptual understanding, it must be founded on pre-ontological understanding. The coping activity is prior to any rule-following activity. Hence, Dreyfus cannot make the bold claim to the effect that concepts are needed only

at the outset but once mastery is granted they become immaterial to the task. For this seems to conflict with Heidegger's account.

According to Heidegger, for the most part, we do not encounter things in our environment as present in our mind. These are taken for granted. When we notice something it follows that something went wrong. Thus it is the *unready-to-hand* that incites us to articulate propositional knowledge about the object. What Heidegger understands by unreadiness-to-hand occurs precisely when a piece of equipment malfunctions such that it becomes conspicuous for the first time. Dasein engages in a theoretical endeavor for the first time as a result of dealing with say, a malfunctioning tool. Anything that interrupts the regular flow of its quotidian dealings instigates a theoretical attitude on the part of Dasein. This is what it is for the ready-to-hand to give way to the present-at-hand. Dreyfus uses this account to emphasize that Heidegger does allow for a conceptual framework in his phenomenology of Being-in-the-world. But it is only in these circumstances that it makes sense to speak about concepts. Otherwise, our going about the environment is non-propositional, i.e., it does not invoke judgments.

> Heidegger's focus on what he calls the unready-to-hand brings his account of action into proximity to McDowell's. In the face of a disturbance, a distance opens up between the coper and what he is acting on which is bridged by a situation-specific concept. (MRB 21)

But if one is able to make assertions about a malfunctioning tool, this means that these assertions rest on other implicit propositions that were there all along in Dasein's dealings. The only difference is that now Dasein has brought it out into the open. Thus, Brandom cannot be convicted of reducing action to the propositional. Insofar as our doings are not always

linguistically *expressed*, actions are thought of as unreflective. This is the benefit of endorsing a view about *implicit* rule-following.

E. Concluding remarks:

I have argued that Brandom's account provides us with appropriate resources for explaining what Heidegger insists on characterizing as "primordial" and "originary". What emerges over the course of the analytic of Being-in-the-world is that at the heart of any understanding lies the pre-understanding of Being, which is another way of saying Dasein's everyday merging with the world. This pre-understanding assumes an implicit use of concepts, or so I have argued. Granted that representationalism is inadequate the question arises whether there is such thing as a non-conceptual way of dealing with objects in the world. Or are rules requisite for such dealing to get off the ground? The distinction between content and act is salient here. In viewing concepts as rules as opposed to representations pertaining to the mental sphere Brandom does away with "representationalism". The rationale for this seems to be that rules are embedded in a practice and the latter implies that the subject is already in the world involved in different kinds of tasks; put more carefully, the subject is already concerned with worldly sapient activities. Indeed, it is one thing to construe concepts as the content of our mental representations and quite another to view concepts as implicit prescriptive rules that dictate action. Hence, Dasein's average everydayness could be equated with the language-game Brandom describes. In other words, for Heidegger's analytic to make sense Heidegger must be implicitly committed to concept-use. Thus I have argued that Brandom's account of the game of giving and asking for reasons constitutes an advance over Heidegger's analysis of the ready-to-hand because it deals

satisfactorily with questions that Heidegger's hermeneutic-phenomenological account is obliged to disregard.

My contention is that Dasein is the kind of entity that is ceaselessly engaged in the practice of giving and asking for reasons. To be sure, a language-game is not just the practice of speaking a natural language. It extends to our going about the environment and navigating it rationally. In other words, "language-game" is also a label for our mode of being in the world. Heidegger emphasizes the thought that we are not born isolated and only drawn to our world by way of a further property. Both Brandom and Heidegger agree that we are merged with our environment. But the merging is different in each case: for Brandom, although our doings do not require representations, the fact that all our doings involve reasoning explains why we are able to do the things other animals cannot. In addition, Brandom has a different appellation for environment; he calls it practice to bring out its dynamical structure. Thus I have shown that Dasein is a normative being when it comes to dealing with things in its environment. I haven't really established that Dasein-with is normative. This is so because Heidegger admits that in average everydayness Dasein obeys norms as part of sharing a world with other Daseins.

Chapter V

Do our existential commitments pose a challenge to rationality or are they continuous with it?

It is crucial at this point to recapitulate some of the findings of the previous chapters to be able to move forward with the positive reconstruction of Heidegger's line of thinking. I have argued that Dasein's mode of forgetfulness, i.e. its everyday absorption in practical concerns and its identification with the "They-self", depends upon a way of being which is yet more fundamental than the one put forth by Heidegger; one which provides a normative basis for action. If Dasein is so engrossed in its environment in such a way as to carry out different kinds of tasks 'without further ado', this is so owing to a certain training Dasein is subjected to in its community. Such training consists in mastering the necessary rules. To assess whether a particular action is appropriate, one must refer back to the social norms embedded in the social practice to which the subject belongs. Note that there is no gulf between skillful doings across communities; the skillful doings are in a way universal, they could take multifarious forms, all the same. Therefore, a particular community need not be familiar with the skillful doings of another community. It remains the case that anything is in principle teachable and it is so because it after all takes shape within a sapient practice. Skillful coping in one cultural community seems to be transferable into other cultural communities. For Brandom, to use a particular tool is to have the concept of it in one's conceptual apparatus. Having a concept is not a matter of correctly representing objects but of understanding the myriad contexts in which one might encounter the same object. At the bedrock level, the relationship between sapient beings and their world is one that invokes rules, i.e. concepts, or so Brandom argues. Rules are

proprieties of inference embedded in a particular social practice; they are manufactured by the community itself in order to navigate a world understandingly. The conceptual apparatus comprises everything one needs to know to be able to use equipment appropriately. For instance, to use a hammer understandingly is to apply the rule requisite for hammering as one is undertaking the task[9]. As we have seen, such application does not require representation. Hammering as such is a social doing that cannot be excised from the social context that creates a space for hammers to be used. I could expect a hammer to do all sorts of things but it is likely that a hammer is used for hammering and this is so in virtue of the training Dasein undergoes early on in its life. Normativity is first and foremost social. Heidegger is in agreement with Brandom on the sociality tenet only up to a point – that point is the priority of Dasein's "mineness" over "being-with" others. According to Heidegger, Dasein manipulates tools with other Daseins. Recall that an account of Dasein-with accompanies the analytic of the ready-to-hand in Division One of *Being and Time*. In its average daily concern Dasein is not the sole inhabitant of a world; its world is already populated by other Daseins. The "Being-with" account reinforces the similarity with Brandom's recognitive model where sociality prevails; again up to the point where Dasein's "mineness" is prior to "Being-with" others. While Heidegger makes room for normativity only insofar as Dasein is "Being-with" and not "Being-alongside things" I have contended that normativity is an essential feature of Dasein's Being-in-the world altogether. In this chapter, I will get to the crux of this enterprise by showing what will become of Heidegger's call of conscience and how we are to interpret it in light of the Brandomian perspective. If Dasein's quotidian existence is fundamentally one that invokes norms how are we

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[9] As I have already shown in the previous chapter, sentience could indeed use a hammer appropriately following a certain training. Be that as it may, trained sentience does not understand the activity to which it is subjected. For that, it must integrate its associations within an inferential network.

to interpret the call of conscience? In Chapter 1, I have carefully outlined Heidegger's overall insight in *Being and Time.* In short, it concerns an architecture of our quotidian dealings that could be interrupted by a call which yields an ethic of existence that poses the question how must *I* live? However, the "must" in the previous question is not the "must" of normativity that is characteristic of Dasein's factical Being. It pertains to a self-prescribed norm that defies the normative scheme one regularly applies. This "must" is of *existential* rather than *normative* import for Heidegger and originates from Dasein's ownmost nature. Our daily obligations differ radically from those that spring solely from our existential obligations. Heidegger's punchline in Division Two is that our quotidian takenness with the world and the obligations that ensue are different in kind from the commitment originating from the call of conscience. The rationale for this distinction is precisely that an existential commitment is one that is assumed by Dasein, whereas a normative commitment is the exact opposite of taking responsibility at the existential level. Heidegger thinks of normative responsibility as a getaway from our ultimate concern. This is anticipatory, things will fall in place toward the end of this chapter.

In the remainder of this chapter, I will adopt Brandom's account of meaning to shed light on what happens when Dasein responds to the call of conscience in a way that interrupts its average existence, wherein forgetfulness of Being prevails. Recall that Dasein is roughly just another way of saying human. All the same, Heidegger has something very specific in mind that cannot be conveyed by the term "human". "Dasein" means that entity which is caught up in existence and whose existence *matters* to it. But existential commitment requires normative commitment. There is indeed an underlying interplay between an engagement in the language-game and a disengagement from it. The call of conscience would be understood in terms of a break with the particular set of everyday normative commitments Dasein is engrossed in, only to

fall back into the language-game again and choose its set of norms (the possibilities it identifies itself with). In the previous chapter, I discussed Dasein's normative commitment in order to pave the way for an account of its existential commitment. This chapter aims at understanding what it is for one to be existentially committed and what the implications of such commitment might be. More exactly, my basic claim is that existential commitments are in a way conditioned by normative commitments and vice versa. To elucidate: In Chapter 1, I have explained how authenticity depends on inauthenticity and vice versa. In Chapter 3, I have pointed out that inauthentic average existence is one that hinges on normativity. Therefore, existential commitments that follow directly from the call of conscience and come to define the authentic self cannot be free-floating; they must rely on quotidian obligations. Roughly, one cannot have existential commitments if a significant portion of existence is absent. Thus normative obligations and existential ones are what Heidegger refers to as "equiprimordial" (i.e. both equally primordial). In claiming that the call of conscience is a break with or an interruption of the set of commitments Dasein has assigned to itself as a reaffirmation of the sense of belonging to its community, something is left unexplained. Underlying this assertion is a dilemma: On the one hand, for Heidegger, the call of conscience is considered as an ineffable experience solely accessible to Dasein as that being which is in each case *mine*. On the other hand, for Brandom, that which is characteristically *my* existence is visible within the space of reasons, i.e., communicable to all because it is conditioned by discursive understanding. That is, from a Brandomian viewpoint, *nothing is hidden*; there is no inherent mystery in the call of conscience – nothing inherently ineffable or incommunicable. Both Heidegger and Brandom reject the Cartesian claim that there exists a private mental sphere; that is, the claim that only the subject could inspect her own private mental sphere with her 'mind's eye', so to speak. Heidegger takes

issue with this claim because he denies that Dasein is a mental substance. For his part, Brandom is dissatisfied with the "mental sphere" picture not only because thinking is first and foremost a doing but more importantly because it is a social doing whose operation presupposes induction into a set of socially instituted norms.

Nevertheless, there is a sense in which one aspect of the call seems to defy rationality: Dasein's encounter with its own nothingness; its coming face to face with itself as "the null-basis of a nullity" (BT 329-331) does not seem to be something that could be comprehended using socially instituted concepts. Only the outcome of the call of conscience is visible in the space of reasons, or so it seems. Dasein's encounter with its own nullity (its "being for nothing") exemplifies a disturbance of the regular flow of events where *meaning itself* is called into question in its totality, and not just with respect to a particular cluster of commitments one had previously undertaken. It could be contended that insofar as it is experienced, the call of conscience is a break with the rational schema of intelligibility as such. Yet because of the interdependence of authenticity and inauthenticity, the resolution to act is still bound to be re-incorporated within the space of reasons. This implies the abstruse claim that the call of conscience is a break *with* rationality *by* rationality itself; a claim which I will try to disambiguate. So long as an act is human it is assessable by reason; even if at first it appears to be completely at odds with everyday practice, it is likely that it will be acknowledged by the practice at a later point.

A. The signification of the question of Being

For Heidegger, the question of Being is intimately tied to the call of conscience. There are two ways of posing the question of Being: authentically and inauthentically. What makes the question of Being possible at all (i.e. be it authentically or inauthentically) is the authentic way of posing it. The ability to puzzle over things around us and perhaps eventually conduct ontological inquiries goes back to a genuine but implicit understanding of our status in the world. At bottom, Dasein is not an object or a substance and its status in the world cannot in any way be apprehended once and for all. To pose the question of Being authentically is to come to terms with the fact that one's relation to the world can be uprooted at any time. Yet we have to continue living with the certitude that the opposite holds, that is to say, that death cannot happen to me just yet. This is the remarkable paradox of existence that Heidegger accurately portrays. As I have mentioned in Chapter 1, authenticity and inauthenticity cannot be juxtaposed. Inauthenticity presupposes that Dasein has understood itself as something which is a nullity. Only if Dasein has comprehended the fact that its relationship with the world is one from which Dasein will be deprived can Dasein go about its business in the world and become immersed in worldly activities. The task of hermeneutic phenomenology is to render explicit that which Dasein has only implicitly understood. The call of conscience reveals to Dasein that its own everyday existence is in vain, that its being in the world is for nothing. In the call of conscience, Dasein is calling for itself to stop fleeing from itself, to stop fleeing from the fact that it is nothing: "The call asserts nothing, gives no information about world-events, has nothing to tell. (…) 'Nothing' gets called to this Self, but it has been *summoned* to itself—that is, to its ownmost potentiality-for-Being." (BT 318) Recall that authenticity does not coincide with the call of

conscience but does follow from it, at least according to Heidegger; authenticity depends for the most part on Dasein's Being-in-the-world in that Dasein borrows worldly raw materials by opting for the possibilities that it opts for. Dasein's choice is not ex-nihilo because it is the choice to appropriate or take responsibility for possibilities of being already given through facticity. Choosing to choose is not free will as choosing ex-nihilo because Dasein cannot disown its own facticity: indeed this is why existential freedom is not metaphysical freedom: it is choosing to choose as a new possibility, i.e., a new way of relating to oneself; not choosing a non-existing possibility, the self-bringing into existence (i.e. actualizing) something that did not previously exist. Metaphysical freedom is creation ex-nihilo; existential freedom is the annihilation of creation understood as actualization, i.e., production or generation: the authentic self avows its own nothingness and in so doing makes a difference that is not a difference at the level of ontic or empirical possibility. These are all and all worldly possibilities and worldly choices that Dasein has already acquainted itself with and continues to do so, so long as it lives. Thus, posing the question of Being authentically does not yield an authentic self.

To translate the call of conscience into common English, it comes down to a specific strand of questioning that any person could stumble upon. It goes along the following lines: Why does one live? Why must one go on living knowing that one's existence can be reduced to nullity in a split second? In other words, to what end must one carry on living? How is it that everything is at once so meaningful and yet meaningless, etc.? Meaning itself is volatile. The call of conscience is a questioning of the regular flow of events – not a questioning for the sake of questioning, but one that goes so far as to uproot the drive that draws us toward our daily tasks. Dasein is not a thing like other things. Being subjected to norms very early on however yields a conditioning whereby Dasein is treated or rather comports itself as though it were a thing. To say

that Dasein is a normative being is not to say that it has an essence or a fixed nature. Quite the contrary, that Dasein is a normative being is just another way of saying that Dasein is prone to comport itself as though it were a thing. For one thing, action on Brandom's account is not dictated by causal forces. The subject is bound by norms, but the subject retains her freedom at all times because being bound by norms *is being* free: one can only bind oneself to a norm: to be *forced* to comply with a norm is not to be bound by it. In other words, it is up to the person to obey a certain norm; the constraints arise once that rule has been obeyed. Again, it is up to me to follow this particular rule, but it is not up to me what the implications of the rule are, i.e. what that rule commits me to. In other words, "what my commitments *are* outstrips my own awareness of my commitments", i.e., inferential content outstrips beliefs about that content. For action to come about, I have to keep a certain number of norms at my disposal as those which distinctively characterize me, i.e., those to which I am ultimately committed. What distinguishes me as a rational agent from other members of my community is the set of norms I abide by within the discursive practice as a whole. Be that as it may, for Heidegger there is nothing about this cluster of norms that essentially ties me to it. The latter is contingent and reinforces the thought that Dasein is not a thing. Dasein's peculiar nature is precisely to yearn for a nature; this is what it is to be human. The call of conscience, on this account, has to do with a break with this social conditioning. In other words, Dasein accepts that it is not a thing, but in order for it to stay alive and do all sorts of things it must renounce its non-thing like status once again. The mode of forgetfulness as obliviousness to one's mortality is that which makes living possible. Accepting that one is not a thing is often inhibitory in itself: it is a traumatic realization precipitating a generalized existential anxiety. The idea is that if not balanced by obliviousness to one's death, coming to terms with the fact that one has no essential features attached to one's selfhood

impedes action. In the call of conscience, the concern with our world is superseded by a distancing from the world. Dasein comes to disown its world because it recognizes that it is not an integral part of it. It cannot disown it for too long however. For we are the kinds of beings that produce meaning and fall into the mode of forgetfulness just to stay alive. Inauthenticity understood as average everyday practical coping is the condition for meaningfulness. As we saw in Chapter 3, socially instituted conceptual competence is the precondition for practical coping. Thus in order for Dasein's activities to be meaningful, it must remain inauthentic through and through. This is the sense of what it is for the authentic mode to be dependent upon the inauthentic mode.

B. The worrisome mineness

Heidegger is careful to define Dasein as that entity which is in each case *mine* or that entity *whose* Being is always at issue for *it*. Two crucial features of this definition are to be retained: 1) Heidegger does construe Dasein as a self-relation, albeit a non-mental one. Put differently, that Dasein possesses an understanding of itself presupposes that Dasein relates to itself, though not in the way in which the Cartesian subject internally relates to herself by inspecting her private mental sphere. 2) To say that Dasein is mineness is also to say that fundamentally an authentic understanding of oneself cannot be socially mediated and consequently cannot be discursive, since discursive understanding cannot but be socially mediated, at least on Brandom's account. If it were, Dasein would forfeit its individuality to the dominant social norms that shapes its average everyday existence. If Dasein is not that which is always mine it is hard to see how individuality is a necessary feature of Dasein. Dasein is defined as that which is in each case

mine, i.e., to each her Dasein. Dasein is precisely the antithesis of the They-self despite the fact that sociality, i.e. being-with, is partly constitutive of Dasein. But in saying that Dasein is peculiar to each individual, are we not assuming that there is a side of the person that remains incommunicable to the public? This prompts the following question: Is the call of conscience peculiar to each Dasein and in that sense ineffable? There is a tension between what Heidegger takes Dasein to be and the co-dependence of authenticity and inauthenticity. What seems to be at stake is that in the inauthentic mode Dasein is wholly at the mercy of social norms in a way that does away with all sense of individuality. However, fundamentally Dasein has full agency even in the inauthentic mode because at the end of the day it is Dasein that opts for everyday possibilities. For it is not as though in its average daily existence, Dasein were transformed into a passive or submissive person against its will. Furthermore, if one resolves to *own* one's existence and act as an agent one has to do so within the realm of human possibilities. This realm is not so different from the one presented in average quotidian existence. As I have mentioned above, Dasein's resolution in the call of conscience is to assume its previous choices or rather assume the choices that are already available by its facticity. Inauthenticity is premised on the proposition that Dasein must have already understood itself one way or another. What kind of understanding is at play? Heidegger rules out the possibility that it be conceptual on the grounds that Dasein is not a mental substance that cognitively apprehends the world as its primary way of being. Neither can this understanding be discursive, for Heidegger takes discourse to be that which sheds light on a fundamental understanding that Dasein possesses in average everydayness. Indeed discourse is the medium in which the ontological interpretation of everyday understanding unfolds. To speak meaningfully is already to interpret things around us. Because our fundamental understanding is not exhausted by discourse, understanding of oneself

cannot be essentially discursive: "Language is a totality of words—a totality in which discourse has a 'worldly' Being of its own; and as an entity within-the-world, this totality thus becomes something which we may come across as ready-to-hand." (BT 204) This is to say that language is a tool among other tools that comes handy in Dasein's environment, but it is not that which makes the use of ready-to-hand objects possible. It is an accompaniment to our daily dealings, as it were.

Dasein is that entity which is in each case mine. This entails that one recognizes oneself in each act, i.e. one sees that whatever it is I experience in the world is *my experience.* There exist two senses of "me": the weaker sense and the radical sense. Dasein could be mine insofar as my actions are distinguishable from those of other Daseins and are assignable to *me*. This is the weak sense of individuality or mineness where acts are recognized as belonging to this particular individual not in the sense that they are unique but merely in the sense that the person who carries them out is constantly aware that they all pertain to something *she* did. The weaker sense of mineness makes room for a self-understanding that pertains to our discursive commitments: in order for me to come to grips with the fact that my doings belong to me, my acts, both verbal and non-verbal, need to have been previously recognized by other members of the community, or so the Brandomian story goes. Thus one must be able to speak meaningfully and have already engaged in certain activities for one to understand oneself and understand that one's dealings are one's own. This is the extent of the weaker sense of mineness. But Heidegger seems to set "mineness" sharply against the They-self in a way that brings us to the radical sense of mineness. For Dasein to be "mine" as opposed to "everyone's" there has to be an aspect of it that is incommunicable to others; a content that only I and no-one else can understand. Otherwise the boundaries between what makes *my* Dasein distinct from *your* Dasein or *our* Dasein would be

blurry: call this the *ineffability thesis*. But while my Dasein encompasses Being-with other Daseins, Being-with remains subordinated to mineness: Heidegger seems to reject the subordination of mineness to Being-with or "We-ness". This is what distinguishes Dasein from Kantian or Brandomian intersubjectivity. If Heidegger endorses the ineffability thesis then the ineffable experience that Heidegger could be alluding to is the call of conscience wherein Dasein is summoned to seize hold of *its* existence. But such a state cannot be shared or made public knowledge. Its content is incommunicable precisely because each existence or Dasein is *my* existence or *my* Dasein. Thus the experience of death as articulated for the first time by Heidegger – not as we experience it regularly in funerals et al. – is my own experience. The reasoning goes along the following lines:

١- Dasein *owns* its existence. Throughout its whole existence, Dasein *owns* everything it undertakes in the sense that it recognizes that action springs intimately from itself. If Heidegger sets this way of relating to oneself against the They-self and emphasizes the non-conceptual nature of such understanding, then this understanding cannot be publicly mediated. This understanding of oneself is there without 'further ado' and does not depend upon conceptual criteria, or so Heidegger would like to maintain.

٢- If this understanding does not invoke public criteria then it cannot be understood by all, but only by the person concerned by this self-relation, i.e. Dasein. Again to each her Dasein.

٣- This understanding must be unique to the person that has it and is in this sense ineffable and incommunicable.

If Heidegger is committed to portraying Dasein's way of Being and to interpreting something common to every Dasein, to say that Dasein experiences something ineffable in the

call of conscience is problematic insofar as it seems to entail a relapse into a Cartesian notion of the self as a realm of privacy and interiority. Furthermore, such commitment undermines Heidegger's attempt at delineating Dasein both insofar as it is engrossed in its world and insofar as it comprehends that such a relation is volatile. This is to say that Heidegger's existential categories would fail to provide a comprehensive characterization of Dasein's existence, since the latter would always comprise something incommunicable. The tradition from Descartes onwards has long construed the subject as a substantial reflexivity, where subjects are mental substances endowed with direct access to the content of their own mental sphere and that recognize that most of their ideas are particular to them. However, what underpin these accounts are theological commitments.

Why is it that subjects are individual substances? The idea is roughly that God has created us in such a way as to endow us with a core self that defines each of us as an individual. Our substantial self is responsible for our ideas, which in turn underwrite action. This project is not far off from that of Kierkegaard, although he seems to reject the substantial conception of the self. The subjective, on Kierkegaard's account, belongs to the individual; it cannot be taken away from it and be appropriated by the community. A gap between subjectivity and objectivity will always hold come what may. Kierkegaard is in fact at pains to demonstrate that absolute truth can only be subjective and incommunicable. (*Concluding Unscientific Postscript*) Thus not only does a gap prevail between the subject and the object, but equally between subjects. Ultimately, Kierkegaard's critique of Hegel rests on theological assumptions. For him, faith is proper to subjectivity and is as such a leap towards the divine. Faith breaks with the ethical sphere of existence. (See *Either/ Or*)It is that by means of which the individual longs to unite herself with the divine; which longing could go so far as to exhibit signs of folly, as was the case with

Abraham. (See *Fear and Trembling*) The story in its most basic form goes as follows: although the relationship between God and the individual subject is heterogeneous, there is room to allow for a unity at the subjective level. Faith is a leap from the intelligible communal sphere toward something incommunicable. Abraham received a command from God to kill his son and acceded to that demand. Kierkegaard understands subjectivity as that which cannot be transmitted to the public, i.e., cannot be made public knowledge. (See *Fear and Trembling*) But Heidegger cannot make this move precisely because there is nothing in his account of Dasein that founds the ineffability thesis. Heidegger is a vehement critic of theology. His indebtedness to Kierkegaard in *Being and Time* comes into tension with his alleged rejection of metaphysical conceptualizations of human existence, i.e., surely Kierkegaard is as indebted to metaphysics as Descartes. In other words, his commitment to the ineffability thesis is incompatible with his rejection to Cartesian interiority. It follows then that Heidegger can only be committed to the weaker sense of "mineness".

Thus it is an open question whether Heidegger can deny that understanding is discursively mediated without reifying mineness and falling into Cartesianism. If the content of Dasein's experience of the call of conscience is ineffable, it seems that Heidegger cannot so easily deny that Dasein retains nothing of the substantial conception of the self. For there is absolutely nothing substantial that subtends the dimension of mineness. Authenticity and inauthenticity are indissociable: the possibility of my own death will never provide a criterion of choice precisely because Dasein is not a thing-substance but always engaged in pursuing worldly possibilities, and as such is always outside of itself and never captivated in subjective self. Unlike Kierkegaard, Heidegger does not envisage a leap beyond the inauthentic to some entirely new realm. This is what distinguishes the call of conscience from the leap of faith. The only way to

render the call of conscience existentially concrete is by relating back to one's factical possibilities.

C. Nothingness as that which resists the Brandomian normative scheme

This brings us to the claim that the call of conscience is only a *formal* characterization. Heidegger does not explicitly describe it as such. It can only be formal since it lacks the resources to carefully outline the meaning of the call for each person. It resembles the Kantian categorical imperative in that the structure of the call by no means determines what its content might be (See Kant's *Critique of Practical Reason*). Indeed, it is not the content of the call that shapes the authentic self. This suggestion seems to be on a par with the idea that the call of conscience defies rationality. Had it been the content that determined one's authentic self it would have been difficult to make a case for the irrational[10] nature of this event. For the content would be derived from worldly features, i.e., social norms that we already encounter in our environment. It would then be a communicable semantic content and as such would not pose a challenge to rationality.

The *formal* characterization of the call of conscience is such as to convince the reader that there is something about existential commitment that interrupts "the structure of rational commitment". In attempting to search for an element that underpins Heidegger's enterprise, it is the encounter with nothingness that stands out in Heidegger's analytic. Nothingness is that which resists rational understanding as cashed out in Brandomian terms. The call of conscience marks

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[10] Irrationality is to be understood in the sense of that which does not abide by the rules of reason, not in the sense that it is a moment of folly.

the shift from a Dasein that mistakes itself for a thing in the world to a Dasein that has come to terms with the groundlessness of its existence. 'Nothing' is what demarcates authenticity from inauthenticity. If Brandom's normative functionalism leaves something out, it will precisely be Dasein's encounter with nothingness.

The intuition that motivates Heidegger's account seems to be that it is hard to believe that everything we do is rational. There is a sense in which rationality fades in the face of certain existential events. Consider the mundane possibility of getting tired of and struggling with commitments. Oftentimes, we see ourselves so caught up in a debate, defending a particular stance, and then we subsequently fail to see what was so enticing about this view. In retrospect, we realize that we were not so religiously committed to this view after all. I do not have in mind the case where one takes a step back and makes a shift in one's commitment. The case I am alluding to is not be confused with the challenge one faces for the cluster of commitments one defends. The underlying thought is that participating in a language-game is indeed a characteristic feature of human being. This is indeed our fundamental way of being in the world. Be that as it may, we are not bound by it. For the most part, our existence comes down to playing the language-game Brandom depicts, notwithstanding instances where one interrupts the regular flow of the game. The case above is indicative of the possibility of an interruption of our inferential commitments; not when it comes to local reasons but at the existential level. It is fair to say that we get tired of giving reasons. In as much as a chess game is tedious, the game of giving and asking for reasons is tiresome in the existential sense. Disowning our world is an instance where rationality itself is renounced, even if this happens only for a split second.

Existential anxiety as a mood that discloses the absence of a core self announces the revelation of the true authentic self beneath the inauthentic They-self. The nuance separating

being existentially anxious from responding to the call of conscience is that anxiety is a mood that does not as yet require action on the part of Dasein; it merely dawns upon it in the manner of an occurrence overtaking a passive receiver. Responding to the call of conscience, on the other hand, involves agency. Notice that the encounter with nothingness already takes place when Dasein endures existential anxiety: "In that in the face of which one has anxiety, the 'It is nothing and nowhere' becomes manifest." (BT 231)

The question arises: is the call of conscience something that all Daseins experience? The alternative could be that only a minority has the privilege to undergo this eventful happening. It is not clear whether Dasein is the very entity it is owing to its *potential* to raise the question of Being, or because it *actually* raises the question of Being. In other words, is the call of conscience and the subsequent encounter with nothingness an essential feature of Dasein? Is it something that Dasein possesses necessarily? The potential to experience the call must be a necessary feature, but not the actual experience of the call. Notice that the distinction between actuality and potentiality is troubling for the structural consistency of Heidegger's account, which insists that Dasein is a pure potentiality to be, not an actuality (i.e. present-at-hand). If it is constitutive of Dasein then anxiety must be universal. But Heidegger runs into difficulties in trying to account for how we should understand the call of conscience. Situating it within the space of reasons seems plausible. But Heidegger opts for the opposite end of the spectrum. The effects of the call are assessable by rational resources but the mood inherent to the call and the resolution that accompanies it are not, or so Heidegger would urge. I have come to this conclusion by drawing on the relationship between authenticity and inauthenticity. If both these modes of self-relation are inter-defined and authenticity involves taking responsibility for one's facticity then only a shift in self-relation via the call of conscience can demarcate authenticity

from inauthenticity. This is why Heidegger would not accept that the resolution and the mood of the call be assessable by reason. *But the content of the call of conscience does not originate on wholly novel grounds, there is no such thing as a possibility in the vacuum. There needs to be a consistency between the previous way of relating to oneself and the new way, the one that stems directly from the call of conscience.*

What is distinctive about the call of conscience is that in it the idea that Dasein is a pure potentiality for Being resurfaces. What makes Dasein a pure potentiality for Being is the fact that while it exists, it is always relating to something that is not there yet, i.e. its future. What the call of conscience yields is an integration of the tripartite structures of time definitive of Dasein. The three items in the structure of care (facticity, fallenness, pure-potentiality for being) can be cashed out in terms of temporality. Facticity would correspond to Dasein's past, fallenness to the Being present of Dasein and the pure-potentiality-for-Being to Dasein's future: "Temporality makes possible the unity of existence, facticity and falling, and in this way constitutes primordially the totality of the structure of care." (BT 376) But the integration cannot be complete precisely because the "not yet there" can never be completed. The possibility of one's death cannot be restricted or localized to a determinate time and place: it is certain yet indeterminate. Dasein understands how death is constitutive of it in that it is always already dying as long as it lives. In facing up to its death it encounters itself as a whole which is necessarily incomplete. The kind of understanding peculiar to that moment of truth that Heidegger designates as the call of conscience differs from the understanding we have in average everydayness. The concept of Dasein in average everydayness is that of a thing alongside other things. If Dasein's nothingness is what it is fleeing from how can Dasein have a concept of it? Concepts are rules, proprieties of inferences. How can there be a rule for something that is

absolutely unique, unfamiliar? Dasein's nothingness stands out as that which is not comprehensible in average everydayness.

D. Brandom's rationality as both a remedy and distortion of Heidegger's thinking

Rationality for Brandom is a critical rectification proposing a non-metaphysical conception of rationality. Rationality is not an innate capacity. It springs from and is embedded in our linguistic practices. Rationality presupposes weighing up the consequences of assertions based on certain commitments which are themselves taken for granted. It follows then that the fundamental understanding characteristic of sapience is discursive. Thinking is constituted by linguistic practice or discursive commitment. The ability to relate to oneself through thought or somehow have "inner" thoughts is publicly mediated, which is to say, inherently intersubjective. That is, my ability to understand myself presupposes sociality, more particularly, the capacity to engage in meaningful speech with others.

It is plain from the above that Brandom allows for no commitments to be undertaken except ones generated by reason or rather within the space of reasons. Even the commitments that might set me at odds with my community are assessed within the space of reasons. Making an unprecedented move in the language-game could be recognized as in conflict with the community. It could equally be unprecedented and yet entirely legal and hence permissible. Brandom's account of rationality makes room for the generation of semantic novelty according to rules. Such moves could sometimes be appreciated and incorporated within the practice of the community so that they become subject to an overarching recognition. This is so precisely for the reason that they are not really in conflict but only perceived as such by certain speakers. What is

and is not conceptually permissible is independent of what speakers happen to believe. They are often treated as rebellious acts against the dominant social norm. Someone like Heidegger might claim that inferentialism lacks the resources to assess existential commitments and events like the call of conscience, as these are cashed out as normative commitments.

Struggle for being authentic is not simply breaking with social norms. The signification of the call of conscience transcends such a naïve take on it. The suggestion could be that whatever content the decision resulting from that moment of truth has will in a way be derived from these social norms; norms in average everydayness will provide the resources for achieving authenticity. While Brandon emphasizes the impossibility to keep track of all of our obligations, one can keep track of some of our obligations as well of others'. But for Heidegger, taking responsibility for one's action does not count as amongst obligations on the grounds that the resolution that ensues from the call of conscience will be of a different kind. As I have suggested earlier, the notion of non-normative i.e. ineffable commitment is problematic because it is both Cartesian and theological.

Brandom would beg to differ; to be able to speak meaningfully about a certain phenomenon or articulate its essential features one must identify public criteria which serve as pattern that any person endowed with a mind would be able to recognize. Heidegger takes the trouble to delineate features of the call of conscience by introducing new concepts so that the reader would identify those features and be able to relate to them. One need only think about the ends of a carefully outlined analytic. If *Being and Time* is to epitomize what is likely to happen for Dasein then it must invoke standards or criteria that ought to shed light on what goes on in the call of conscience. This prompts the following question: how do normative commitments differ from existential ones following this rationale? According to Brandom, the difference

between the two kinds of commitment is inherent to the practice of giving and asking for reasons and does not present a stratum over and above it. If some people acknowledge existential commitments as distinct from mundane normative commitments, this is so owing to a capacity to introduce new vocabulary to the practice and thus enrich the conceptual scheme that the member of the community regularly abides by. Even if only a minority has developed this ability, humans have the capacity to apply concepts not merely in a practical register. Higher order understanding requires more sophisticated conceptual scheme, particularly more sensitive to nuances. But it is nonetheless an activity that thrives on concept-use. In a way, Brandom is making the same point made by Deleuze about the importance of introducing new concepts in philosophy as a practice. The only way for philosophy to shed light on certain phenomena that get passed over on a regular basis is by using peculiar language or positing concepts that we do not ordinarily use. It is impossible to understand peculiar phenomena such as the encounter with nothingness if we lack the requisite concept. For instance, Heidegger introduces many concepts which an average lay person would not use such as "pure-potentiality-for-Being", "Being-towards-death", "presence-at-hand" etc. The claim is that we need unusual concepts to deepen our understanding of the things around us. Brandom would explain away the conceit of a further aspect to understanding by incorporating the so-called encounter with nothingness within the game of giving and asking for reasons. New levels of understanding, new ways of inquiring into the nature of things require the appropriate vocabulary. Absent the appropriate vocabulary, understanding will not be as fine-grained as we want it to be. In short, the encounter with nothingness is intelligible owing to the vocabulary that philosophical accounts such as that of Heidegger make use of. There is nothing about it that defies rationality, it merely necessitates a more sophisticated vocabulary. This vocabulary belongs to a second-order discourse, a discourse

about discourse, providing a deeper understanding of the ultimate presuppositions underlying everyday course. So the claim would be that the concept of nothingness as used by Heidegger is perfectly compatible with Brandomian semantics, but operates within a special domain of discourse about the categorical structure of discourse. Reading Heidegger provides us with new insights into ourselves and allows new experiences that we otherwise would not have been capable of having. Existential anxiety is not a ubiquitous human experience but something encountered by humans operating within a specific and highly sophisticated cognitive context: philosophy. We are all summoned to confront our death at some point. In as much as death is mysterious there is nothing mysterious about this confrontation. Accepting that we are mortal is something human *par excellence* but requires a higher-order understanding which necessitates the employment of unusual concepts (i.e. concept that are not used in everyday practice).This is precisely what makes an existential analytic possible. One could deploy different existential categories in order to carry out an existential analytic, or make use of the same categories but assign different definitions to them to a different end. It remains the case that the experience portrayed by Heidegger is intelligible. It is precisely its intelligible character that renders its portrayal meaningful. This intelligibility implies the priority of conceptual understanding over a pre-understanding.

E. Concluding remarks

To conclude, the call of conscience yields two types of responses: an act that has never been put forth before, or an act derived from normative commitments, but one which makes us see the old normative scheme anew. Put differently, an act when generated could be completely unprecedented: it is conceivable that Dasein sets about a wholly new task or exhibits an unprecedented way of being. Some might refer to it as creation ex-nihilo. On the other hand, an act could have been repeated before on many occasions by many Daseins. As a direct consequence of the call of conscience the same act could be carried out such that nothing would distinguish it from or set it against that generated in a quotidian register. The difference lies in the decision to assume the act. Heidegger is at pains to show that the difference is not palpable within the space of reasons. Thus rationality would be the aftermath of a decision made ex-nihilo. On the one hand, the outcome of the call of conscience is part and parcel of the practice we are dealing with. On the other hand, the encounter with nothingness is what Heidegger takes the interruption with the regular flow of events to be. It is a liberation from average everydayness whose end is to revalidate worldly possibilities or create new ones.

Brandom, by way of contrast, defines philosophy as that which develops the appropriate vocabulary to render explicit that which remains, for the most part, implicit in our practices. Death is a terrifying thing and I believe most people are in agreement on that. What is it about death that makes it so terrifying? It is precisely the *implicit* understanding that it is annihilation. Death is irrevocable in that it presents a state where we lose everything and there is absolutely no way back and no return. The encounter with nothingness makes that clear for us. But does this

mean that we lack the tools to talk about such abstract a phenomenon? Someone like Brandom would argue that we do have a concept of death that we do use but we nonetheless do not reflect upon it very often using the requisite vocabulary. Heidegger agrees that there is a concept of death but it is not that which sheds light on our encounter with nothingness. The latter is ontically more primordial. Only after having encountered nothingness can we develop a concept of death. Brandom would be willing to concede this point with a minor twist: only after having encountered nothingness *using our previous conceptual tools* can we develop a concept of death. But this is not quite right; presumably plenty of people who do not understand the concept of nothingness nevertheless understand that death is the end of everything. The point to be made here is that absent our linguistic capacities and the practice we have been brought up in, one can be sure that no understanding could take place. The need to develop new concepts is grounded in the availability of others concepts, as I have carefully outlined in the second chapter.

The aim of this chapter was to evaluate whether the Heideggerian framework is better suited for Heidegger's account of authenticity or whether the Brandomian framework presents us with a clearer picture. To be sure, I do not wish to pit the Heideggerian account against that of Brandom, or vice versa but to come to a settlement, as it were. Heidegger does away with the substantial conception of reflexivity – one whereby the subject always relates back to itself. In average everydayness, in fleeing from itself, Dasein understands that it is unlike anything else. That understanding is implicit through and through, but it is nonetheless there. The question arises whether that understanding is social or not: is it acquired or are we born with it? No doubt, that understanding requires a certain maturity on the part of Dasein and a discursive intelligence. The implicit self-understanding that Dasein is fleeing from in average existence is its understanding as nothing. Heidegger remarks that it is generated by the understanding of the

ready-to-hand, i.e. it is naturally secreted by that average everyday understanding. Again, Dasein disavows the encounter with nothingness because it needs to carry on functioning and the encounter with nothingness is paralyzing. Therefore, Dasein's understanding of itself is social not in the sense that it must be mediated by other Daseins at all times; rather Dasein must be conceptually equipped to fully comprehend itself as ownership of existence. This harks back to the idea that authenticity depends on inauthenticity. If Dasein has not been trained in a community and learned to use conceptual tools granted by its community the call of conscience would not come about.

The encounter with nothingness, it appears, resists the whole rational practice that Dasein has been brought up to partake in. Only for a short period of time does Dasein disown its world. To Heidegger's bold proposition that there is something about our understanding of death that resists rationality, Brandom would respond that it is possible to develop special vocabularies that help us get a grip on the most abstract of notions. This is what philosophy does. It is not the case that we do not possess a concept of death as annihilation; it may remain implicit all along but it is nonetheless there if we choose to render it explicit or merely attend to it. Brandom seems justified in saying that we do possess a concept of death so that after all the encounter with nothingness is conceptual. Therefore existential commitments are different in kind from normative ones but these are all assessed within the space of reasons. Furthermore, our understanding of ourselves, be it in average everydayness or in the call of conscience, does hinge on sociality and concept-use. This would be the Brandomian integration of Heidegger's call of conscience.

Heidegger could, in addition, take issue with the claim that all our obligations stand on an equal footing. Questions of life and death and existential obligations have a radicality that

outstrips our average, routine dilemmas. Existential commitments trump all our commitments because they pertain to existence as such. But the concept of "existence as such" is an abstract philosophical one – this would be Brandom's riposte. Indeed, to say that normative commitments and existential commitments are both commitments in the language-game is also to presuppose that existential obligations vis-à-vis oneself are on an equal footing with our normative daily obligations. Heidegger would rightly insist that existential obligations vis-à-vis oneself outrun normative ones, but only for those who have understood what existence means, which is precisely the issue: how does one come about such understanding? The point is not to say Heidegger is wrong, but just to say there is a way of making sense of his account in terms of Brandom as a second order reflexive philosophical analysis of our first order understanding: so that Heidegger would be making explicit what is implicit in our prephilosophical understanding. Thus, "nothingness" and "the call of conscience" would be conceptual components of a discursive understanding of our own prephilosophical self-understanding, not ubiquitous anthropological phenomena.

I am inclined to side with Brandom on this matter. Everything we do or say, even the most alienating acts are human *par excellence.* Humanity is no more than our rational capacity, as Brandom puts it. Rationality is not having a fixed essence that dictates action but rather invokes positive freedom in the sense of autonomy. This autonomy may be more compatible with existential freedom than it appears. I am able to generate new thoughts and unprecedented acts in virtue of my understanding of my discursive commitments. This is our way of going about the world. We have the capacity to generate an infinite number of new sentences and concepts from a cluster of concepts. So long as we live, our fundamental mode of being is the

language-game we engage in. This practice individuates us by allowing us to opt for our sets of commitments and even modify them over the course of time:

> (…) That is to say, as normative creatures we are rational creatures—not in the sense that we always or even generally think or act as we have reasons to, or that we usually have good reasons for thinking and doing what we do, but in the sense that whether we do or not, we are always liable to normative *assessment* concerning our reasons for thinking and doing what we do or not. (RIP 38, Chapter 4)

No matter how much an act is unprecedented, a thought revolutionary, we will ascribe reasons to them. For this is what it means for us to be normative, this is what we generally do. There is nothing mysterious about it.

Chapter VI

Conclusion

This thesis has compared and contrasted Heidegger's existential analytic of Dasein with Robert Brandom's normative functionalism. Both of these accounts jettison representationalism and endorse a kind of pragmatism. The aim of this thesis has been to challenge the sufficiency of Dasein's existential individuation in the call of conscience by using Brandom's account of discursive understanding. In other words, I have examined whether an existential datum such as the confrontation with 'nothingness' poses a challenge to conceptual rationality understood in Brandom's terms. The question my thesis takes up draws on the distinction in Heidegger's *Being and Time* between the two fundamental modes of existing characteristic of Dasein: authenticity and inauthenticity. While inauthentic Dasein mistakes itself for something that has a fixed nature in the world by immersing itself in worldly activities, authentic Dasein comes to terms with the nothingness of its own Being and as a result takes hold of its existence. Dasein's recognition of itself as a pure-potentiality-for-Being by facing its own death is what distinguishes authentic Dasein from inauthentic Dasein. In average everydayness, Dasein is said to be inauthentic precisely because it flees from its nothingness and engages in all sorts of worldly activities. In everyday coping, Dasein possesses a pre-ontological understanding that allows it to be familiar with its world. In order to determine whether or not 'nothingness' is an existential datum that transcends our discursive obligations, I have argued that the game of giving and asking for reasons is the *condition* for Being-in-the-world. Indeed, I have confronted Brandom's normative functionalism with the analytic of Being-in-the-world and in a second step evaluated the role of the call of conscience. Brandom's account of the game of giving and asking for reasons is akin to

Heidegger's phenomenological description of average everydayness insofar as both reject representationalism and subordinate contemplation to practice. They conflict however on what grounds the structure of Dasein's environment. The Brandomian view seems more plausible because it is capable of disambiguating many claims that Heidegger's analytic leaves ambiguous: Brandom's notion of discursive understanding accounts for the difference between animals and human beings, whereas Heidegger's analytic merely stipulates that the difference is ontological. Brandom's account has it that our practices are meaningful as a result of invoking implicit rules. For his part, Heidegger merely roots Dasein's activity in pre-ontological understanding, i.e., a kind of understanding that makes our doings meaningful but that is not as yet understanding in the sense of applying concepts. At no time does Heidegger specify exactly what that pre-understanding consists in. For Brandom, the distinction between a basic form of understanding and an interpretative understanding (i.e. the distinction between the implicitly and the explicitly conceptual, not between the non-conceptual and the conceptual) does not need to be sharp: we fundamentally possess a discursive understanding which it is possible to deepen by developing our conceptual apparatus. Whereas Heidegger situates the break between the non-conceptual and the conceptual *within* the human, i.e., the gap between pre-understanding and interpretation, Brandom situates it between the non-human and the human, i.e., the gap between sentience and sapience.

Drawing on the distinction between the two modes of existing introduced in Chapter 1 between authenticity and inauthenticity, the final chapter debates the role of the call of conscience in Division Two of *Being and Time* in light of Brandom's account of discursive commitment. Given Heidegger's rejection of the Cartesian notion of the self as a private inner sanctum, the distinction between authenticity and inauthenticity cannot be regarded as a

distinction between two substances, where an authentic self subtends an inauthentic one. Once we reject the substantialization of the self, authenticity and inauthenticity can only be modes of self-relation, and what separates the two can only be a more sophisticated form of understanding that is part of the practice of speaking a language. The way in which Dasein's nothingness is discursively articulated in Heidegger's own work suggests that the encounter with 'nothingness' is mediated by sophisticated second-order (i.e. philosophical) concepts continuous with the practice of giving and asking for reasons. It is not a ubiquitous experiential datum. Responding to the call of conscience would require a higher-order understanding, but one which is nevertheless discursive in nature. Thus, to answer the question with which I began my thesis: 'nothingness' as an existential datum does not defy rationality and does not mark a break with the game of giving and asking for reasons.

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