

Being as an ‘issue’ for Dasein in Heidegger’s fundamental ontology

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Introduction

In *Being and Time* Heidegger’s topic is the question “what is the meaning of Being?” In investigating this question, we must, Heidegger says, take an entity to be interrogated, and this entity is to be transparent in its own Being. Since asking about the meaning of Being is itself a mode of Being, we might choose the inquirer as our entity—Dasein, the entity that each of us ourselves are, is thus taken as the entity for interrogation.¹ Dasein, he says, is distinct in its relationship towards Being:

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. And this means further that there is some way in which Dasein understands itself in its Being, and that to some degree it does so explicitly. It is peculiar to this entity that with and through it Being, this Being is disclosed to it. *Understanding of Being is itself a definite characteristic of Dasein’s Being.* Dasein is ontically distinctive in that it *is* ontological.²

There are several key points here that will form the basis of this essay. Being as an ‘issue’ for Dasein goes towards making up its Being, that is, Dasein *is* such that it has a relationship towards this *is*. In a way, Dasein understands itself in its Being, and, as such, Dasein has an understanding of Being. This way that Dasein *is*, that is, with an understanding of Being, makes Dasein *ontological*. However, Dasein is only taken as the starting point in finding the meaning of Being, which is still unclear, and so Dasein’s distinctive Being is to be characterised as *pre-ontological*—“being in such a way that one has an understanding of Being.”³

But how is Being an ‘issue’? How does Dasein understand itself in its Being? These are the questions that prompt the investigation of this essay. But I do not intend to solve the whole problem here; Heidegger explicitly says that the Being of Dasein is “*care*”,⁴ and to go into an examination of Dasein’s understanding of itself as *care* would be far beyond the scope of this essay. In leaving Dasein’s Being itself uninvestigated, our question is instead narrower: how is it that the Being of Dasein

¹Heidegger, *Being and Time*, H. 7.

²Ibid., H. 12.

³Ibid., H. 12.

⁴Ibid., H. 57, 121, chap. vi.

may be brought into view, such that Dasein may have an avenue to understand itself in its Being, that is, such that Being might be an 'issue' for it? In the past, the answer to this has been taken as obvious, and, as we will see, Heidegger research has tended to move ahead into the existential analytic of Dasein with a problematic assumption that I believe perverts the discourse. My intention is to resolve this through a closer examination of the ontological structure of Dasein as Being-in-the-world. This I contend is that which clears the way to Dasein's understanding of itself in its Being (*care*) and thus answers how Being is an 'issue' for Dasein in Heidegger's fundamental ontology.

Heidegger says that we understand ourselves in our possibilities of existence, whether we are firefighters or artists, whether we have a pastrami sandwich for lunch or a croissant, whether we are now breathing in or breathing out, etc. One might quickly jump to the conclusion that Dasein's relationship towards its Being hinges on choice, but this would be mistaken. Or one might ponder that it is our capacity to ponder such intellectual questions as the meaning of Being itself that answers the question, but this would again be mistaken. Finally one might arrive at the proposal it is self-reflection, as a mirror of consciousness, that gives us our relationship towards Being, but again, this is leaping too far, opening oneself up to faltering and falling down. We have already missed a crucial problem, so close to our faces that we might always look straight past it: in order to properly answer how it is that Being is an 'issue' for Dasein, we should first have at least a bare sketch of Being, that is, Being must somehow be brought into the light before it can be at 'issue'. If we do have a relationship towards our Being, this Being remains pre-ontological, only 'on the way' to an ontology,⁵ so then how does our pre-ontological Being open us towards an understanding of Being? It remains dim. Only in venturing further into the existential analytic does this way of openness to our Being begin to take shape. Heidegger has set out a loop of sorts, a brilliant "relatedness backward or forward" wherein the issue of inquiry is the inquirer, the meaning of the 'issue' of Being only disclosed as the meaning of Being is pursued. As Heidegger says, "our discussion must anticipate later analyses."⁶

I plan to offer a path through the first part of the existential analytic, where we will arrive at a point where the loop rejoins itself: where it becomes clear how Dasein, in its ontological structure as Being-in-the-world, may understand itself in its Being, and thus have avenue to an understanding of Being, that is, that Being can be an 'issue' for Dasein without recourse to problematic tangents.

Being as an 'issue' for Dasein

The link between the ontical and ontological nature of Dasein is the linchpin on which the existential analytic becomes an inquiry into the meaning of Being, and thus can hope to answer Heidegger's question. It is therefore of paramount importance that we get clear on this 'issue'; to begin with a bad interpretation is to pervert the inquiry that follows.

Being as an 'issue' for Dasein has traditionally been interpreted with little care, as if the answer were already self-evident: that "Only human beings *lead* their lives: the next moment or phase of their lives is such that they have it to be"⁷ or that "it is *human* beings *alone* who are able to encounter the question of what it means to

⁵Heidegger, *Being and Time*, H. 12.

⁶Ibid., H.11.

⁷Mulhall, *Routledge Philosophy GuideBook to Heidegger and Being and Time*, p. 15.

be”⁸ or that Dasein “understands the being of beings”.⁹ None of these are totally satisfying.

First, the interpretation that Dasein *leads* its life seems a shrouded appeal to choice as an exceptional quality, if not directly to free will—Dasein is free to choose from its possibilities of existence while other entities operate as pure automatons. This is unattractive because it balances Heidegger’s fundamental ontology on the shaky foundation of the uniqueness of human choice. Furthermore, any claim of distinction about *what it is like* to be a human being, made in supposed factual comparison with other entities, failing recourse to some object phenomenology (which is absurd), will ultimately suffer a proximal bias we have for our own phenomenal experience.¹⁰ While I do not wish to argue for any form of determinism or against phenomenal anthropocentrism, we can surely agree that an interpretation that avoids being mired in either of these arguments is preferable in both elegance and substance.

The tendency towards this interpretation no doubt springs from passages such as the following, but this also throws such an interpretation into doubt.

Dasein always understands itself in terms of its existence—in terms of a possibility of itself: to be itself or not itself. Dasein has either chosen these possibilities itself, or got itself into them, or grown up in them already.¹¹

The problem with appointing choice as Dasein’s mark of difference is that it fails to take into account the ways in which Dasein may understand itself in its many possibilities that are not its own choosing, possibilities Heidegger would call *inauthentic*, but are no less important in our investigation into Dasein’s understanding of Being.¹² If we can understand how Being is an ‘issue’ for Dasein without excursions into these problematic trails, this is the path we should take.

Next, the interpretation that only Dasein may encounter the question of the meaning of Being makes the mistake of interpreting the ‘issue’ as the topic in question, that is, only Dasein may ask “what is the meaning of Being?” and so only Dasein may answer it. This seems self-defeating, but also gets wrong a distinction in the earliest stages of *Being and Time*: between “the meaning of Being” and Being itself. Heidegger explicitly states the topic of the treatise on the first page: “it is fitting that we raise again *the question of the meaning of Being*.”¹³ Soon thereafter he says that even in asking the question “what *is* Being?” we hold a vague and average understanding of Being as the *is* of the sentence.¹⁴ At the heart of the grand intellectual pursuit of “the meaning of Being” it is this everyday encountering of Being that is *what is asked about*, and this is what must be taken as an ‘issue’ for Dasein. If, instead, Dasein were to take the “meaning of Being” as an ‘issue’ it would be in the form of intellectual question, which is far removed from the everydayness in which Being is an ‘issue’:

⁸Wheeler:2013.

⁹Inwood, *A Heidegger Dictionary*, p. 147.

¹⁰For discussion on the traps and difficulties of an objective phenomenology, see Nagel, “What Is It Like to Be a Bat?”

¹¹Heidegger, *Being and Time*, H. 12.

¹²Discussion of authenticity is outside the scope of this essay, however it should be plain to see that Dasein may exist in inauthentic possibilities and yet still have an understanding of itself in its Being.

¹³Heidegger, *Being and Time*, H. 1.

¹⁴Ibid., H. 5.

Dasein's Being is an issue for it in a definite way; and Dasein comports itself towards it in the mode of average everydayness, even if this is only the mode of fleeing *in the face of it* and forgetfulness *thereof*.¹⁵

What we seek is Being as an 'issue' in a primordial way—a way in which Dasein may still possess an understanding of itself in its Being even when fleeing and forgetting. The question “what is the meaning of Being?” is asked in intellectual abstraction *away from* such everydayness. And in the next section we will see that the Being of Dasein, as first disclosed in encountering the ready-to-hand, escapes any such abstracted intellectual pursuit.

It is only in this last way, that Dasein understands the Being of beings, do we get a vague and incomplete sketch of the 'issue'. But it still unsatisfying because the question still must be asked: how does Dasein *understand* itself in its Being, so Being may then be an 'issue' for its in its everydayness?

Being-in-the-world, entities as ready-to-hand

Dasein, in its general state as *Being-in-the-world*, has something like a 'world' intrinsically, and this relationship of *Being-in* the world is “a *unitary* phenomenon” that “cannot be broken up into contents which may be pieces together” although we may look at its constituents from their respective angles to understand the whole.¹⁶ At this early point, *Being-in-the-world* is left vague and indefinite, as it is only explained fully through the course of the existential analytic. While Heidegger says that *Being-in-the-world* falls short of fully revealing the Being of Dasein, our investigation is only into how the Being of Dasein may be brought into view, and so the aspects of *Being-in-the-world* on which I intend to focus are sufficient for answering our question. In examining 'world' and *worldhood* (CHAP. III), and *Being-in* as such (CHAP. V), we can gain a clear explication of *Being-in-the-world*, such that the Being of Dasein may then come into view for Dasein.¹⁷

How then should 'world' be made clear? When we examine it without due care, Heidegger protests, we slip into the conventional procedure of considering it within the subject/object relationship. But here lies a problem we have got ourselves into over and over throughout history; that in *knowing* the world in this manner, the knowing must be 'inside' the subject, and, in encountering the world as objective and external, must somehow come 'outside' of this subjective sphere in order to have any knowledge of the world. Heidegger argues that, regardless of how we may interpret the way in which knowing comes 'outside' this sphere and achieves 'transcendence', we will always run into problems with this line of thought.¹⁸ We must instead understand 'world' as an essential constituent of *Being-in-the-world*:

Being-in-the-world shall first be made visible with regard to that item of its structure which is the 'world' itself. [...] What can be meant by describing 'the world' as a phenomenon? It means to let us see what shows itself in 'entities' within the world.¹⁹

¹⁵Heidegger, *Being and Time*, H. 44.

¹⁶Ibid., H. 53.

¹⁷I do not intend to focus on the “who” of Dasein (CHAP. IV) because a path of least resistance can be traced through the existential analytic that answers our question without giving this chapter attention.

¹⁸Heidegger, *Being and Time*, H. 60–61.

¹⁹Ibid., H. 63.

This would suggest that ‘world’ is disclosed through ontic description, that is, discovering and depicting the basic stuff that exists apart from us, from Descartes’ piece of wax to the scientific inquiry into the makeup of the universe. However, in doing so we will have lost sight of Dasein as the entity of interrogation, and no longer be investigating Being-in-the-world. The ‘worldhood’ of the world then is to be taken as the structure of ‘world’ as an essential constituent of Being-in-the-world, that is, our investigation into entities as within-the-world must proceed along the lines of Dasein’s encountering of entities. How then does Dasein encounter entities?

If we take Heidegger’s famous example of the hammer, we might consider it as an object and wholly separate from ourselves as subjects. But this would be again running into the wall of *knowing* as ‘inside’ our subjective sphere. Instead, when we put the hammer to practical use we become absorbed in the practical activity of hammering (after all, no one wants to be unabsorbed and hit their thumb!). Within this activity the subject/object divide dissolves—there is little to say where the subject ends and the object of the hammer begins, unless we break from absorption within the activity. We must then wonder if we are ever not in activity, since even Descartes meditating on his piece of wax is within some kind of fascinated activity. To consider ourselves again as the isolated Cartesian subject and the hammer again as the present-at-hand object, we must perform an intellectual *abstraction* where we are pulled back from the hammer *as* the ready-to-hand equipment of a “hammer”.²⁰

The Cartesian might respond that we may arrive at knowledge of a present-at-hand object not through dissolving the subject/object divide, but through an exhaustive list of facts about it. If we have all the information, surely we will *know* the object. The problem arises that, for an object as humble as a hammer, such a list of facts is never definite. Consider the possible uses for hammer: for hammering nails, for clawing out nails, for breaking emergency glass, for breaking a piggy bank, as a murder weapon, as a doorstop, as part of a carnival strongman game, etc. The list is indefinite because a hammer’s use is tied to Dasein’s possibilities in taking the hammer as ready-to-hand equipment as however it deems appropriate.²¹

Imagine yourself entering a small shop that sells novelties and knick-knacks. Towards the back you discover a *thing* without any apparent purpose. You can pick it up and turn it over in your hand—surely this mysterious object would arouse great curiosity as you inspected it trying to discover its purpose. Is it a tool, a puzzle, an ornament, or something else? You would certainly expect that you could

²⁰To further illustrate how present-at-hand is secondary to ready-to-hand, let’s take the simple example of using a map. In the task of getting from one side of a city to the other, there are two forms of knowing at hand: either knowing how to navigate the route using familiar streets and landmarks, or knowing that a route exists by looking at a map. Although the map itself is ready-to-hand equipment, it renders our experience of the city as something abstracted and present-at-hand. The map is a semblance of the city from an aerial vantage that we don’t experience, and if we did have such a vantage, in that we were capable of flying above the city, the vantage itself would no longer be useful because we could fly over the city to our destination. The map, as the city as present-at-hand, is a pulling back from the city in a literal sense. From this it is clear that entities are primarily encountered as ready-to-hand, and only as present-at-hand in abstraction.

²¹If we were to write a list of rules governing the use of a “hammer” such that one in possession of such a list might have knowledge of a hammer, we would necessarily reduce its serviceability to the point that it isn’t really a “hammer”. Since the rules need to be applicable to the myriad of situation the hammer user might encounter, the rules need to be predicated on further rules, and so forth to an infinite regress. Conversely, if the Cartesian welcomes the idea that a single list of rules may be applied at the hammer user’s discretion, this negates the need for the rules at all. (Mulhall, *Routledge Philosophy GuideBook to Heidegger and Being and Time*, pp. 56-57)

take the thing to the shopkeeper and get an answer. Perhaps it's purpose is simply to torment the curious? Even this indeterminate *thing* becomes ready-to-hand in its puzzling indeterminateness of being un-ready-to-hand—its serviceability is taken to be obstructed, not absent. A thing is never just a *thing*, but is always taken *as* something by Dasein.²²

We are now clear on how Dasein encounters entities primarily as ready-to-hand, or obstructed as ready-to-hand, but we are not yet clear on how entities are encountered within-the-world, and how this goes towards 'world' as a constitutive part of Being-in-the-world, which is the ontological structure in which the Being of Dasein is brought into view.

The 'worldhood' of the world, the totality of involvements

While the world cannot be a present-at-hand collection of entities, nor can it be an entity among other entities, there must still be a relationship between entities and world. If we return to our hammer, grasping it and using it in absorbed activity isn't the whole story; it fails to say how we understand it *as* a "hammer". One is never just hammering, rather, hammering is always part of accomplishing something—to drive a nail into wood to take a basic example. This *in-order-to* presupposes a knowledge (of the ready-to-hand kind) of 'nails' and 'wood', but this immediate activity is itself not isolated, but performed towards something else—to build something. If we take an example of a father in his workshop building a rocking horse for his young son, his use of the hammer is involved in the absorbed activity of hammering *in-order-to* drive a nail into wood, in a *towards-which* of building a rocking horse for his son. The activity is part of a totality, which includes the hammer, nails and wood, but also "rocking horse" as a ready-to-hand equipment, which itself presupposes not just childhood play, but also "horse" as serviceable for riding, and of representing a horse as a child's plaything, and yet still further, presupposes the knowledge of gravity and balance, of transportation, ownership, gift-giving, family, etc.²³ It is plain to see that such a web of contextual relations could go on to encompass the world in totality. But the relations that make up this totality are not metaphysical (as entities present-at-hand), rather, *we* reveal them through taking entities *as* such in circumspection. It is as embedded within this context of meaningful relations that the Being of the hammer is revealed *as such* for Dasein—the Being of the hammer is "freed" by Dasein "letting it be involved" (taking-as) in its *totality of involvements*, a totality in which all other ready-to-hand entities are likewise involved.²⁴ This is getting towards something like a world, but still remains unclear.

It is difficult to think of the hammer as being concealed to be freed, that it only gets its Being through Dasein's taking-as, so I offer the example of walking along a rocky beach towards a house in the distance; the beach is freed in circumspection *as* the path towards the house in the activity of walking (and perhaps as a place of aesthetic fascination). A single rock among the many remains concealed until we

²²One might argue that not all entities are equipment, or tools, and that one can easily walk in a forest in simple appreciation of its beauty without taking the trees to be equipment for firewood. This is, however, taking Heidegger's thought in a reduced interpretation. When one walks in the forest to appreciate its beauty, the forest is ready-to-hand *taken-as* the source of beauty, the absorbed activity is that of aesthetic fascination. The forest, as a thing of beauty, is never detached as a present-at-hand thing but is always taken-as ready-to-hand

²³Heidegger, *Being and Time*, §16; Wheeler:2013.

²⁴Heidegger, *Being and Time*, §18.

break from our taking the beach *as* a path to the house and instead take the rock *as* a constitutive part of the beach, that is, through our circumspection we let the rock now be involved in a way it was not before. In this way, the rock is disclosed as such. (But even then, who can take in all the rocks that make up a beach? The few will be disclosed as such while the rest will fall back into the darkness of concealment.)

If we consider this encountering of entities within-the-world as so immediate, it would suggest that Dasein's relationship towards 'world' is so transparent that it is never disclosed, and, as such, Dasein could never understand itself as having 'world' as a necessary constituent of Being-in-the-world. However, we must remember that in our everyday dealings things rarely go as planned; equipment breaks, we become distracted, other people and things get in the way of our primary concern. Our ontic everydayness is a constant struggle to achieve the kind of absorbed concern like hammering together a rocking horse. As such, when the ready-to-hand is obstructed, the context in which the ready-to-hand is involved comes into circumspection:

Our circumspection comes up against emptiness, and now sees for the first time *what* the missing article was ready-to-hand *with*, and *what* it was ready-to-hand *for*. The environment announces itself afresh.²⁵

The *with* and *for* then reveal to circumspection the contextual relations of *in-order-to* and *towards-which* that allow the ready-to-hand to be involved in a totality. If, while the father is hammering a nail into a part of the rocking horse, the hammer breaks, suddenly these contextual relations come into sharp relief: the *in-order-to* of hammering in the nail becomes obvious in its obstruction, as does the *towards-which* of building the rocking horse, and this then reveals the intention of giving the gift, the father-son relationship, and so forth. Thus entities are revealed not as abstracted objects, but as embedded within a world of involvement:

When an assignment to some particular "towards-this" has been thus circumspectively aroused, we catch sight of the "towards-this" itself, and along with it everything connected with the work—the whole 'workshop'—as that wherein concern always dwells. The context of equipment is lit up, not as something never seen before, but as a totality constantly sighted beforehand in circumspection. With this totality, however, the world announces itself.²⁶

Thus we seem to have arrived at 'world' in its basic sense, but yet to be made clear is how Dasein *has* 'worldhood', and, as such, how *world* is a constituent of Being-in-the-world.

If we return to the father building the rocking horse, I have purposefully delayed mention of the father as in-the-world until now. The father, in his practical dealing with the ready-to-hand equipment, is absorbed in "hammering", in order to drive a nail into a wooden part, towards making a rocking horse, which he will give to his son, for the sake of his possibility of existence as a "father who has made a rocking horse for his son." It is ultimately in the service of this possibility of a way of existing, a "towards-which" as a beginning/end, that the totality of involvements springs forth.

²⁵Heidegger, *Being and Time*, H. 75.

²⁶Ibid., H. 74-75.

[T]he 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. This primary “towards-which” is not just another “towards-this” as something in which an involvement is possible. The primary ‘towards-which’ is a “for-the-sake-of-which”. But the ‘for-the-sake-of’ always pertains to the Being of *Dasein*, for which, in its Being, that very Being is essentially an *issue*.²⁷

From this we see that *Dasein*, as the “for-the-sake-of-which” of the totality of involvements, has ‘worldhood’ as a necessary structure of its Being, that is, as Being-in-the-world, it is inextricable from ‘world’.

Dasein then, as the “for-the-sake-of-which”, is that which discloses ‘world’ as *significance*. The father in our example, once finished building the rocking horse, will probably paint it to look like a horse. Such a representation is not really a tool, but an ‘assignment’ of ‘reference’ between the rocking horse and “horse”—or *sign*. What are we to take from such a sign? Should one take the rocking horse and put it in a field with other horses? No, it is meant to be understood that like a horse can be taken-as ready-to-hand equipment for the purpose of riding, so can the rocking horse, and furthermore, that the child, in “play”, is not “riding a horse”, but again only in activity as reference towards “riding a horse”. It is in these relations of significance that signs are freed in the totality of involvements. It is in *Dasein*’s understanding of significance that a structure is disclosed, and thus how *Dasein* might come to understand itself within such a structure:

The relational character which these relationships of assigning possess, we take as one of *signifying*. In its familiarity with these relationships, *Dasein* ‘signifies’ to itself: in a primordial manner it gives itself both its Being and its potentiality-for-Being as something which it is to understand with regard to its Being-in-the-world. [...] The relational totality of this signifying we call “*significance*”. This is what makes up the structure of the world—the structure of that wherein *Dasein* as such already is.²⁸

That is to say, the world is taken-as significance, and *Dasein*, in grasping significance in a primordial way, with itself as the beginning/end that is “for-the-sake-of-which”, *Dasein* signifies itself *to* itself as part of it.

We seem to have arrived at a clear understanding of how *world* is a necessary constituent of Being-in-the-world, how *Dasein* grasps itself as having ‘worldhood’, and how *Dasein* grasps itself as a part of ‘world’. The first step in answering our question is complete: the avenue whereby the Being of *Dasein* may be brought into view is becoming clearer. The next step is to examine *Being-in* as a constituent of Being-in-the-world.

Being-in, the “there” & understanding

According to Heidegger, there is a fundamental difference between how we are *in* the world and how entities are *within* the world. If we ask ourselves how we are

²⁷Heidegger, *Being and Time*, H. 84.

²⁸Ibid., H. 87.

in a room compared to how a chair is, we might say that we *know* we are in the room whereas the chair does not. But this subjective—and essentially Cartesian—response makes the same mistake as outlined above, in that it supposes *knowing* as ‘inside’ the subject, which must then come ‘outside’ in order to have knowledge of the world. Like much of Heidegger’s thought, the problem lies right at our noses: we have ‘world’, such that we may encounter entities within-the-world, whereas entities within-the-world do not, and therefore, for entities such as the chair, encountering is impossible.²⁹ While we have thoroughly examined the way in which Dasein has ‘worldhood’, in that, it is a necessary constituent of Dasein’s general state of Being-in-the-world, we need to get clearer on the *way* in which Dasein’s Being is *in* this world, or as Heidegger says, “there” *in* the world.

To say that in existing, Dasein is its “there”, is equivalent to saying that the world is ‘there’; its *Being-there* is Being-in.³⁰

The “there” is not to be taken as a place in the sense of getting “here” from “there”, rather, Dasein’s “there” is the sense in which place can be disclosed as an ontological concept. The “there” is the grounding of Dasein, such that it can be *in* the world, not in the sense of where a particular Dasein is situated, but that Dasein has “the character of not being closed off”, that is, the way in which Dasein is open to disclosing the world.³¹ We might think of it as how fish are open to swimming, such that they are *in* water—the water is not just the world of the fish, but their being “there” in it is unlike being “inside” water, as water is so ubiquitous that the fish could not possibly conceive of it as otherwise (but we are talking of fictionally intelligent fish!).

Heidegger breaks the “there” into two constituent parts, *state-of-mind* and *understanding*, both of which we will now examine.

The terminology “*state-of-mind*” is misleading if we take it in the conventional sense of “mind” as subject, rather, it is better understood as *mood*, although still very unlike our usual interpretation of this word. For Heidegger, a mood is not an internal mental state, but a constituent of Being-in-the-world; Dasein does not possess moods, but finds itself always *in* a mood.³² This mirrors our general way of talking about moods, despite our subjective understanding; one might say, “I am in a bad mood today,” as if it were like a cloud one had wandered along into. This is not far from Heidegger’s meaning, provided we drop the connotations of the world as a present-at-hand place in which this bad mood cloud has spatial coordinates, and assume that we’re always in one cloud or other.

Let’s return to our scenario of the father building the rocking horse. He suffers the misfortune of a broken hammer and can no longer finish. We can assume that this would make him angry. We can see that this mood of anger does not really come from ‘inside’, since it is a reaction to the broken hammer, and the father, if he controlled the comings and goings of moods, would certainly not wish to be angry. Nor does the mood of anger come from ‘outside’, since we have already thoroughly established that ‘world’ is a constituent of Being-in-the-world and is not an external

²⁹Olafson, *Heidegger and the Philosophy of Mind*, pp. 34-35, this is vastly different to saying that human beings are objectively distinguished and thus miring us in the argument of anthropocentrism, since as we have shown, ‘world’ is not an object *space* in which things can be compared in this way.

³⁰Heidegger, *Being and Time*, H. 143.

³¹*Ibid.*, H. 133.

³²*Ibid.*, H. 134.

thing. If we begin to think of moods in this subject/object divide, we have already gone the wrong way. Rather, mood is way in which Dasein is disclosed to itself:

In a state-of-mind Dasein is always brought before itself, and has always found itself, not in the sense of coming across itself by perceiving itself, but in the sense of finding itself in the mood that it has.³³

This is similar to how we might say that you can't escape yourself—your Being is, in this way, necessary. It requires no special thought or self-reflection. In always having a mood, or rather always being *in* a mood, which is neither internal nor external but rather a part of the “there”, you are always in a state of worldly affectedness. Wherever you go, “there” you are.

But this is not the whole story. Not only should an account of the “there” include *understanding* as an integral part, but state-of-mind relies upon understanding, just as understanding relies upon state-of-mind. To see this, we need only ask why it is that the father's broken hammer makes him angry. This obstruction of the ready-to-hand affecting the father's mood is not arbitrary, but predicated on the *significance* in the world, that is, the broken hammer signifies that work on the rocking horse will not be completed, and this prevents one of the father's possibilities from existing—a possibility that “*matters*” to the father. It is only in the father's understanding the world as significance that the broken hammer may matter to him, and the broken hammer may only matter to him insofar as he can be affected. This is to say, by way of always being in a mood he is thrown into the “there”, he is always as openness/understanding of the world.³⁴

I use “*openness/understanding*” to denote the inseparable nature of these as constituents of the “there”, and, as such, how *understanding* is not to be taken as *knowledge*. The openness/understanding of the “there” is not associated with the content of the knowing-that of the present-at-hand, but rather with the knowing-how of the ready-to-hand and the world as significance.³⁵ As we saw above, it is in Dasein's understanding of significance, as springing forth from the “for-the-sake-of-which” of Dasein, that allows Dasein to encounter ‘world’, and it is only in Dasein's encountering and *understanding* ‘world’ may something like a broken hammer affect Dasein's state-of-mind. Like a fish in water, we are “there” *in* the world in our necessary openness to its significance and affection.³⁶

In the understanding of the “for-the-sake-of-which”, the significance which is grounded therein, is disclosed along with it. The disclosedness of understanding, as the disclosedness of the “for-the-sake-of-which” and of significance equiprimordially, pertains to the entirety of Being-in-the-world. Significance is that on the basis of which the world is disclosed as such. To say that the “for-the-sake-of-which” *and* significance are both disclosed in Dasein, means that Dasein is that entity which, as Being-in-the-world, is an issue for itself.³⁷

Here our answer is clear. Dasein, as openness/understanding, is “there” *in* the world, and, in understanding itself to be the “for-the-sake-of-which” that structures world

³³Heidegger, *Being and Time*, H. 135.

³⁴Sheehan, “A paradigm shift in Heidegger research”, p. 193, I borrow the terminology “openness” from Sheehan, although Sheehan goes further than I am willing, and translates the *Da* of Dasein as not “there” but “open”, concluding that Dasein is not “Being-there” but a “having-to-be-open”.

³⁵Olafson, *Heidegger and the Philosophy of Mind*, pp. 111-112.

³⁶I use “affection” in the archaic sense of the process of being affected.

³⁷Heidegger, *Being and Time*, H. 143.

as significance, Dasein may *see* itself, that is, the Being of Dasein may finally come into view, such that Dasein may catch sight of it and understand it, and thereby, Being may be an ‘issue’ for Dasein.³⁸

Bringing the Being of Dasein into view, the ‘issue’

In investigating *world*, we found that Dasein encounters entities as ready-to-hand, and the way in which we understand encountering rejects our notion of the subject/object divide. The ready-to-hand is freed in a totality of involvements of “in-order-to” and “towards-which” relations, the ultimate of which is the “for-the-sake-of-which”—Dasein. As the beginning/end of the totality of involvements, Dasein gives it structure and thus discloses the world as significance. Thus, in its Being, Dasein has ‘worldhood’. Then, in investigating *Being-in*, we found that Dasein is “there” *in* the world, through having state-of-mind and understanding, and only through this way is it possible for the world, as significance, to be disclosed to Dasein. As such, we found Dasein is openness/understanding. In this way, as Heidegger says, “*Dasein is its disclosedness.*”³⁹

It is important to note that there are not two concepts here; it is not that Dasein has *worldhood* and has the “there” as openness/understanding, but that Dasein is inextricably “there” *in* the world, in affection and understanding.⁴⁰ To think of these things as separable introduces the problem that in order for Dasein to understand itself in its Being it requires self-reflection, but this would be to fall back into the subject/object divide, where Dasein is an ‘inner’ sphere and the world an ‘outer’. Dasein, as openness/understanding *in* the world, needs no mirror to turn this light back on its own Being—as Being-in-the-world, Dasein’s openness/understanding is itself *in* the world, a world that is disclosed with Dasein a necessary and inextricable part.

Thus we see that in examining Dasein in its ontological structure of Being-in-the-world, there is a clear avenue for Dasein to understand itself in its Being, such that Being may be an ‘issue’ for it.

Conclusion & criticisms

We started with the question: how is Being an ‘issue’ for Dasein? This is proposed in Heidegger’s original postulate that Dasein, in its Being, has a relationship towards that Being, and in understanding itself in its Being, Dasein then has an understanding of Being. But this raised the question of how Dasein, without a clear picture of Being to start, may understand itself in its Being; we needed a way in which to bring Being into view, such that Dasein might *see* it. This way is revealed in Dasein’s ontological structure, such that Dasein, as openness/understanding, may be disclosed to itself in its Being. This, as I see it, is the only way Dasein might have a primordial understanding of Being, such that Being can be an ‘issue’ for it.

What I have provided in this essay is a way in which the Being of Dasein is ontologically brought into view, such that Dasein may understand itself in its Being.

³⁸My terminology (“brought into view”, “catching sight of”) is not intended to suggest that Dasein’s understanding of Being is somehow dim or distant, but quite the opposite. As we are talking at the level of fundamental ontology, “view” and “sight” should not be mistaken for the fallible human senses, but at a primordial level.

³⁹Heidegger, *Being and Time*, H.133.

⁴⁰Sheehan, “A paradigm shift in Heidegger research”, p. 195.

This is not to say how we should understand the Being of Dasein, since Heidegger explicitly says that the Being of Dasein is *care*. My intention was never to examine the Being of Dasein, but rather in explicating the ontological structure of its state of Being as Being-in-the-world. Provided this avenue for catching sight of its Being, we are clearer on how Being may be an ‘issue’ for Dasein.

One might make the charge that the whole question of Dasein’s priority is restricted to its ontical character, and, as such, my investigation into Being as an ‘issue’ for Dasein in fundamental ontology is missing the point. However, we should recall that Dasein is “ontically distinctive in that it *is* ontological.” If Dasein is to understand itself *in* its Being, it must understand itself as “Being-ontological”.⁴¹ It is this “Being-ontological” understanding of Dasein on which I have tried to focus my investigation.

Or one might take issue with the structure of my investigation, in that the priority of Dasein is predicated on the existential analytic of Dasein, which itself is justified on the priority of Dasein. The criticism of circularity is obvious, and I have little in defence of this, except to say that *Being and Time* is itself circular thought, a result that necessarily arises if the central question can be formulated as “what is *is*?” Thus the work has been described as having “a spiral structure in which a sequence of reinterpretations produces an ever more illuminating comprehension of Being.”⁴² My only reprieve comes from Heidegger:

The ‘circle’ in understanding belongs to the structure of meaning, and the latter phenomenology is rooted in the existential constitution of Dasein—that is, in the understanding which interprets. An entity for which, as Being-in-the-world, its Being is itself an issue, has, ontologically, a circular structure.⁴³



⁴¹Heidegger, *Being and Time*, H. 12.

⁴²**Wheeler:2013.**

⁴³Heidegger, *Being and Time*, H. 153.

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