Objectivity and Reflection in Heidegger's Theory of Intentionality

ABSTRACT: *Heidegger claims that Dasein's capacity for adopting intentional stances toward the world is grounded in the reflective structure of its being, which dictates that Dasein exists for the sake of a possibility of itself. Commentators have glossed this reflective structure in terms of the idea that our subjection to the normative demands of intentionality is grounded in a basic commitment to upholding an identity-concept, such as an occupation or a social role. I argue that this gloss has serious adverse implications for Heidegger's philosophical project and for the internal coherence of his theory of intention. I recommend an alternative gloss on the reflective structure of existence, according to which sustaining a robust claim to openness to the world specifies the universal, formal object of intentional stance-taking. The reflective structure of existence should be understood through the concept of* self-maintenance *rather than that of* self-definition.*

1. Introduction

In his lectures and writings in the 1920s, Heidegger analyzes the intentionality, or object-directedness, of human activity. Yet Heidegger's approach to intentionality embraces commitments that point in contrary directions. On the one hand, Heidegger observes that the intentional stances we adopt aspire to objectivity: 'intentional comportment as such orients itself toward the present-at-hand' (GA 24: 88).[1] When we observe an object or use it, he claims, we aim to grasp the thing just as it already is. In consequence of this aim, our stances claim to understand the being of their objects. By contrast, to construe these stances as 'cut off' from their objects in any way is to fall prey to a distortion of theory in the form of an 'erroneous subjectivizing of intentionality' (GA 24: 91). For Heidegger, we cannot make sense of intentionality as anything less than a responsiveness to entities as they are in themselves.

1 In referring to Heidegger's collected works, I will cite the volume and pagination of the *Gesamtausgabe* (GA). Except where noted, all translations are my own.

Yet, even as Heidegger endorses the objectivity of our world-directed attitudes, he maintains that these same attitudes exhibit a reflective structure: they aim to realize some possibility of their agent's being. In consequence, our stances toward the world discover objects always in light of how they matter to our projects, their appearance reflecting what we care about and who we care to be. This reflective structure, called 'care', grounds the normative order that makes intentionality possible. These two governing commitments, to care and to objectivity, stand in apparent tension, for while Heidegger's account of intentional comportment portrays us as beholden to the things themselves, his account of normativity insists that, in the end, we are accountable only to our own self-understanding. It seems we must either hold faith that our reflective commitments grant us unfettered exposure to entities as they are or else concede that our understanding is *of being* in name only.

This prima facie tension is in a certain way exacerbated by the fact that Heidegger explicitly *identifies* an agent's self-understanding with her understanding of being (Heidegger 2006: 143, GA 24: 394–95). To motivate this identification, Heidegger invites us to observe that to understand oneself as (for example) a shoemaker just *is* to understand how to employ the objects properly that populate the workshop environment in pursuing the ends constitutive of that occupation. Yet examples of this kind suggest, at most, that any self-understanding comprises an understanding of how to traffic with certain entities within the world. They do not show that every conception of how to respond appropriately to entities in the world corresponds to a familiar self-concept. Given the imperfections of the equivalence, we are confronted with the question of how to understand the relative priority of understanding of self and world in the normative landscape of agency on Heidegger's account. Are we to understand agents as guided by their self-concepts *because* these concepts articulate their understanding of how to navigate the world? Or are agents led to navigate the world as they do *because* they are committed to their particular self-concepts?

The dilemma points us to Heidegger's account of the basic structure of intentional comportment. This account appears mercifully unambiguous. For Heidegger describes Dasein as universally striving toward an object, called 'the for-the-sake-of-which', that he identifies as a 'possibility of [Dasein's] being' that is 'at issue' for the agent in each case. This description has seemed to settle the question in favor of the normative priority of self-understanding. For it appears to portray Dasein as continually striving to realize a contingent, self-conceived possibility of intentional agency, such as a practical identity, social role, or occupation. Since this possibility represents the fundamental object of intention, it provides the natural standard against which our stances are to be assessed. The normative demands we undertake in consequence of intending entities must be subordinate to those of living up to the demands of our chosen identities. In what follows, I shall call the claim that our contingent self-conceptions explain—and so circumscribe—our capacity for responding intelligently to objects the Primacy of Care thesis.

However strong its textual motivations, ascribing the Primacy of Care thesis to Heidegger evidently places a tremendous burden on Heidegger's conception of the objectivity of intentionality. For accommodating the thesis has seemed to require either committing Heidegger to a relativistic metaphysics—on which our identities

simply determine the character that entities can have—or else demonstrating that robust objectivity can be achieved by a commitment to a contingent practical identity when that commitment becomes 'authentic.' Exemplars of the former strategy are provided by those readings that treat Heidegger's term 'being' as a synonym for 'intelligibility'. On such readings, aiming to grasp entities with respect to their being is just grasping them in terms of the sense they currently make to us (cf. Sheehan 2001: 189–92; Braver 2007: 186; and Dreyfus 1991: 16–23, 262). Despite its widespread influence, this strategy is controversial: Blattner (1999: 3–4) argues that it trivializes the argumentative agenda of *Sein und Zeit*, while Okrent (1988: 201–18, 2000: 72–74) regards it is a philosophical failure. The latter strategy, pioneered by Haugeland (2000) and Crowell (2007a), has gained influence in recent years but remains a minority position. Whatever the relative merits of the positions, the strains undertaken in pursuit of both strategies attest to the fact that a great exegetical burden would be lifted if it could be shown that self-understanding and world-understanding coincide more perfectly. Heidegger's apparent commitment to the Primacy of Care has seemed to foreclose upon such hopes.

Yet I will argue that the Primacy of Care thesis is rooted in a misunderstanding of the character of Heidegger's analysis of intentionality. For Heidegger aims, above all, to specify *what it is* for something *to be* an object of intention or care. Consequently, Heidegger cannot, on pain of circularity, endorse the claim that agents' self-conceptions provide the basic object of their intentional striving: for an agent's self-conception is a contingently intended object, something cared about. To rectify this difficulty, I will offer an alternative reading of Heidegger's account of the structure of intention that avoids this circularity by inverting the priority of self-understanding and world-understanding. The resultant reading, which I shall call the Formal Object reading, takes Heidegger's analysis of care to show that our intentional stances aim not at realizing any contingent identity or social role, but at sustaining a self-understood relation we bear toward things. For Heidegger claims that our intentional stances are one and all directed at sustaining our ability-to-be-in-the-world, our capacity to inhabit our environment by making sense of it. In aiming to sustain our openness to the world, however, our stances become immediately beholden to their proximate objects. On this reading, Heidegger's theory of intention embraces no subjectivism about normativity but instead aims to characterize intentional agency as a distinctively *self-sustained* capacity.

The Primacy of Care thesis I intend to attack represents a centerpiece of most interpretations of *Sein und Zeit*. Consequently, the preliminary case I make against its acceptance must necessarily ignore some passages that, having long been read in its light, might seem to be readily marshaled in its defense. Moreover, many of the passages that speak directly to the question of the structure of intention prove to be profoundly ambiguous once the possibility of a Formal Object reading is admitted. Hence, I cannot realistically hope to establish the textual superiority of the Formal Object reading outright. Moreover, I shall offer only a preliminary sketch of how this alternative reading should be elaborated and fitted to the text of *Sein und Zeit*. I hope readers will forgive these infelicities. This paper aims only to identify a threat of incoherence that strikes against the received reading and to indicate a promising

revision of our understanding of Heidegger's theory of intentionality that would assuage the difficulty.

2. The Problematic Objectivity of Practice

I will begin by locating the conflict of principles described above in the context of *Sein und Zeit* in order to specify the interpretive task of the paper. Those familiar with *Sein und Zeit* and its reception might bristle at the suggestion that there is a tension between objectivity and reflection in Heidegger's thought since Heidegger clearly gives priority to *practical* intentionality and thus privileges contexts in which this tension might appear to be absent. As Heidegger famously insists, the entities we encounter first in our environment, and to which we are primarily beholden, are not objects of detached perception but objects of practical use, 'equipment'. The character of such objects is fixed by their practical role. In this context, there may seem to be no tension between care and objectivity, since it is natural to suppose that items of equipment acquire their determinate roles in relation to our particular, prevailing projects and interests at any given time. In that case, being beholden to the equipmental character of the hammer would involve nothing more than recognizing how it conduces or fails to conduce to accomplishing one's current projects. Granting the premise that our use of equipment provides our basic and foundational mode of access to our environment, it may indeed seem that we have nothing but ourselves to be faithful to.

In fact, however, it is possible to locate the tension even in Heidegger's discussion of our practical engagements. For Heidegger characterizes our access to items of equipment as a distinctive form of receptivity:

> Hammering itself uncovers the specific 'handiness' of the hammer. The way of being of equipment, in which it shows itself from itself, we call readiness-to-hand. Only because equipment has this 'being-in-itself' and does not merely occur, is it handy in the broadest sense and at our disposal.... The merely 'theoretical' inspection of things is devoid of understanding readiness-to-hand. The contact that uses and employs is, however, not blind, but has its own kind of sight, which guides the employment and imparts to it its specific certitude. Dealing with equipment subordinates itself to the referential manifold of the 'in order to'. The sight of such accommodation is *circumspection*. (Heidegger 2006: 69)

Heidegger holds that the sound employment of equipment becomes possible through a kind of vision called 'circumspection'. But as Heidegger insists, what circumspection discovers about entities, e.g., the functional role of the hammer in building houses, is 'not to be understood as merely a way of taking them, as if we were talking such aspects into the entities we first encounter' (Heidegger 2006: 71). Rather, circumspection is a way of discovering entities just as they already

are. Indeed, Heidegger holds that when we encounter the hammer and put it to use, we discover not only its instrumental function but *also* the end that makes this function necessary in the circumstances, 'that which is to be produced at the time' (Heidegger 2006: 70). The activity of using ready-to-hand equipment is thus an act of 'letting something ready-to-hand *be* thus-and-so *as* it already is': *letting* the item have the practical role that suits it independently of one's particular projects and preconceptions (Heidegger 2006: 84). In *Sein und Zeit*, Heidegger thus suggests the possibility that our practical dealings may grasp or fail to grasp their objects just as they are *in themselves*. And since grasping an end *qua end* is grasping it as 'that which is to be done', grasping practical matters aright requires not merely that we adopt correct means but that we pursue ends that are recognizably appropriate to our circumstances as well.

This apparent pretense to objectivity in our practical engagements with the ready-to-hand appears to be undermined, however, by Heidegger's account of the underlying structure of our practical capacity. For Heidegger appears to suggest that the intelligibility of practical paraphernalia always takes root in reference to the agent's self-understanding. The order of involvements that constitutes the intelligibility of practical paraphernalia assumes the following structure:

> That in which [*Wobei*] [an item of ready-to-hand equipment] is involved is the to-this [*Dazu*] of serviceability and the for-what [*Wofür*] of usability. With the to-this of serviceability there can again be an involvement: with this thing, for example, which is ready-to-hand, and which for the following reason we call a hammer, there is an involvement in hammering; with hammering, there is an involvement in fastening; with fastening, there is an involvement in protecting against storms; and this protection is for the sake of accommodating Dasein— that is to say, for the sake of a possibility of its being.... [T]he totality of involvements itself goes back ultimately to a to-this in which there is *no* further involvement: this to-this is not an entity with the kind of being that belongs to what is ready-to-hand within the world; it is rather an entity whose being is defined as being-in-the-world and to whose ontological constitution worldhood itself belongs. This primary to-which [*Wozu*] is not just another to-this as a possible in-which of an involvement. The primary to-which is a for-the-sake-of-which. The 'for the sake of' however always pertains to the being of Dasein, for which in its being this being itself is always essentially an issue. (Heidegger 2006: 84)

Here we see that all chains of practical significance—hence all acts of practical discovery—find their ground in accommodating some possibility of Dasein's being, which is an issue for Dasein in each case. For everyday Dasein, the content of this 'possibility' is presumably filled in by an account of what *one* (*das Man*) does as a certain kind of agent. But to say that the possibility is an issue is evidently to suppose that it falls to the agent in each case to determine the possibility's content.

The commitment that flows from this determination appears to constitute the fundamental object of our voluntary effort that fixes our practical and normative orientation in the world.

Taking these points at face value encourages us to locate, in Heidegger, an emphasis on agents' practical identities that recalls the 'existential Kantian' account of our practical capacity developed by Christine Korsgaard (for Korsgaard's account of the role of practical identity in voluntary action, see Korsgaard 1996: 100–101, 120–21, 2009: 18–26; Okrent (2000) and Crowell (2007b) develop the comparison between Korsgaard's account and Heidegger's). On the reading that results, which I shall call the Practical Identity reading, Heidegger, like Korsgaard, holds that our capacity to set and pursue ends is grounded in a more basic capacity to 'constitute ourselves' by committing to uphold the constitutive standards of a form of life, role, or occupation. It is thus in virtue of my effort to be, for example, a college professor that, as Okrent explains, 'I experience the paper as to be written, my texts as to be consulted, and my computer as to be pounded' (Okrent 2000: 69). Unlike Korsgaard, however, Heidegger denies that there is any objectively apt self-conception—of oneself as a human being or rational chooser, for example—to which our particular, contingent practical identity commitments must answer. Even the authentic agent who 'discloses to itself its own... being' (Heidegger 2006: 129) does not choose in light of some singular, fundamental self-description. Instead, it confronts the question of how to proceed as one to which 'only the resolution itself can give the answer' (Heidegger 2006: 298). In the lectures of 1928, Heidegger elaborates on the idea that our identities and purposes resist 'objective' specification:

> Dasein, we can say, exists for the sake of something, so now we must determine, in terms of its content, that for the sake of which Dasein exists. What is the final aim for the sake of which humankind exists? With this we would have the decisive question. But only seemingly.... [The question] assumes that it can somehow be decided objectively, while in the end the content of the question itself is such that only the questioner can pose this question for himself and answer it in the genuine sense. But if this is so, it must be shown why it is so. In other words, it must become clear from the metaphysics of Dasein why Dasein, according to the essence of its being, must itself take over the question concerning the final end and answer it, why the search for an objective answer is in itself a, or indeed even *the* misunderstanding of human existence in general. (GA 26: 238–39)

This passage seems to confirm Heidegger's abiding commitment to the Primacy of Care thesis, for it portrays Dasein as 'taking over' the question of what it exists 'for the sake of' and determining its answer to that question without reference to any external standard.

Yet, there seems to be good reason to worry whether an intentional capacity so described will be well-suited to grasp entities as they are 'in themselves'. For while

the act of committing ourselves to an identity will require us to take account of the characteristics of objects and persons in our midst in order to determine how these will, and will not, conduce to our efforts to embody that identity, we will be limited in our capacity to respond to objects *as they are* to those circumstances in which there is no gap between *how the objects really are* and *how our identities demand that we take them*. Proponents of the Practical Identity reading may insist that this gap cannot open by allowing as many 'worlds' as there are identities to embody. But this would seem to 'subjectivize' intentionality no less than the Cartesianism Heidegger so trenchantly opposes. Recoiling from such a prospect, Practical Identity readers may hope to close the gap by pointing out that, for Heidegger, our identifications may break down in adverse circumstances. We can succumb to the mood of anxiety, they will observe, that alienates us from our commitments; we can anticipate the 'death' of our identities; we can detect, in the voice of conscience, a call to assess the validity of the norms we live by. In these moments of authentic being, we may find a way of inhabiting our identities or a standpoint of reflection upon them that requires us to concern ourselves with entities as they really are (cf. Haugeland 2000; Crowell 2007a: 57–58 and 2013: 209–10; and Burch 2010). This latter line of response has much promise—not least because it allows us to make out the philosophical purchase of several very obscure discussions in Heidegger's text—but it skirts the fundamental issue in at least two respects.

First, if I am right, the conflict between the demands of objectivity and the care-based analysis of normativity appears even at the level of Heidegger's basic phenomenology of everyday practice. For, as I noted above, our everyday practical vision presents tasks and projects under the guise of practical necessity as just *what is to be done* in the circumstances. But Heidegger's analysis of practical intentionality seems to insist that this appearance of necessity is, strictly speaking, false since the necessities that govern us are conditioned by how we happen to understand ourselves, and there is *no* necessity attaching to *that*. The appearance of practical necessity is in that case inexplicable. *Pace* the appearances, no computer is ever 'to be pounded', because no agent is ever 'to be professored'. The only imperatives in play are hypothetical, and the satisfaction of their antecedents is perpetually 'at issue' for each agent.

Second, and more fundamentally, the voluntaristic theory of intentional norms that Heidegger appears to endorse on the Practical Identity reading threatens to render the method of *Sein und Zeit* extremely peculiar. Recall that the project of Heidegger's work is to reawaken the question of the sense of being. Heidegger argues that it is appropriate to approach this question via an analysis of Dasein's being because Dasein is that entity who asks what being means (Heidegger 2006: 5–7). But if *our* basic aim is to settle upon the sense of being as such, it would seem unpropitious to approach this question by reference to an entity who only considers such matters when it falters in settling the supposedly prior question of who it is. At least it would surely have been better to find an entity that simply 'is as it is' because it is likewise constitutively 'directed upon Being as such' (Heidegger 2006: 146). Perhaps no such entity avails itself for phenomenological reflection; perhaps no such entity is even possible. But why not? Indeed, why could *we* not be that

very entity? We must reconsider Heidegger's account of the structure of intention in more detail to assess his answer.

3. Reflexive Intentionality and the Problem of Normative Governance

The Practical Identity reading purports to gloss Heidegger's account of the structure of intentional activity. I shall reassess the credentials of this reading by taking stock of what Heidegger's account purports to show. Doing so will reveal that, on the Practical Identity reading, Heidegger's account cannot do the work he asks of it.

Heidegger seeks to understand the fact that our intentional attitudes and behaviors take shape under the guidance of their objects. Heidegger seeks to explain this fact by identifying a metaphysical characteristic of intentional stance-taking that he calls 'freedom'. 'Freedom', in Heidegger's special sense, names the capacity to hold oneself responsible to norms, to raise and answer demands for reasons (GA 26: 25–26, 276). Heidegger articulates the basic philosophical question of freedom from his standpoint as follows:

> How must that entity which is subject to such laws, Dasein itself, be constituted so as to be able to stand under such lawfulness? How 'is' Dasein according to its essence that in it and for it such an obligation as that of logical law can arise?...

> [O]bligation and law, in themselves, presuppose freedom as the basis for their own possibility. Only what exists as a free entity could in general be bound by a law as obligatory. Only freedom can be the basis of commitment. A basic problem of logic, the lawfulness of thinking, reveals itself to be a problem of human existence in its ground, the problem of freedom. (GA 26: 24–25)

If freedom is what allows us to impose an 'obligatory law' upon our activities, then, plausibly, freedom will provide a condition on intentionality. This is because the very possibility of 'directing' ourselves toward objects presupposes that we have a capacity to 'bind ourselves' to them: to make the characteristics of an object into standards of successful comportment toward it (cf. Crowell 2007a: 45 and Golob 2014: 195–96). Understanding 'freedom' in this special Heideggerian sense, however, does not call so much for a metaphysics of free will as for an account of the structure of the activity of intentional stance-taking. For what we need to answer the question of 'freedom' as Heidegger understands it above is an account of that feature of intentional comportments that renders them answerable to normative standards. Heidegger's official answer indicates that freedom lies in Dasein's transcendence, that is, in the fact that 'Dasein exists for the sake of Dasein's being and its ability-to-be' (GA 26: 186), and every exercise of freedom serves to realize some possibility of Dasein's own being.

The Practical Identity reading identifies the 'possibility of the agent's being' targeted by transcendence with a contingently chosen practical identity. To assess this reading, we must first understand *why* it could be a condition on the normative regulation of intentional stances in general that the fundamental object of intention be a practical self-conception. Steven Crowell and Mark Okrent have answered this challenge by arguing that the reflexive character of our will is what allows norms associated with the constitution of objects to come to bear on our activity. On their view, it is our commitment to being a particular type of agent that brings our conduct within the scope of the normative requirements of intentionality. As Crowell explains,

> The *Worumwillen* [for-the-sake-of-which] is not another aim or goal but a possible way of being a self that constitutes the self-determining principle essential to action. I hammer nails in order to secure boards, but such action always has a self-referential dimension as well: I am *trying* to be a carpenter; being one (practically) is an *issue* for me. When I try to exercise the skills that define that way to be, try to live up to the demands of the job, I act for the sake of a possibility of my own being, and only so can things present themselves to me in light of *their* possibilities. (Crowell 2007b: 319)

On this view, intending the for-the-sake-of-which is necessary for the constitutive standards that define objects—for example, equipment—to legislate or make sense of what I do. Absent my thinking of myself as a carpenter, for example, I might remain indifferent to the role of the hammer in securing boards. My intending to be a carpenter is what refers me to this item of equipment and makes me receptive to, and governable by, the standards of its proper use. Similarly, Okrent writes,

> Heidegger says that there is thus a double intentionality involved in acting with tools as they are to be used by a certain type of agent. One acts in order to achieve the ends which are characteristic of that type of agent.... All of the norms that I experience these items in terms of are rooted in the 'world' of the professor, a world that is in part defined by those very norms. But since it is only a particular type of agency that is governed by these particular norms, it is only a certain type of agent that is governed by these norms. So in acknowledging these norms as normative for me by acting as professors act, I also acknowledge the norms of professorial behavior as governing me, and commit myself to being a professor, rather than a bike rider, alas. (Okrent 2000: 69)

For both Crowell and Okrent, what Heidegger's theory of intention must do is show how the constitutive standards that determine an entity come to regulate my conduct. The theory accomplishes this task by linking those standards to an understanding of who I am to which I am committed.

There is much to be said on behalf of this account of the genesis of our intentional stances. In view of the stated aspirations of Heidegger's theory of intention, however, there is a worrisome failure-of-fit implied by the proposal. For Heidegger appears to be concerned with the fact that it belongs to the being of intentional stances to be subject to normative regulation. The Practical Identity reading appears to propose that we understand this generality by appeal to one of its instances: namely, regulation by the norms of a practical identity. Plainly, this will be satisfying only if we find the regulative power of a self-interpretation less mystifying than that of a constitutive standard for an intended object. In framing the basic question of his account in terms of the possibility of 'obligatory lawfulness', however, Heidegger suggests that it is normative regulation *as such* that must be explained. As a consequence, the Practical Identity account must peg its explanation on an appeal to the very phenomenon it is invoked to elucidate.

Both Crowell and Okrent maintain that intentional comportment involves a 'double-intentionality': whenever one acts, one is at the same time trying to do something and trying to be someone. But Heidegger would seem to invoke this double intentionality in order to account for our subjection to normative requirements in general, even of the most fundamental kind. When Heidegger explicitly raises the question of normative regulation in the passage above, he does so with respect to the fundamental laws of logic: the law of noncontradiction, the law of identity, and so on. But these laws are plausibly constitutive principles of *sense-making* in general. And it would seem viciously circular to explain the capacity for making sense of things in general by appeal to an instance of our *making sense of ourselves* in some particular, contingent way. For we should have to be *already bound by* the laws of logic in order to be capable of putting forth, for example, that we are carpenters (or whatever). We could avoid this circularity by supposing that the self-directed intention is merely necessary and not a sufficient condition of normative regulation, but only at the cost of reneging upon Heidegger's claim that Dasein's reflective nature, its transcendence, constitutes it capacity for normative regulation. If what we need is an explanation of the norm-governedness of intentional activity in general, an appeal to double intentionality seems ill-suited for the work.

Heidegger clearly believes our capacity to be governed by norms consists in our intending the 'for-the-sake-of-which', which he identifies as a 'possibility of Dasein's being'. If the preceding observations are apt, then it is Heidegger's account of intentionality itself that risks incoherence (cf. Okrent 2000:72–74). But in fact, there is another way to understand the 'for-the-sake-of-which' and the role it plays in Heidegger's account of intention. Perhaps the 'for-the-sake-of-which' is not a name for a distinct object of intentional effort at all but is instead intended to designate a 'formal object' in the sense invoked by the Aristotelian and scholastic traditions (a helpful account of the lineage of this concept may be found in chapter 10 of Kenny [1963]). Correspondingly, when Heidegger writes that Dasein acts in each case 'for the sake of a possibility of Dasein's being', perhaps he means for the stress to fall upon the second genitive construction, '*of Dasein's* being'. Understood in this way, the role of the for-the-sake-of-which would be to introduce a restriction on the possible objects of our intentional stances in accordance with what sustains,

as against what would not sustain, Dasein's very being. As I shall seek to show, this hypothesis saves Heidegger's theory of intention from incoherence and allows us to reconcile satisfactorily the competing principles informing Heidegger's account.

4. The Structure of Heideggerian Intentions Reconsidered

As noted above, Heidegger wishes to identify that general structure of intentional acts in virtue of which these acts can transpire under the guidance of an understanding of their objects. Heidegger names this structure Dasein's 'transcendence', and he argues that its apt description is: 'being for the sake of one's ability-to-be'. As we have seen, readers typically understand the 'ability-to-be' that is picked out by this description to be a *variable*: a self-conception specific to each agent. But the troubles to which the Practical Identity reading gives rise may be avoided if we understand the 'ability-to-be' instead as a constant, a singular object that acquires fully determinate content in the context of a general account of being of intention. Indeed, there is reason to think that Heidegger *must* identify such a singular object if he is to hold fast to the explanatory ambitions of his work.

We can find a pretext for regarding the for-the-sake-of-which as a formal object in an important but difficult passage from the *Metaphysical Foundations of Logic*:

> The for-the-sake-of-which is what it is in and for a will. But this does not mean the existentiell-ontic act, but rather in turn the metaphysical essence, the inner possibility of the will: freedom. In freedom such a for-the-sake-of-which has always already emerged. The self-availing of the for-the-sake-of-which belongs to the essence of freedom. Something like the for-the-sake-of-which is not somehow on hand [*vorhanden*], to which freedom is subsequently related, but instead freedom is the origin of the for-the-sake-of-which; but again, not such that there would first be freedom and then also the-for-the-sake-of-which, but freedom is one with the for-the-sake-of-which. (GA 26: 246–47)

This passage indicates an internal connection between the for-the-sake-of-which and the 'metaphysical essence' of will, that is, freedom. This connection dictates that we cannot understand an agent's freedom, her capacity to intend, separately from her intending the object Heidegger calls the for-the-sake-of-which or vice versa. Rather, freedom is 'one with'—constituted by—the agent's intending the for-the-sake-of-which. But if that is correct about the capacity to intend in general, it supports the thought that the for-the-sake-of-which is a formal object against the claim that it is a variable object of a 'double intentionality'.

To see why, note that the double intentionality analysis suggests that everything we do involves the co-occurrence of two independent exercises of our intentional capacity: one directed at the object, the other at our self-conceived identity. But as the double intentionality analysis would have it, we can understand both objects separately from the capacity that targets them. If I use a hammer in the context of

building a house, for example, I can be described as both *trying* to hammer and *trying* to be a carpenter. But I could give up hammering or being a carpenter without abrogating my capacity to will. Hence, the end of being a carpenter, as a candidate 'for-the-sake-of-which', is separable from the essence of my will. Nor does my ceasing to will the end of being a carpenter make the end of being a carpenter unintelligible. 'Being a carpenter' seems to be something already 'on hand', which *might* be joined to my free capacity should I happen to intend it.

But the passage cited above suggests that we cannot understand the relationship between the will and the for-the-sake-of-which in such terms. For Heidegger claims that the for-the-sake-of-which is 'one with' freedom and hence 'one with' the intelligibility of an activity as intentional. If that is the right way to understand the unity of freedom with the for-the-sake-of-which, then the for-the-sake-of-which cannot name a variable object of intentional effort. If it did, it would make sense to ask: what constitutes the fact that an agent wills *this* for-the-sake-of-which rather than another? Yet the passage tells us that this question is out of order. For it is precisely the relationship to the for-the-sake-of-which that makes an act intelligible *as intended* in the first place. On pain of circularity, the object that Heidegger calls the 'for-the-sake-of-which' cannot be a practical identity that is contingent or specific to the agent. Rather, it must be a single object characteristically targeted by every intentional act as such. Yet Heidegger plausibly identifies such an object in Dasein's 'ability-to-be'.

So far, I have followed commentators in taking 'Dasein's ability-to-be' to name a variable, whose content is determined by the agent in each case. Now let us consider what content the locution could have if it were understood to name a formal constant. Consider that Heidegger uses the expression 'Dasein's ability-to-be' as a shorthand for the ability-to-be-in-the-world, i.e., the ability to be 'with others in the ability-to-be-amidst present-at-hand things' (GA 26: 247). 'Being-with' and 'being-amidst', however, denote conditions of our understanding *access* to persons and things, respectively. In that case, our 'ability-to-be' denotes our capacity to intend entities within our environment. We ought then to consider whether Heidegger might mean that our activities are intentional in that they serve to sustain the very capacities for access they exercise, that is, they are intentional in that they are *self*-sustaining *qua* intentional.

To substantiate the suggestion, let us first identify a sense in which our intentional activities may be aptly called 'self-sustaining' on Heidegger's understanding. Heidegger's analysis in Division I of *Sein und Zeit* implies that our openness to things comprises a number of distinct subcapacities: the ability to distinguish and interpret objects with respect to what they can and cannot be (§31); the ability for the contents of such interpretation to *matter* to one in determinate ways (§29); and the ability to articulate the contents of one's interpretations in language (§34). Meanwhile, he depicts the exercise of these capacities as constrained by their social and historical setting, circumscribed within conditions in which what can be the case, what can matter and for what reason, and what one can do (with what, for what purpose, and so on) have already been publicly and authoritatively delimited (cf. §27, §58). This discrepancy in origin between the determinate capacity our activities serve to sustain and the material constraints that shape the exercise of this

capacity implies that we may not take for granted that our inherited capacity for making sense of our world will achieve its aspiration. For there will be no guarantee that the concepts and practices that shape the exercise of our intentional capacities will be adequate to make our circumstances *accessible* and *comprehensible* to us. As Heidegger observes at the beginning of Division II, we are exposed to the possibility of a peculiar 'death', distinguished not by a cessation of biological function but a *loss of intentionality*. In the face of such a liminal threat, only our situated effort to make sense of our circumstances can secure—or fail to secure—our claim to being open to them.

Granting, then, that a certain sense can be made of the suggestion that our intentional capacities require sustenance, let us reconsider what might be meant by calling such sustenance the *aim* of these capacities' exercise. Recall the passage that introduces the for-the-sake-of-which in section 2 above. There, Heidegger identifies the 'for-the-sake-of-which' of Dasein's hammering with the end of providing protection against bad weather. Heidegger mentions no social role, occupation, or self-conceit in this context. Instead, he appears *to identify* the agent's for-the-sake-of-which with a perfectly ordinary practical end: affording oneself shelter against the rain. Yet, Heidegger claims that this mundane end can serve as the anchoring point for the practical significance of the hammer because, when it is specified, it allows us to see that the entire chain of involvements leading up to it possesses a special status: this chain of involvements 'is' in that it preserves Dasein's ability-to-be. On the one hand, this is not an implausible thing to say about that chain of involvements: for needlessly suffering one's demise from exposure to the elements would indeed manifest that one had lost the world, taken leave of one's senses, and thus suffered the kind of death to which *Dasein* as such is susceptible. But equally significant is the fact that Heidegger attributes 'being-for-the-sake-of Dasein's ability-to-be' to the end of providing shelter itself. His claim, in other words, pertains to the ontological status of this end as it figures in and (so to speak) 'guides' circumspective action. The thought is that when Dasein wields the hammer in the context depicted by the passage, we can equally describe it as acting for the sake of building a house and acting for the sake of maintaining its ability-to-be—but not because 'maintaining its ability-to-be' is *another* end in addition to the house-building willed by the agent. Rather, in being willed, house-building *is present in the action* of hammering in virtue of being what, here and now, purports to maintain the agent's ability-to-be-in-the-world. Sustaining Dasein's ability-to-be specifies the manner of being of the object of intention *qua* intended. I shall consider how this point about the status of the for-the-sake-of-which allows us to address the worry of circularity below.

5. Normative Governance and the Hylomorphic Model

At first blush, the Formal Object reading sketched above may seem to offer no response to the charge of circularity levied against the Practical Identity reading. For in appealing to a formal end, Heidegger seems to invite us to appeal to *another* instance of normative regulation—to the way in which we are 'guided' by an

understanding of how to sustain our intentional capacities in acting—in order to explain the possibility of normative regulation writ large. Yet I shall argue that this difficulty is removed by appropriately understanding the relationship between the formal and concrete objects of intention and the possibility of their union in authenticity.

I have previously claimed that 'sustaining Dasein's ability-to-be' provides a specification of the kind of being that belongs to an object of intention *as such*. As a heuristic aid to my exposition, I will recast this claim in the more familiar, structurally analogous idiom of matter and form: the concrete, final end of an action is a matter that possesses the form of being-for-the-sake-of Dasein's ability-to-be. This recasting allows us to preserve the vital point that acting for the sake of one's ability-to-be and acting for the sake of a concrete end, such as house-building, can be *the very same phenomenon*. Moreover, it allows us to make use of an important Kantian precedent. In the *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant writes:

> If a rational being is to think of his maxims as practical universal laws, he can think of them only as principles that contain the determining ground of the will not by their matter but only by their form. (Kant [1788] 1997: 24)

Here Kant relies upon a distinction between the 'form' of a maxim—which consists in its claim to universal law-giving—and its matter or concrete object. The significance of this distinction is twofold. In the first place, it allows us to resist the idea that the 'matter' of a given act of willing—that is, the intention to do some concrete thing in some definite circumstance—can be understood as such independently of also conceiving it as embodying a pretense (however hollow) to reflect a principle demanding similar acts of agents similarly circumstanced. And second, it allows us to speak of acts of will as subject to normative regulation from within, namely, on account of bearing, however deficiently, an organization that is constitutive of the successful exercise of the underlying capacity (for a clear explanation of the normative significance of form in Kant's account, see Engstrom [2009: 131]). Using this Kantian account as a model, we can see how Heidegger can rebut the charge of circularity by providing a nonnormative account of the capacity to intend that prescribes a rule for intentional activity.

Heidegger observes that for Kant the laws that govern the will take the form of normative imperatives only insofar as the human will is impure, subject to sensible incentives. A will that is not likewise dependent upon sensibility for its exercise is by contrast able to realize its essence as pure practical reason without fail. As Kant observes, for a 'divine' or 'holy' will, 'the ought is... out of place, because the *would* is already of itself necessarily in agreement with the law' (Kant [1785] 1993: 24; cf. GA 31: 280). Hence, the moral law does not just describe how our will *should* be exercised, but also how the will *is* exercised when it is allowed to be in harmony with its rational nature. The relationship between the moral law and the will is, at this level, *descriptive*: the moral law describes the willing capacity's genuine, unimpeded exercise.

Heidegger's account of Dasein allows for an analogous appeal, because Heidegger describes a possible configuration, called 'authenticity', in which Dasein distinctively *lets itself be as it is*. Heidegger indicates that authenticity is marked by the self-realization of the 'current factical ability-to-be' (Heidegger 2006: 307). That is to say, authentic Dasein distinctively *knows* the nature of the capacity that defines it and hence *that* this capacity is finite and so must be sustained. Authentic Dasein is thus *defined* by its proper grasp of its own being: knowing and acting from this knowledge is not merely what authentic Dasein *should* do, but what, *qua* authentic, it *will* do unfailingly. In virtue of this special connection to its ability-to-be, authentic Dasein's conduct provides a paradigmatic case of normative governance:

> [A]uthentic disclosedness modifies the disclosedness of the co-dasein of others and the discoveredness of the 'world' that is founded therein. The ready-to-hand 'world' does not become another one with respect to its 'content', nor does the circle of others get exchanged for a new one, but the concernful-understanding being toward the ready-to-hand, and the solicitous being-with others become determined on the basis of their ownmost ability to be themselves. (Heidegger 2006: 297–98)

In authenticity, our intentional stances take on an essential character of self-agreement. These stances are brought into being through a knowledge of the capacity that they must sustain and of how this capacity can be sustained in the circumstances. That does not mean that authentic Dasein necessarily possesses adequate knowledge of its circumstances; rather, it means that authentic Dasein *unfailingly* intends what would sustain its openness, given its understanding of the circumstances. But what sustains our openness to entities is our receptivity to the being of those entities, to what and how they are. Hence, because even authentic Dasein's understanding of entities remains at issue for it, its stances towards those entities are distinguished above all by their capacity for 'revocation' (Heidegger 2006: 307–308), Authentic Dasein *knows* that its best efforts can fail: it is alert to the most radical challenges that sustaining its openness to entities may present.

Because of this distinctive realization of fallibility, authentic Dasein can provide the basis for a noncircular understanding of how the normative regulation of intention is possible. For authentic Dasein provides the paradigm case of a form of action that undertakes to sustain an openness to being *as such*—not because it is *guided* by a conception of that openness and what it requires, but because sustaining an openness to the world has become, as it were, the law of its nature. On the basis of this claim, we may say without fear of circularity that to be guided in one's intention by an understanding of the being of one's objects is to do *as authentic Dasein would* with respect to them. Often we fall short of this mark in consequence of laboring under misconceptions about our intentional capacities and what is required to sustain them. In such cases, we realize these capacities in a recognizably deficient mode, *in*authentically. But if authentic Dasein

represents, as I have suggested, the perfect realization of Heideggerian 'freedom', its activity provides the standard against which any exercise of human agency is to be measured.

But in light of this suggestion, what should we make of Heidegger's insistence that the final object of intention belongs to the individual in each case to decide? For the Formal Object reading, this claim must appear extraordinarily hollow. To be sure, the account summarized thus far leaves it up to the individual case of Dasein to identify those concrete ends that will suffice to sustain its ability-to-be. But the account nevertheless portrays Dasein as governed by an objective necessity deriving from the universal form of care. The metaphysics of willing on this account, far from showing that there is no 'objective' answer to the question of what one should will, appears to suggest that such an answer is readily forthcoming as soon as we recognize the intentional, world-directed character of our comportments.

In fact, the sense in which Heidegger denies there is an 'objective' answer to this question must be qualified. Immediately after voicing the insistence that the final end of intention is determined by the agent in each case quoted in section 2 above, Heidegger goes on to explain that the sense in which there is no 'objective' answer lies in the fact that

> In contrast to the truth about the present-at-hand, truth regarding existing entities is truth *for* that which exists. This truth consists only in being-true qua existing. And the questioning must be grasped accordingly: not as inquiry-about but as inquiring-for, wherein it is already asked how the inquirer is commissioned. (GA 26: 239)

Heidegger's point is that the question of what to intend is yoked to the first-person perspective of one who is situated in the world and faced with the incumbent task of sustaining her capacities through action. In that case, the fact that the question of the object of the human will lacks an 'objective' answer need not rule out the possibility of giving a general account of the will and its normative regulation. Only we must understand that our ability to give such an account issues *essentially* from *our own* occupancy of the practical standpoint. We cannot expect to understand the urgency of maintaining our ability-to-be from sideways-on (cf. GA 31:288–89). The agent-relativity of care is thus rehabilitated in the form of an epistemic claim: we comprehend the norms that govern an agent's conduct only by understanding ourselves as cooccupants of a shared practical point of view that looks to satisfy the conditions of its own persistence. To understand another's action, we must place ourselves in the other person's shoes and seek to work out what sustaining *their* openness to being would require.

6. The Transparency of Self-Understanding

As we have noted, Heidegger takes self-understanding and world-understanding to represent two sides of a single coin. Yet, if the prior arguments against the Practical

Identity reading hold, the common illustrations of this point must be misleading, since they suggest that we begin with some conceptually prior notion of a certain kind of agency, and derive from this an understanding of how the world is to be inhabited. The Formal Object reading insists that we must reverse this relationship of conceptual priority. I shall presently detail how.

In the first introduction to *Sein und Zeit*, Heidegger approvingly quotes Aristotle's remark from the *De Anima* that 'the (human) soul is, in a certain way, entities', that which is (*De Anima* 431b20–21, as quoted in Heidegger 2006: 14). This remark suggests that Dasein, as the entity that intends and understands being, takes its character in each case from what it discovers in its world. In that case, what Dasein understands about itself must be derived somehow from what it understands about the entities that confront it and the context of significance in which these entities find their place. The Formal Object reading thus insists by contrast that we must enter the equation of self-understanding and world-understanding from the opposite side: we must see our self-understanding as, in each case, a reflection of our conceptually prior understanding of our circumstances and of how we can sustain our openness to them through action. The question of who I am is, on the Formal Object reading, *transparent to* the question of what there is and how I must cope with it if I am to sustain my claim to understanding being.

In *Sein und Zeit*, Heidegger himself uses the language of 'transparency' to describe the nature of our self-understanding:

> We choose [the term 'transparency'] to designate 'self-knowledge' in a sense which is well understood so as to indicate that here it is not a matter of perceptually tracking down and inspecting a point called the self, but rather one of seizing upon the full disclosedness of being-in-the-world throughout the constitutive moments which are essential to it, and doing so with understanding. In existing, entities sight 'themselves' only in so far as they have become transparent to themselves in equal primordiality in those moments which are constitutive for their existence: their being-amidst the world and their being-with others. (Heidegger 2006: 146; translation modified from Heidegger 1962: 186-97)

This passage suggests that not only is the knowledge we have of ourselves *just* our knowledge of how to navigate the public, practical environments we inhabit, but that the content of our self-understanding is in fact *given by* the disclosedness of being-in-the-world. Likewise, when Heidegger writes in *Basic Problems* that 'each one of us is what he pursues and cares for', and that 'we understand ourselves and our existence by way of the activities we pursue and the things we take care of' (GA 24: 226–27), he can seem to be saying that we understand ourselves in terms of the public roles we discover ourselves occupying. But in point of fact, these phrases, literally construed, express a thought at least equally congenial to the Formal Object account: that what content there is to our 'identity' is given by

our understanding of how to inhabit the world by letting the entities that populate the world be what they are.

To be sure, this suggestion about the source and content of our self-understanding may seem incredible. How, we might wonder, can facts about our circumstances and the entities that populate them *fix* how we conceive of our identity? Certainly, if we conceive the circumstances of interpretation too narrowly, for example, by specifying them in wholly impersonal terms, the account becomes absurd. But this only goes to show that we must not construe the circumstances of interpretation too narrowly, for our circumstances are indeed partly constituted by facts about our person: e.g., by our history, our proclivities, interests, and talents. Once we include these personal facts into our survey of the context of intentional activity, the idea that our self-understood identity reflects our openness to the world regains plausibility. For, taking cognizance of where we come from, what needs doing, what others expect, what comes easily, and what imposes strain (and so on), and operating within the limits prescribed by our received understanding, we readily discover that some ways of responding to the world—and *in so doing* grasping who we are—make attuned sense of our situation while others do not. Sometimes, there may be multiple ways to go, our circumstances leaving us leeway of indifferent choice as to what kind of agent we shall be. Sometimes, meanwhile, the way forward is obscured. The Formal Object reading only insists that *being a self at all* is, for Heidegger, maintaining an attuned understanding of one's circumstances. To understand oneself *as oneself* is *just* to understand, as well as one can, what this maintenance requires here and now.

In this way, the Formal Object reading will encourage us to rethink the place of practical identity concepts within Heidegger's philosophy. For if what we aim at is only the sustenance of our capacity to make sense of what there is and why it matters within our social and historical milieu, there seems to be good reason to doubt whether social roles, occupations, and the like will play a significant role in guiding us much of the time. For a (contingent) practical identity is, from the point of view of the account developed here, only a concept for describing some pattern of comportment that might be urged upon us by our circumstances (or, for inauthentic Dasein, by the public interpretation of the same). And while my circumstances may sometimes demand that I act as a student, a friend, or an advocate for justice, for example, they need not always do any such thing. The demands of maintaining our situated openness need not coincide with any such familiar pattern. The Formal Object reading insists that it is enough for my activities to embody *my* agency that they recognizably reflect my understanding of the response the circumstances call for: if you like, that they sustain my identity as world-disclosing Dasein. The concept of a contingent identity or social role may capture this understanding and aid in its expression, but the correspondence will be a happenstance of no special theoretical import.

Beyond its exegetical credentials and its ability to overcome the threat of incoherence, we ought also to recognize a benefit that the Formal Object reading supplies in cohering with our everyday understanding of the intelligibility of human action. When we explain an action by rationalizing it, we impute to the agent adherence to some principle on which that action makes sense to do, for example:

because one is ψ-ing, or *because P, it is reasonable to* φ. But how should we understand the power of such a principle to illuminate the intentionality of the agent's action? Heidegger, on the Practical Identity reading, suggests that we must conceive of the action itself as the instantiation of a general pattern of responses, which is itself intended (e.g., 'I'm just trying to do what a good student does'). Since this pattern represents the basic object of that agent's intentional striving, there is no room to ask *why* the agent intended *that* broader pattern in order to derive a more satisfying explanation of why that person φ-ed. We must, upon reaching this point, rest content with what appears as a nonanswer to the 'why' question. But if, by contrast, we understand the principle of the agent's action as one that carries *objective* necessity because it specifies that description under which every object is intended, then rationalization can plausibly achieve its aim. For if, as on the Formal Object account, the principle of the agent's action picks out the action prescribed as one urged upon her by the demands of maintaining agency in her situation, there is no further need to explain why the principle attracts the agent's adherence, for it represents the action as just *what one does*. The Formal Object reading can thus boast, in addition to its exegetical credentials, that it ascribes to Heidegger a plausible account of how intentional acts become intelligible.

7. Conclusion

In the foregoing, I have indicated a threat of circularity that jeopardizes Heidegger's account of the reflective structure of intention as it is standardly read. If my arguments succeed, we cannot address this problem without rethinking our picture of what distinguishes Dasein as an entity: that is, without reconsidering what Heidegger means when he claims that Dasein's being is 'at issue' for itself, that Dasein's 'essence' lies in its 'existence' (Heidegger 2006: 42), and the like. Moreover, any account of these claims ought to keep in view the fact that Dasein's theoretical significance is bound up with its capacity to understand being, to grasp entities aright.

To accommodate these points, I have suggested that we understand the reflective, self-directed character of Dasein's intentional stances in terms of the metaphor of *self-maintenance* rather than that of *self-definition*. On the reading I propose, what is most basically 'at issue' for Dasein is not *who* it is, but *whether* it can be itself: that is, whether it can sustain the openness to the world that defines its essence. The work of sustaining this essence falls to Dasein's existence: that is, to its concrete intentional activities themselves, which both enact and seek to sustain its capacity for making sense of its world. Readers of *Sein und Zeit* ought to consider whether such a gloss on the special character of Dasein, suitably elaborated, affords a more satisfactory way to unify the apparently divergent threads of Heidegger's analysis.

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