

Chapter 2

Introduction

Phenomenologists have taken themselves to offer an account of the mind which refutes naturalism. I will be arguing that phenomenology has important insights to offer about what it is for a creature to undergo conscious experiences which any satisfactory naturalist theory of mind must incorporate. If phenomenologists are right these are insights the naturalist is precluded from recognising. To accept a phenomenological account of the mind it would seem is to already abandon naturalism. Thus a naturalistic account of the mind which takes its lead from phenomenological description look at best misconceived.

In the previous chapter we saw that Husserl's argument against naturalism relied upon accepting a commitment to idealism. I offered a characterisation of the phenomenological project which allowed the phenomenologist to remain neutral on the issue of idealism. Unfortunately for me, the phenomenologist's argument against naturalism doesn't depend on idealism. We shall see in this chapter how existential phenomenologists rejected Husserl's idealism while nevertheless remaining steadfastly opposed to naturalism.

Existential phenomenologists agree with Husserl that a naturalistic theory of mind depends for its truth on certain presuppositions it cannot explain. However it disagrees with Husserl about the nature of these presuppositions. The existential phenomenologist takes intentionality to be a defining characteristic of our *existence* as conscious subjects. Unlike Husserl's phenomenology it doesn't begin by bracketing all existence claims. Rather existential phenomenology takes as its subject matter our own existence in the world. It then sets about identifying what it is about our existence that makes it possible for our thoughts and experiences to exhibit intentionality.

The presuppositions which it is argued naturalism cannot explain relate to our existence as persons. Heidegger calls our way of existing as persons 'being-in-the-world'. It is being-in-the-world which he and the other existential phenomenologists

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will argue explains how intentionality is possible. Our being-in-the-world is something the existential phenomenologist claims will always resist assimilation into the naturalist's explanatory framework. My aim in this chapter will be to reconstruct the existential phenomenologist's argument for this conclusion.

1. The Departure from Husserl

Existential phenomenologists part company with Husserl over his conception of subjectivity.¹ Husserl's phenomenology, they were to argue, rested on certain philosophical presuppositions which careful phenomenological description reveals to be ungrounded. Husserl lent his uncritical endorsement to a conception of the conscious subject inherited from Descartes.² He contrasts the "immanent" existence which he took to be characteristic of our occurrent conscious mental states, with the "transcendent" existence which is a feature of any physical or abstract object. This contrast between "immanence" and "transcendence" forms the basis for a Cartesian distinction between what is internal to a subject's mind and what is external. What is internal to a subject's mind is, at the time of its occurrence, known with complete certainty while what is external to a subject's mind can always be subjected to doubt.

For Heidegger, Husserl's adherence to a Cartesian conception of mind as an inner, private mental realm was a prejudice that doesn't accord with the phenomenology of our experiences. Rather than carefully reflecting on our existence as conscious subjects, Husserl simply accepts without question a traditional Cartesian understanding of the conscious subject. He does so because this understanding of subjectivity suits his needs; it fits with his desire to make philosophy into a science.

'Husserl's primary question is simply not concerned with the character of the being of consciousness, instead he is led by the following concern: *How can consciousness become the possible object of an absolute science?* The primary concern guiding him is the *idea of an absolute science*. The idea that

¹ We shall see in due course that this departure from Husserl enabled them to reject his idealism.

² For a criticism of Husserl along these lines see Heidegger's comments on Husserl's Encyclopedia Britannica Article reprinted in Sheehan and Palmer (ed.'s) (1997). For an excellent discussion of the difference between Husserl and Heidegger see Carman (2003: ch.2).

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consciousness should be a region of an absolute science, is not simply invented, rather it is the idea that has occupied *modern* philosophy since Descartes. The elaboration of pure consciousness as the thematic field of phenomenology is *not derived phenomenologically by going back to the things themselves*, but by going back to the traditional idea of philosophy.’ (Heidegger, 1992: 147 (emphases appear in the original text))

The idea that the contents of the conscious mind are immanent is an ungrounded presupposition which Husserl, by his own phenomenological standards, ought to have set aside. The kinds of experience we undergo when we are behaving skillfully, for instance, don’t admit of any distinction between what is internal to a subject’s mind and what is external.³ An accurate description of perceptual experiences of this kind conflicts with any conception of the contents of the conscious mind as immanent as opposed to transcendent. When we are behaving skillfully we are absorbed in what we are doing, and our experience is taken up with the things in the world with which we are dealing. Such experiences do not seem to admit of any distinction between what is inside a subject’s mind and known with complete certainty, and what is outside and known only dubitantly. Husserl’s failure to inquire into the ways in which we and the things we experience exist led him to ignore the fact that many of our experiences do not permit a precise boundary to be drawn between what lies inside the mind and what lies outside. It is this failure which we shall see existential phenomenology sought to remedy.

2. Operative and Cognitive Intentionality

Existential phenomenology distinguishes itself from Husserl’s project by inquiring into the nature of intentionality itself, and of the subject and object that form the relata of any given intentional relation. Like Husserl they undertake this inquiry by seeking to describe our experiences just as they are lived by us, free from any

³ To put this claim in more familiar contemporary terms, Heidegger is claiming that the type of perceptual content which accompanies our skillful behaviours is “object-dependent”. Perceptual content can be said to be object-dependent if it includes the entity experienced as a constituent. See McDowell (1986) for an object-dependent account of perceptual content. I will have more to say about Heidegger’s description of skillful behaviour later in the chapter (see sections 2 & 4).

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philosophical or scientific presuppositions. Among the presuppositions the phenomenological philosopher must set aside is the idea of the conscious mind as a self-contained, self-sufficient realm. This is a philosophical prejudice which should not be accepted without question if we are to describe our perceptual experiences as they are lived by us.

When we reflect on our existence as conscious subjects, and describe what we find free of any prejudice, we discover that there are two distinct ways in which we can represent the world. I shall call these two modes of representation “reflective” and “operative” respectively. Existential phenomenologists describe each of these modes of representation as having its own distinct variety of intentionality, which I shall call “cognitive” and “operative” intentionality. They distinguish operative from cognitive intentionality by describing on the one hand, the different ways in which a *subject* exists when she takes up an operative rather than a cognitive relation to the world and on the other, the different ways in which an *object* exists when it is experienced operatively and cognitively.

Contrast the kind of relation to the world we take up when pointing at a coffee cup, and the relation to the world we take up when taking hold of a coffee cup and drinking from it. When I point at the coffee cup I experience it as at a determinate location in space separate from myself. Not so when I take hold of the coffee cup and drink from it. When I reach for the mug and grasp hold of it, I experience the mug not as an entity existing apart from me. Instead I experience the mug in terms of how I must behave if I am to successfully use it as a coffee-drinking receptacle. In both cases my experience has an intentional content that literally includes the mug as a constituent. In the latter case the mug guides the behaviour I direct towards it. The mug is experienced as something located at a position in egocentric space the coordinates of which are centred on my body. It is experienced as something calling for me to direct certain reaching and grasping behaviours towards it.

Operative intentionality attaches to our skillful behaviours. It is a feature of these behaviours that they do not seem to be the outcome of any act of reflection or

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deliberation on the part of the agent. Think of a skilled musician. She can use her instrument to perform a piece of music without having to consider at each moment what she is doing and what she is to do next. Thoughts of this kind would obstruct the fluidity of her performance. Instead repeated and regular practice has brought her to the point where she has an ability to play without any intellectual effort. The knowledge of how to use her instrument has become second nature.

It would be a mistake to conceive of our skillful behaviours as mere reflex responses because they can be exercised without recourse to any act of reflection or deliberation. Rather skillful behaviours are a category of behaviour in their own right, falling somewhere in between merely mechanical bodily movements and reflective or deliberative actions. This can be seen by contrasting a reflex response with an act of grasping.⁴ Our acts of grasping are directed towards their objects in a certain way. It is in this sense that they can be said to have intentionality, albeit of a different variety from cognitive processes as we shall see in due course. I move my body in a certain way in accordance with the object I am attempting to take hold of. My grasping act can of course fail if the object isn't as I anticipate it to be. The object might for instance fail to be the size, shape or weight I represent it to be when I initiate my movements towards it.

Of course reflex behaviours can also be said to succeed or fail; the lower part of my leg can fail to rise when I am struck just below the kneecap. However the failure of my reflex behaviour to occur has nothing to do with me; the relevant muscular contractions are not under my control. The same is not true of a grasping act. In the latter case it is *me* that directs my behaviour in a certain way in accordance with how *I* am representing the object, and it is *me* who succeeds or fails in grasping the object. I am responsible when my skillful behaviours do not succeed in achieving their goals in a way that I am not responsible for my body's reflex responses. My skillful

⁴ Kelly (2000) offers this contrast in illustrating Merleau-Ponty's idea of motor intentionality. See Merleau-Ponty (1965: 40) for the claim that skillful behaviours form a category of behaviour in their own right.

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behaviours fail to achieve their goals in part because of the way in which I direct them.

So skillful behaviours should not be understood as reflex responses, but nor should they be treated as the outcome of deliberation or cognition. The agent represents an object in different ways when she experiences an object cognitively and when she experiences the same object operatively. Cognitive intentionality is the kind of intentionality that belongs to our propositional attitudes. By a “propositional attitude” I mean a state of mind which we can ascribe to a creature using a sentence of the form ‘S φ ’s that P’ where ‘S’ is the creature, ‘ φ ’ is the psychological state and ‘P’ is a sentence or proposition which specifies φ ’s representational content.

Operative intentionality doesn’t attach to states of mind. Instead it belongs to the activities in which a creature engages, in particular to its skilful activities. These activities still have success conditions. They involve the creature’s directing its behaviour in a goal-directed manner. We cannot make sense of these behaviours except in terms of the goals which the creature was acting in-order to bring about.

The existential phenomenologist claims that we would be misdescribing these activities if we took them to be the outcome of states of mind which possess what I have called cognitive intentionality. When we represent an object operatively, we represent the object in a way which makes essential reference to the use we are making of that thing. The ways in which the thing is represented make essential reference to our dealings with that thing, and the goals we have when we are dealing with it.

It is true that some of a creature’s propositional attitudes will be assessed for their truth or falsity by making reference to a creature’s dealings with the world. If I form the belief that I must turn the door handle to the left in order to open the door, we will have to make reference to my dealings with the world in order to assess this belief for truth. This however seems inessential to states that have cognitive intentionality in a way that it isn’t for activities that exhibit operative intentionality. Many of my propositional attitudes represent situations that have little or nothing to do with my

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engagement with the world. Furthermore those of my propositional attitudes that do concern my dealings with the world, represent their objects differently from the ways in which I represent them when I am engaged in some skilful activity. When I form a belief or some other propositional attitude about the objects of my dealing, I do not represent the object in terms of which actions will be appropriate and which inappropriate. I represent the thing as belonging to an objective world. Whether or not I represent the thing correctly will be decided by facts about this objective world. My propositional attitudes will be made true by conditions which in many cases will not require us to make mention of me and my goals. This is never the case for activities that have operative intentionality.

I began this section by saying that existential phenomenologists depart from Husserl by making the existence of the subject and object, the relata of an intentional relation, the objects of their phenomenological descriptions. Now that we have some sense of the difference between cognitive and operative intentionality I want to consider what sense can be made of the claim that subject and object exist in different ways when a subject experiences the world operatively and cognitively. This will eventually enable us to see how existential phenomenology can avoid the charge of idealism. Having established that existential phenomenology is not guilty of begging the question against naturalism, as we have seen Husserl was I shall consider their argument against naturalism.

3. The Question of Being

In this section and the next I shall propose a reading of the claim that we and the things we experience exist in different ways when experienced operatively and when experienced cognitively. I will argue that our cognitive modes of experience reveal a world that is there anyway whether or not it is being experienced. While our operative modes of experience, by contrast, represent entities which are, in a sense to be explained, dependent on us and our ways of experiencing these entities. Thus the existential phenomenologist can defend a qualified realism about the objects of our

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experience. First we must make sense of the idea that persons and the objects of their experience exist in different ways depending on whether they are experienced operatively or cognitively. What do I mean by my talk of “objects and persons existing in different ways”?

It was Heidegger’s (1927/1962) magnum opus *Being and Time* which was responsible for ushering in questions about existence into phenomenology. In this work Heidegger asks what it means for something to be; he asks what “being” means? There is of course an important sense in which there is nothing univocal we mean by “being”. We use the term “being” in different ways to talk about identity, as when we say one thing *is* identical with or distinct from another thing, or to talk about predication as when we say one thing *is* such-and-such, or simply in saying that something *is* the case. Might there nevertheless be something that these different uses of “being” share in common?

I shall follow Carman (2003) and many others in reading Heidegger’s question ‘what does “being” mean’ as a question about a person’s understanding of “being”.⁵ According to Carman’s reading, Heidegger is claiming that these distinct uses of the term “being” all draw upon a common *understanding* of being. Heidegger tells us that by “being” he means ‘that which defines entities as entities, that on the basis of which entities...are in each case already understood’ (Heidegger, 1927/1962: 8). Carman finds in Heidegger a description of our understanding of “being” as having two features. First we understand *what* an entity is; we know its nature or essence. Second we understand whether an entity is or not. In the most general and abstract terms then, Heidegger is claiming that to understand the meaning of “being” is to “understand what and that (or whether) something is” (Carman, 2003: 17).

Each of the senses of “being” mentioned above – the “is” of identity, predication and existence – require one to understand what an entity is and whether it is. One cannot correctly apply the “is” of predication in asserting that the sun is shining for instance, if one doesn’t know what it is for the sun to shine or whether the sun is now

⁵ See Carman (2003, pp. 17-18)

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shining. Equally one can correctly apply the “is” of identity to say for instance that ‘water is H₂O’, only if someone in one’s linguistic community knows what “water” and “H₂O” refer to and if someone knows whether these two terms pick out one and the same stuff.⁶ Finally, one can correctly say that the dodo no longer exists only if one knows what a dodo is and whether there are any in the world. Let us suppose then that Heidegger is right and there is a univocal understanding of “being” underlying each of the three senses of “being” mentioned above. Let us suppose that in order to correctly apply “being” in any of the aforementioned senses one must understand what an entity is and whether or not it is.

In line with Carman’s reading of Heidegger, I shall take the existential phenomenologist’s talk of an entity’s different “ways of existing” to mean different ways of *understanding* what an entity is and whether it is. An entity “is” when we human beings can make sense of this entity as an entity, when we have an understanding of what it is and whether it is. Thus construed Heidegger is claiming that being and our understanding of being stand in a relation of reciprocal dependence. This is to say that without persons who have an understanding of being, there would be nothing which defines entities *as* entities. Equally, in the absence of anything which defines entities as entities there would be no understanding of being.

Consider our affective states of mind as example of how our understanding of being might help to constitute a thing’s being, in this case our affective states of mind. When someone asks me how I feel and I give expression to my feeling, the understanding I arrive at shapes my emotion.⁷ My feeling is the emotion it is because I understand it to be a particular emotion, a feeling of shame say rather than pride. The more fine-grained the discriminations I can make among my feelings, the richer my emotional life. A person that can only distinguish between feeling good and feeling bad will clearly enjoy an impoverished emotional life compared with someone

⁶ I express the understanding that is required in these impersonal terms so as to do justice to the arguments of Putnam (1975) and Kripke (1980).

⁷ See Taylor (1985, essays 2 & 4) for extended discussion of this claim. For a careful discussion of Taylor’s account of self-interpretation see Moran (2001: ch.2).

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who can make some of the many distinctions there are to be made within these broad categories. Moreover if my understanding were to change so too would my emotion. Consider a person who interprets a feeling he is experiencing as love. Later he realises that the feeling was no such thing and with this realisation his feeling changes, he no longer feels that he is in love. The change he undergoes in what he feels is the result of a change in his understanding.

My feelings are always feelings about something⁸; they are responses to the situation I find myself in. Feelings of shame for instance, are responses to situations which are in some way shameful or humiliating. Sartre discusses at length a case in which a person experiences shame having been caught looking through a keyhole.⁹ The shame this person feels is a response to the situation of being caught and how the other person will see him as a result. They see him in a way that he does not want to be seen, and this explains why he feels shamed or humiliated.

A property of a situation like shamefulness is a property defined by our emotional response to a situation. I have just suggested that a person comes to feel a particular emotion like shame when he arrives at a particular understanding of his feelings.¹⁰ Suppose that (a) feelings are responses to the situations they are about, and (b) our feelings are given shape, they are constituted, through the beliefs or understanding we form about them. It will follow that there are some properties, for instance the properties we are responding to when we are emotionally affected by a situation, which are shaped by the understanding we have of ourselves. For these properties, there will be no separating the property from our understanding of it: our emotional

⁸ Searle (1983) offers as examples of states of mind that lack intentional content, undirected nervousness and anxiety. Taylor (1985: 48) points out that what marks out these states of mind is “the felt absence of object”. The inability on the part of the subject to find an object which his feeling is about is a feature of the situation a subject is in when he undergoes such an experience. Instead of thinking of intentionality in terms of direction towards an object, Taylor suggests we think of intentionality as giving a subject a sense of a situation. This is something our feelings accomplish whether or not they are directed towards an object.

⁹ Sartre (1943/2000: pp.’s 259- 302).

¹⁰ Taylor claims that the beliefs I form and the descriptions I would give of my feelings articulate, or make explicit, those features of the situation that are of relevance or importance to me. The person caught in the performance of a voyeuristic act for example feels shame because he *desires* that others see him as dignified and he knows that this is not how voyeurs are viewed. His feeling is a response to the view the other person has of him as worthless, as deserving of little or no respect.

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response is shaped by our understanding, and the property which our feeling is about is defined by our emotional response.

Let us see if we might be able to extract from my discussion of affective states some salient features which might help make sense of Heidegger's claims that being and our understanding of being stand in a relation of reciprocal dependence. I have said that:

- (1) There are some situations (e.g. shameful situations) which are shaped or constituted by our affective responses to them, and
- (2) Emotions are shaped by the understanding we form of them.

I have inferred from these two claims that there are some situations which are shaped by our understanding. If Heidegger is to generalise this claim to being as such – what an entity is and whether it is – he must say the following:

- (1*) Being as such is constituted by our cognitive and non-cognitive responses to it, and
- (2*) The relevant responses are shaped by our understanding.

We have taken this brief excursus into Heidegger's existential phenomenology in order to make sense of the claim that we and the objects of our experience have different ways of existing when experienced cognitively and when experienced operatively. We are now well placed to make sense of this claim. The idea seems to be that our operative and cognitive modes of experiences are constituted by different modes of understanding. The existential phenomenologist wants to claim that these different modes of understanding not only shape different experiences, but also shape or constitute what an entity is and whether it is. Our cognitive and operative modes of understanding shape the "being" of those entities we experience cognitively and operatively.

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In the next section I will explore the difference between these two modes of understanding. We shall see how our operative mode of understanding gives us a sense of ourselves and the objects we experience that is “pre-objective”. We make sense of the objects of our operative modes of experience in terms of our ways of dealing with them. To make sense of an entity in terms of one’s dealing with it is to represent the entity from the point of view of a person with particular interests and concerns. In this sense the contents of our operative experiences can be said to be pre-objective. By contrast our cognitive mode of understanding gives us a sense of ourselves as existing apart from the world. It is through our cognitive mode of understanding that we discover a world that is there anyway apart from our particular interests and concerns.

4. Two Modes of Understanding

Heidegger’s well-known distinction between readiness-to-hand (*Zuhandenheit*) and presence-at-hand (*Vorhandenheit*) is introduced to characterize the sense in which one and the same entity can exist in different ways. This distinction is intended to pick out two different ways in which we can understand entities – we can understand an entity *as* ready-to-hand or *as* present-at-hand. We understand an entity as ready-to-hand when experiencing it operatively. I shall call the understanding in virtue of which entities can be experienced as ready-to-hand, “operative understanding”. When we experience an entity cognitively we understand it as present-at-hand. I shall call this mode of understanding – the mode of understanding we draw on in experiencing something as present-at-hand – “cognitive understanding”.

An entity is understood as ready-to-hand when a subject knows how the entity can be used to achieve some end. For recall that operative intentionality was introduced to characterise the kind of intentionality that belongs to our skilled behaviours. It is a characteristic of such behaviours that the agent has mastered the skillful activity to the point where she can exercise her skill without the need to deliberate on or think about what she is doing. She can act appropriately in response to the twin demands of the

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situation she is in and the activity in which she is engaged. The agent can exhibit this kind of sensitivity to a situation only if she knows what an entity is for and how it is to be used.

It is a feature of ready-to-hand entities that they are defined by their function – the way in which they should be used. Heidegger tells us that it is not just artifacts which are ready-to-hand. Nature is also ready-to-hand: ‘The wood is a forest, the mountains a quarry, the river is water power, the wind is wind ‘in the sails’.’ (1962: 70) Our understanding of natural entities is also in an important sense defined by our dealings with those natural entities.

When we have an understanding of an entity as ready-to-hand we understand how that entity is normally used. A musical instrument such as a piano is ready-to-hand for a musician who knows how to play it. To say what a piano is we must describe the way in which pianos are normally used.

An entity like a piano doesn’t have a function apart from other entities that are ready-to-hand for us. A piano has its particular function only in the context of the activity of playing music, and this is of course a context that includes a lot more than just pianos. It includes such things such as scored sheets of music, musical notation, piano teachers, chairs, rooms, orchestras etc. A subject must have an understanding of how all of these things are to be used and relate to each other before he can be said to have an understanding of a piano. Any entity that is experienced as ready-to-hand has a place in a network of other entities that are experienced as ready-to-hand. One can relate to an entity as ready-to-hand only because one has a broader understanding of the place that this entity occupies in a nexus of equipment. This is an understanding one has only by knowing how the entities which compose a nexus of equipment are normally used.

We cannot describe what a ready-to-hand entity is by listing the properties in virtue of which it occupies a particular position in space and time. To say what a ready-to-hand entity is we need also to make mention of how it is normally used. We have just seen how this requires us to also make mention of the

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place it has among other entities which are experienced as ready-to-hand. To use Heidegger's famous example of the hammer: a hammer is something with which to hammer in nails in order to fasten together pieces of wood towards the end of constructing a house for-the-sake of a person's shelter.¹¹

The place the hammer has among other ready-to-hand entities is a place inhabited by persons. An entity which is experienced as ready-to-hand gets its identity from our particular concerns and interests. Ready-to-hand entities are used in the way they are because persons assign to them these uses in the light of their projects and goals. Our particular interests and concerns are not projected onto ready-to-hand entities. These entities do not have a ready-made identity independent of our concerns: they are what they are only for persons like us who relate to them as something to be put to certain uses.

Thus there is an important sense in which ready-to-hand entities exist in a way which depends on us. Something is ready-to-hand only because of the ways in which it is normally used, but an entity's normal use is defined by us with our particular projects and goals. Ready-to-hand entities fit exactly the model I set out above when I was accounting for Heidegger's definition of being in terms of our understanding of being. The being of ready-to-hand entities is indeed shaped or constituted by our understanding of these entities. It is our knowing the way in which an entity is normally put to use which determines what counts as an appropriate response to something ready-to-hand. A ready-to-hand entity has its particular identity – it occupies a particular place among other ready-to-hand entities – because of the ways in which it is normally used. Thus the being of a ready-to-hand entity, what it is and that it is, is defined by our operative understanding, our understanding of how this entity along with other entities, is normally put to use.

I have said that it is not only the entities we experience, but also ourselves that have a different way of existing when undergoing an operative experience and when undergoing a cognitive experience. This is to say that we understand ourselves

¹¹ Heidegger (1927/1962:116)

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differently when we experience an object operatively and when we experience an object cognitively. One important difference is that in the former case we represent the world from our own particular point of view. The subject doesn't think of his point of view as distinct from its objects because he doesn't think about his point of view at all.¹² When we are acting non-deliberatively, immersed in what we are doing and all is going to plan we are consciously aware of ourselves only in the course of directing our actions. We do not distinguish our particular point of view from the object on which we have taken up a point of view. Instead we are wholly absorbed in our dealings with the object. We understand the object wholly in terms of our dealings with it.

The existential phenomenologist makes a further claim about the understanding we have of ourselves when engaged in a skillful activity. Just as we understand an entity as ready-to-hand by understanding it in accordance with the norms that govern its usage, so we also understand ourselves and our actions according to certain norms. The norms which govern the use of a piece of equipment like a hammer only make sense in relation to us, and the tasks in which we are engaged. A task like hammering in a nail in order to put up a shelf in turn gets its point or purpose from us and our goals. We make sense of an activity like hammering in terms of our goals. Heidegger calls these goals in terms of which we make sense of our activities, "for-the-sake-of-which's". There is some point or purpose standing behind every one of our activities by reference to which we make sense of whatever we are doing.

The operative understanding we draw on in acting skillfully includes a sense of the point or purpose behind our actions. It is important to realise that this purpose will

¹² This is not to say that when experiencing the world operatively, a subject is not self-aware as Dreyfus (1991: 67) once claimed. Dreyfus says that our operative experiences are accompanied by "awareness but no self-awareness". I will argue in chapter 5 that this is a mistake. The subject is aware of himself but he is aware of himself as Sartre says "pre-reflectively". He is aware of himself as immersed in whatever it is he is doing. When Dreyfus denies that the subject is self-aware I think what he is meaning to highlight is that when experiencing the world operatively the subject make no distinction between himself and world. Dreyfus may have been assuming that to be self-aware a subject must think of his own point of view as one among others. I shall argue that Sartre shows this is not to be the case. He identifies a kind of self-awareness which accompanies our operative experiences and which is such that a subject doesn't conceive of himself as distinct from the object of his experience.

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often *not* be one we have decided on for ourselves. Just as there are social norms which determine how to use a piece of equipment so too will the for-the-sake-of-which's that stand behind our actions often be socially determined. There is a normal way of using equipment, a norm one expresses by saying what one does with the equipment. Equally there are normal ways of making sense of an activity, a norm expressed by saying what one is doing and by expressing the point behind one's actions. Our skillful behaviours draw on a body of knowledge of how things are normally done, and in exercising such behaviours we act in ways which conform to these public norms. More often than not then the for-the-sake-of-which's in terms of which a person makes sense of her actions are the result of a person falling in with public norms. A person's understanding of herself when she is acting operatively is for the most part a public understanding.

We have seen something of how operative understanding can shape the being of ourselves and the entities we experience. Let us now turn our attention to cognitive understanding. The existential phenomenologist claims that we spend most of our lives engaged in skillful activities. Under what circumstances do we come to experience the world cognitively, independently of our particular point of view?

When I introduced the idea of cognitive intentionality in section 2, I said that when we represent the world cognitively we do not necessarily represent the world in terms of our dealings with it. Heidegger describes a number of different ways in which we can represent the world cognitively.¹³ Of particular interest to us is the account Heidegger gives of scientific theorising.¹⁴

Scientific theorising, like other forms of deliberately attentive activity, requires us to break from our ordinary concerns. Scientific theorising is however importantly different from other forms of deliberation in that it involves a radical kind of decontextualisation. When we ask what it is for the hammer to be heavy, we cease to relate to the hammer as something to be used. We are interested instead in a property

¹³ Heidegger (1927/1962: §16)

¹⁴ Heidegger (1927/1962: 408)

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that the hammer shares in common with other particulars that are heavy: the property of having a weight.¹⁵ The scientist might ask, in virtue of what do entities in general have weight? It is only by decontextualising – by considering this thing and its properties apart from the context in which we use it – that we become concerned with entities in general and their properties.

The scientist doesn't just decontextualise; he also recontextualises. In our capacity as scientists we do not relate to things according to our ordinary practical concerns, but instead we relate to them in the light of our scientific theories. We might for instance be interested in the causal properties of items that have a weight, and note that anything which has a weight can exert a pressure on things that come into contact with it.¹⁶ The scientist might then ask in virtue of what a thing has a causal power of this kind, and develop a theory to answer this question. Henceforth, the understanding we have of "weight" will derive from this theory. Any modifications this understanding might undergo in the course of scientific practice will take the form of modifications to this theory.

By first decontextualising – that is to say by setting aside our ordinary concerns – a subject comes to experience an entity as present-at-hand. When one relates to an object apart from the context in which it is ordinarily encountered one comes to experience it as having context-free properties. That is one can think about the object in ways that do not depend on one's particular point of view. The particular point of view one takes on an entity when relating to it as ready-to-hand depends, as we have seen, on situating the entity in a context. It depends on our knowing the place that the entity has in a network of other ready-to-hand entities. As soon as one ceases to experience an entity as ready-to-hand and relates to it as something present-at-hand one discloses or reveals that the entity has context-free properties and features. One

¹⁵ In a passage quoted by Dreyfus (1991: 80) Heidegger tells us that the proposition 'the hammer is heavy' "can mean that the entity that is before us, which we already know circumspectively as a hammer, has a weight – that is to say, it has the property of "heaviness": it exerts a pressure on what lies beneath it, and it falls if this is removed." (1927/1962: 412) The account of Heidegger on scientific reasoning which I am here presenting follows closely Dreyfus. See Dreyfus (1991, pp.'s 79-83).

¹⁶ See the previous footnote.

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comes to experience the entity as having properties and features independently of the particular point of view one takes on it.

To experience an entity as present-at-hand, as existing independently of a particular point of view or context, requires one to bring to bear a certain understanding. One comes to experience an entity *as* having context-free properties and features. To experience an entity in this way requires that the subject understand the entity in a certain way. Thus we see once again how an entity's being – what it is and that it is – can be constituted by our understanding of its being.

There is a sense in which this is equally true of the entities our scientific theories disclose to us. The properties the scientist identifies are ones that show up for us only once we have taken up the standpoint of the scientist. These are properties that come into view for us only once we have taken a ready-to-hand entity out of its ordinary context and resituated it in the context of our scientific practice. Having done so, we come to understand this entity according to the scientific theories of the day. This understanding brings to light properties that would otherwise have not shown up for us.

We have seen how Heidegger thinks that an entity's being is shaped or constituted by our understanding of being. Moreover it has been claimed that one and the same entity can exist in different ways, it can be ready-to-hand at one time and present-at-hand at another. This is because one and the same entity can be understood in different ways. Our understanding of being defines both what an entity is and that it is. Where does this leave Heidegger on the question of realism?

5. Heidegger's Realism

I shall take realism to be the view that there is a fixed totality of entities which exist independently of our practices, and our modes of understanding them. Heidegger's position on realism can be summed up as follows: while *being* depends on our understanding of being, entities or *beings* do not. As he puts it:

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“Entities are, quite independently of the experience by which they are disclosed, the acquaintance in which they are discovered, and the grasping in which their nature is ascertained.” (1927/1962: 228)

This seems an unequivocal statement of realism. However Heidegger goes on to add the following significant qualification:

“But being ‘is’ only in the understanding of those entities to whose being something like an understanding of being belongs.” (*ibid*, 228)

A little later in the text Heidegger considers the question of an entity’s independent existence and has this to say:

‘If Dasein does not exist, then, ‘independence’ ‘is’ not either, nor ‘is’ the ‘in-itself’. Such a thing is then neither understandable nor not understandable...it can be said neither that entities are, nor that they are not.’ (*ibid*: 255)¹⁷

In this passage Heidegger is asking us to consider the following counterfactual scenario:

(IND) If there were no longer any persons (or what Heidegger calls “Dasein”) in existence, entities like hills and mountains, rivers and trees, would still exist.

Heidegger seems to want to say in response to this counterfactual that we are not in a position to assess its truth or falsity. This is not for the trivial reason that in the scenario described persons wouldn’t exist so there would be no one to discover that entities exist independently of us. Nothing would be understood in such a scenario. No one is going to disagree that if nothing is understood, entities will not be understood either as independent existents or as existing in a way that depends on us.

I have said that to understand an entity as existing independently of us is to understand it as existing apart from any particular point of view we can take on it. In Heidegger’s words, it is to relate to the entity as something present-at-hand. Now

¹⁷ I shall follow Carman (2003: 35-43) in reading Heidegger’s technical term “Dasein” to refer to persons.

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Heidegger's thought seems to be that if we are not around to understand an entity in this way then there are no present-at-hand entities. Thus construed isn't Heidegger saying that an entity's independent existence ultimately depends on our way of understanding it? An entity is present-at-hand only if it is understood as such. Can an entity truly be said to exist independently of us if its independence from us is characterised in terms of our ways of understanding entities?

In interpreting these passages we need to be careful to distinguish an epistemological from a metaphysical reading. I take Heidegger to be making the surely uncontroversial claim that we have no *access* to an entity apart from our ways of understanding that entity. Our access to entities comes in different forms. There is epistemic or cognitive access which can be understood in terms of our capacity to arrive at knowledge of the world or form accurate beliefs about the world. There is what we might call semantic access, which can be understood as our capacity to make meaningful utterances, and to refer to things by means of our utterances. Finally there is a practical access to things which we have when we can causally affect things in such a way as to satisfy our needs and desires.¹⁸

I take Heidegger to deny that there is, to borrow Nagel's useful phrase "a view from nowhere", which we can take up and thereby know entities as they are apart from our ways of understanding them. It is by means of our understanding that we gain access to entities in the three senses I have just set out. We can form true beliefs and arrive at knowledge of entities only by drawing on our understanding. We can make meaningful utterances and succeed in referring to entities only by means of our mastery or understanding of a language. As we have seen in the previous section, we can use entities so as to achieve our ends only by understanding them as having a normal use and thus fitting into a network of other things that we use to accomplish our ends. It is tempting then to read Heidegger as claiming with Kant that our access to things is limited to that which our understanding discloses to us. As soon as we try

¹⁸ Heidegger distinguishes between these different modes of access using his distinction between presence-at-hand and readiness-to-hand. Malpas (1999) offers a useful reconstruction of Heidegger's distinction in terms of this division between the epistemic/cognitive, the semantic and the practical.

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to step outside of the bounds of our understanding we make claims that are neither true nor false but unintelligible.¹⁹

It doesn't follow from such a claim that an entity is brought into existence through our ways of understanding it, so that if we didn't exist nor would mountains, trees, rivers and the rest of nature. What our understanding discloses to us is a world that is there anyway, a world that doesn't depend on our concerns and interests. We discover such a world when we stand back from our particular point of view and relate to entities as something present-at-hand. Then we discover the entities and their properties that underlie our everyday dealings with the world. Nature is revealed as having been there all along.

(IND) claims that the natural world would continue to exist were persons not to exist. (IND) was introduced as a way of making sense of Heidegger's claim that while an entity's *being* depends on us, the entity itself does not. What does it mean to say that the natural world and the entities of which it is composed exist "independently" of us?

Unsurprisingly, this is not a question to which I am currently able to return a definitive answer. I shall settle instead for sketching two possible answers.²⁰ The first answer claims that our access (in the epistemic, semantic and practical senses) to

¹⁹ I have been reading Heidegger as claiming that there is a restriction on our understanding of the counterfactual situation which (IND) describes. Blattner (1994) takes Heidegger to be defending a kind of transcendental idealism. He takes Heidegger to be saying that when we consider the situation (IND) describes from a transcendental standpoint it makes no sense to say either that entities are or that they are not. I do not mean to ally myself with Blattner. Near the end of his paper Blattner raises an objection (posed to him by Dreyfus) that Heidegger couldn't have been a transcendental idealist since "Heidegger insists that all understanding takes place in the context of an involvement with the world, and hence the detached, uninvolved perspective of the transcendental standpoint is impossible." (Blattner, 1994:196) I am not sure I understand Blattner's response but Dreyfus objection seems to me a powerful one.

Cerbone (1995) seems to me to have been more successful in pinpointing the restriction on our understanding Heidegger has in mind. He argues that we cannot make assertions about the situation (IND) describes, since our assertions get their significance from our being-in-the-world. A situation in which there are no persons is a situation in which there is nothing to confer significance on our assertions. Cerbone concludes that it is not entities that depend on us for their existence, but only "what we say about them". (*ibid*, 416) Assertions depend on us for their significance, but it is not us that make our assertions true or false.

²⁰ I am basing the first position on Dreyfus (1991: ch.15, pp's 251-265) & Dreyfus & Spinosa (1999) and the second on Cerbone (1995) and Malpas (1999). For a defence of Heidegger's realism that diverges in subtle ways from both these positions see Carman (2003: ch.4).

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an entity *necessarily* depends on our ways of understanding an entity but the entity itself only *contingently* depends on our ways of understanding it.²¹ On this understanding to say an entity exists independently of us is to say it has a “nature” or “essence” that is in no way dependent on us and our ways of understanding it. Moreover this essence or nature is something that we can achieve knowledge of through scientific investigation. Our ordinary, pre-theoretical ways of understanding an entity, secure access or reference to an entity by picking out certain of its contingent properties. Through scientific investigation, so the argument goes, we can discover properties that belong to the entity essentially, properties that it has at every possible world where it exists.²²

This second conception of realism departs from the first by denying that we have epistemic access to the world independent of our practices. It denies that we can know a thing’s essence or nature if we understand a thing’s essence to be something that is independent of us, and our ways of understanding an entity. The second view insists on a distinction between on the one hand the independence of the thing which we take a point of view on when we understand an entity in a certain way, and the independence of the point of view from our concerns and interests. It denies that there is any point of view we can take up which doesn’t in some way reflect our concerns and interests. It doesn’t follow that the existence of the thing which we take a point of view on is dependent on our mode of understanding. Malpas (1999) offers the following useful analogy:

‘(A) map of some portion of space depends on a particular set of interests on the part of the mapmaker, and the likely user of the map, as well as on certain conventional forms of presentation, but this is no way impugns the capacity of the map to accurately “describe” and thereby to give access to some portion of objective space’. (*ibid*, 99)

²¹ See Dreyfus and Spinoza (1999: 57)

²² Dreyfus and Spinoza cite Kripke, Putnam and Donnellan’s pioneering work on rigid designation in explaining how we come to identify a thing’s essence or nature. See Dreyfus and Spinoza, (*ibid*, FN 47: 76).

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I am not going to attempt to decide between these two ways of construing the claim that entities exist independent of us. It suffices for my purposes that there are at least two credible ways in which existential phenomenology can be read as compatible with realism. I have been looking to the existential phenomenologist for an argument against naturalism that doesn't beg the question by presupposing the truth of idealism. I have shown that the existential phenomenologist isn't committed to idealism and can indeed be used to defend some version of realism.

Before we can turn to the existential phenomenologist's argument against naturalism we need to introduce something the existential phenomenologists call "being-in-the-world". This idea does serious work for the existential phenomenologist explaining how both operative and cognitive intentionality are possible. We shall see that it is being-in-the-world which the existential phenomenologist argues the naturalist must presuppose and so cannot explain.

6. Being-in-the-World

I have said that just like Husserlian phenomenology, existential phenomenology seeks to describe how it is possible for our thoughts and experiences to exhibit intentional directedness. Existential phenomenologists depart from Husserl in locating the conditions of the possibility for intentionality (both cognitive and operative) in something they call "being-in-the-world".

We can get some idea of what existential phenomenologists mean by "being-in-the-world" by considering how we grasp, or make sense of, the content of a particular intentional state.²³ We have an understanding of our intentional states as being about particular situations in virtue of their contents, but how do we come to understand an intentional state's content as representing one situation rather than another? Any account of intentionality must answer this question; the answer the existential phenomenologist returns appeals to our being-in-the-world.

²³ My treatment of this question is indebted to Dreyfus (1991, ch.'s 3-5). For some tweaking of Dreyfus' account see Wrathall's (2000). Olafson (1994) attacks Dreyfus' interpretation of Heidegger, but I cannot engage with his arguments here.

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Take my desire for a good cup of coffee. This desire only makes sense to me given a large number of other beliefs and desires I have, such as beliefs about what counts as good cup of coffee, where such a thing might be purchased, what it is to buy coffee, and so on. However, it looks implausible to say that the grasp I have of my desire's content derives from these various beliefs. Not only is there an indefinite number of other beliefs that I would have to mention in order to spell out my understanding of this simple desire. My understanding of each of these beliefs is likewise dependent on a whole host of other intentional states. To explain how we grasp an intentional state's content by appeal to other intentional states seems to land us with a regress. The same question arises again for each intentional state to which we appeal in accounting for our understanding – we want to know how we make sense of each of these intentional states as representing one situation rather than another.

The existential phenomenologists claim that it is by means of our being-in-the-world that we interpret an intentional state as having one content rather than another.²⁴ To return to my desire for a good cup of coffee, it is my familiarity with coffee and cafes that gives me a sense of what it is to desire good coffee, and what I

²⁴ Searle (1983: ch.5 and 1992: ch.8) appeals to something he calls “the background” to answer the question I have posed about our understanding of an intentional state's content. Searle's notion of the background is similar to what I am here calling “being-in-the-world”. He describes the background as a set of “capacities, abilities and general know-how that enable our mental states to function.” (Searle, 1992: 176) The background determines what Searle calls an intentional state's “conditions of satisfaction”, the conditions which we would state in specifying an intentional state's representational content.

There are however, some significant deficiencies in Searle's account, for an account of which see Carman (2003: 115-121) and Wrathall (2000, pp.103-114). Carman attacks Searle for failing to account for the normative status of the skills that constitute the background. What Searle's account leaves out is “the phenomenon of embodied social skill as such, which is arguably neither full blown conscious obedience to explicit rules nor mere blind neurophysiological capacities and dispositions.” (Carman, 2003: 121) Carman's complaint against Searle is that he tries to treat our being-in-the-world as a set of mere causal capacities when being-in-the-world consists in a variety of knowledge, knowledge of what one *should* do in everyday situations.

Wrathall objects to Searle's characterisation of the background as a neuronal capacity. He argues that such a characterisation ignores the background's temporal structure. The background doesn't just fix an intentional state's content, it also refers forward to certain future possibilities for action. The background gives us an orientation to the world not just now but also in the future, it opens up or discloses a world to us. According to Wrathall, Searle cannot recognise “the temporally embedded character of human existence” (Wrathall, 2000: 113). He claims this is something which “cannot be explained in terms of neurophysiological structures” (ibid, 113). Whether he is right about this is something that I think can be questioned (see Varela (1999) and Van Gelder (1999)). Leaving Wrathall's objection to one side, it seems to me Carman has raised a significant problem for Searle.

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need to do to satisfy this desire. This familiarity isn't something I can make fully explicit by writing down everything I know about coffee and cafes. I know how to find my way about in the world of coffee, this is just one facet of my being-in-the-world. Much of this knowledge consists in a sense of what to do, of what is appropriate and what is not given this desire. I am ready to respond appropriately to whatever my coffee-related circumstances might present me with. I have a sense of how to respond appropriately because of my familiarity with coffee-drinking situations, because I know how to find my way about in such situations.

What I have just described with respect to the world of coffee is true of other worlds too. Consider the art world, for instance. In order to understand a work of art, a conceptual piece by Joseph Beuys say, one must know how to find one's way about in this world. One must know quite a lot about the history of art, so as to decipher whatever references might be being made to other artists. One must also understand what it is the conceptual artists do, in order to decipher the signs they use in their work. This knowledge is knowledge one must acquire before one can understand a work of art as a work of art. In other words one must know one's way about in the art world in order to understand an entity which is a work of art as a work of art. What is a pile of bricks to one person is a work of art to someone who knows how to find their way about in this world.

I have given a couple of examples of how before we can represent an entity as an entity we must have what I shall call "a background understanding". This background understanding is what enables one to understand an entity as the entity it is. The background is a feature of each and every world we inhabit as persons. Each of these worlds has its own background which we draw on in understanding the entities that populate those worlds as the entities they are. Heidegger will say that the background forms a part of the structure of being-in-the-world. Recall that being-in-the-world is our way of existing as persons. It follows then that the background forms a part of our way of existing as persons. Now it is only in virtue of the background that we can understand, that is to say represent, an entity as an entity.

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Thus it follows that intentionality has as its condition of possibility, being-in-the-world. Let us consider how this is the case for the two modes of intentionality described above, cognitive and operative intentionality.

When we experience the world operatively, we experience things in terms of our dealings with them. Being-in-the-world confers on a person, knowledge of how to deal with a thing competently. To know how to deal with a thing competently is to have a sense of what counts as an appropriate response, and what does not. The existential phenomenologist claims that this sense of appropriateness derives from a person's being-in-the-world, from her knowing her way about in the world.

When does a response count as appropriate and when does it count as inappropriate? This all depends on the point of the response; it depends on the purpose or goal which the agent is acting to bring about. Any piece of equipment is defined by its normal way of being used, its function.²⁵ A thing's function will depend on the activity the agent is engaged in when he puts the thing to use. This activity in turn derives its point from the agent and her self-understanding. The agent understands herself as engaged in a certain task, and it is by reference to this understanding that she makes sense of her actions.

We saw in section 3 that an agent's knowledge of the point of some activity often derives from her knowing what others do and knowing how to conform with her community's normal ways of doing things. An agent can be said to know the point of some activity when she knows what it is to participate in a communal or social practice. Her knowledge of how to find her way about in the world, her being-in-the-world, is a matter of knowing how to act in ways that fall in with what others normally do. She makes sense of things and finds intelligibility where others find it. Someone can experience something as a piece of equipment only when she knows

²⁵ We saw in section 3 that a piece of equipment doesn't have a function in isolation from other pieces of equipment: we make sense of something as a hammer, for instance, only in the context of other pieces of equipment like nails and pieces of wood. It is only if a person knows the place a piece of equipment occupies in a network of equipment as a whole that she can be said to know how a piece of equipment is normally used. This knowledge of how a piece of equipment is used in conjunction with other items of equipment in pursuit of some activity forms a part of what a subject must know if she is to know how to respond appropriately to a situation.

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how to respond to it as others respond to it, when she knows how this thing would normally be used. This knowledge is knowledge of how to make her responses conform to the responses of others.

It is also our being-in-the-world that makes it possible for things to show up to a person as present-at-hand. To represent an entity as present-at-hand is to represent this entity cognitively. Even our propositional attitudes have a kind of intentionality that is dependent on our being-in-the-world. For the entities and properties we represent cognitively are also understood as entities. We have seen above that to understand an entity as an entity is always to draw upon a background understanding relating to the world of which that entity is a part. Consider as an example the world as it is described by physics. One can understand an entity as belonging to this world only because one has acquired a background understanding required for participating in physics. However we have seen that to be in possession of a background understanding is a feature of our way of existing as persons; it forms a part of the structure characteristic of being-in-the-world. Thus our understanding of entities as present-at-hand no less than our understanding of entities as ready-to-hand is dependent upon our being-in-the-world.

The latter point that we can experience entities as present-at-hand only because each of us is a being-in-the-world forms the basis for the existential phenomenologist's argument against naturalism. The existential phenomenologist doesn't think of intentionality as the means by which the subject escapes the confines of her own mind. He claims instead that intentionality just is transcendence:

“In directing itself toward something and grasping it, Dasein does not somehow first get out of an inner sphere in which it has been encapsulated, rather its primary kind of being is such that it is always “outside” with entities that it encounters and that belong to an already discovered world...And furthermore perceiving what is known is not a matter of returning with one's booty to the “cabinet” of consciousness after one has gone out and grasped it; even in perceiving, retaining and preserving, the knowing Dasein, as *Dasein, remains outside.*” (Heidegger, 1962: 62)

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It is our being-in-the-world which makes it possible for us to encounter entities “that belong to an already discovered world.” It makes possible both our cognitive and our operative modes of understanding. We shall see in the next section how being-in-the-world is something that the existential phenomenologist will argue must resist naturalistic explanation. Let us finally turn to the existential phenomenologist’s argument against naturalism.

7. The Argument against Naturalism

The naturalist, you will recall from chapter 1, takes science to be the measure of what is and what is not. The entities the scientist identifies are present-at-hand entities. They are entities that have been stripped of their ordinary significance so as to reveal their context free properties and features. It is these properties and features the scientist then proceeds to describe in the light of the theories of the day.

The existential phenomenologist argues that we cannot account for our being-in-the-world by appeal to the kind of context-free properties the theories of the natural sciences identify. To see why not it will be helpful to remind ourselves of Heidegger’s claim that being and our understanding of being stand in a relation of reciprocal dependence. In section 3 I said we should understand Heidegger’s as claiming that:

- (1) An entity’s being is constituted by our cognitive and non-cognitive responses to it, and
- (2) The relevant responses are shaped by our understanding.

From (1) and (2) it follows that an entity’s being is shaped by our understanding of it. Now according to the existential phenomenologist the mistake the naturalist makes is to try to understand everything in terms of the existence an entity has when it is experienced as present-at-hand. Recall that an entity becomes present-at-hand when we cease relating to it as something ready-to-hand, when we cease to relate to the

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entity in terms of our everyday, pre-theoretical interests and concerns. The naturalist is accused of giving a false priority to this present-at-hand mode of understanding. Suppose we grant that an entity's being is shaped by our modes of understanding in the way that was described in section 3 & 4. If the naturalist is to give priority to the present-at-hand, she will have to explain our ready-to-hand mode of understanding in terms of context-free properties and entities we uncover when we take up a reflective standpoint. This is just what the existential phenomenologist claims the naturalist cannot do.

The conception of reality that results from prioritising the present-at-hand will be one in which the meaning we ordinarily and unreflectively find in a thing has been bleached-out. Once we have abstracted away from our ordinary concerns with things, it becomes impossible to recover these ordinary concerns within the context of the scientist's theorising. We cannot account for the meaning we give to things, making use only of the properties and entities we learn of from the theories of the natural sciences. For these properties and entities have been discovered only by stripping objects of the meaning we ordinarily give them.²⁶

By prioritising our present-at-hand mode of understanding, the naturalist ends up treating our ordinary ways of understanding entities as mere projections of our mind, superimposed onto a world fundamentally lacking the meaning and value we invest in it. The existential phenomenologist argues that this gets matters back to front. We discover a thing's context-free properties they claim only once we have set aside our ordinary, operative mode of understanding. Things can be encountered as present-at-

²⁶ Dreyfus (1991) makes this point in discussing Heidegger's critique of naturalism. Once "we have stripped away all meaningful context", he says "to get the elements of theory, theory cannot give back meaning. Science cannot reconstruct what has been left out in arriving at theory; it cannot explain significance." (Dreyfus, 1991: 121)

The existential phenomenologist allows that science might discover laws that further our understanding of, for instance, an entity's causal powers. However, he also thinks the explanations of the natural sciences have their limits. They can never explain how we come to inhabit a world in which things are encountered as significant. For the entities and properties the scientist makes reference to have been discovered only by abstracting away from the meaning we ordinarily give to things. The elements of which the naturalist's ontology is composed are devoid of the meaning we ordinarily find in the world.

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hand only because they have first been experienced as ready-to-hand and only once this ordinary way of understanding things has been set-aside.

It is a mistake to treat the significance we ordinarily find in things as projections of our minds onto the world. Scientific theorising, the existential phenomenologist points out, is just one of the modes of our being-in-the-world. To take the theories of the natural sciences as a guide to what there is, is to ignore all of the ways in which a thing's existence is shaped by our non-scientific modes of understanding. It is to treat entities as if their sole mode of being is that of the present-at-hand. This is what the naturalist is accused of doing when she gives priority to the present-at-hand and treats everything else as a merely subjective contribution of our own minds. The result of understanding all entities in present-at-hand terms is a leveling-off of the different ways of being that entities have. For there is a variety of other ways we have of understanding entities in addition to our scientific mode of understanding. The existential phenomenologist claims that corresponding to each of these modes of understanding there is a way that entities are.

Nagel (1986) can be construed as echoing the existential phenomenologist's argument when he worries that an objective conception of reality must leave something out from its description of what there is. Nagel tells us:

“(A) succession of objective advances may take us to a new conception of reality that leaves the personal or merely human perspective further and further behind. But if what we want is to understand the whole world, we can't forget about those subjective starting points indefinitely; we and our personal perspectives belong to the world.” (Nagel, 1986: 6)

For Nagel, an objective conception of reality can never find room for what he calls our “subjective starting points”. It has always already left these starting points behind. The existential phenomenologist makes the very same point about our non-cognitive modes of understanding. As soon as the natural scientist proffers her explanations she has abandoned the context in which her experiences ordinarily take

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place. The scientist cannot explain what takes place within this context once she has abandoned it.

It might be reasonably objected that so far no reason has been given for the priority existential phenomenology gives to our ordinary operative mode of understanding over the cognitive mode of understanding achieved by the scientist. The existential phenomenologist's argument as I have presented it derived some of its force from the claim that we come to experience things as present-at-hand only by abstracting away from the significance we ordinarily give to things when dealing with them operatively. Why not say that things are fundamentally without the significance we ordinarily invest in them? To pose this question in the existential phenomenologist's terms, why not prioritise the present-at-hand over the ready-to-hand in the way that it is claimed the naturalist does?

The question I am currently raising is why we should grant that we must first experience something as ready-to-hand before we can experience something as present-at-hand. Why not say instead that something must be present-at-hand, it must have the context-free properties identified by the natural sciences, before it can be experienced as ready-to-hand? Such a response derives additional force when we consider the fact that a thing can only function as an item of equipment, as a hammer say, if it has certain properties that enable it to play this role, properties like mass, solidity, *etc.* These are properties the true nature of which is identified and described by science. Surely then something can be ready-to-hand, it can be used for our ends, only because it is first present-at-hand.

The existential phenomenologist can concede that the "handiness" of ready-to-hand things is dependent on the properties that science identifies, in the way I have just sketched. However he will deny that an entity's being is exhausted by what science tells us about an entity's nature. Recall that according to Heidegger an entity's being – what an entity is and whether it is – is defined by our understanding of being. Our scientific theories reveal to us a world that is there anyway independent of us. However, this is not the only way in which entities exist. Entities also have

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ways of existing that depend on us and our peculiar concerns and interests. The existential phenomenologist claims that we can learn about the nature of entities as they exist independently of us from the theories of the sciences. What we cannot learn about from those theories is the various ways in which entities exist when they are made the object of our non-scientific concerns and interests.

Still the naturalist might ask why some psychological or biological story couldn't be told about how we come to invest entities with significance? We have seen the existential phenomenologist claim that the properties which are the scientist's stock and trade, have been shorn of the significance we ordinarily give to things. Perhaps this is right. Still the question remains why we shouldn't treat the significance we give to things as merely subjective responses to be explained by our psychology and biology?

We are yet to find a reason for agreeing with Heidegger and the existential phenomenologists that an entity's being is dependent on our modes of understanding. Until we give some reason for thinking this is true we will only have established that there is a conflict between the metaphysics of the existential phenomenologist and that of the naturalist. We will not however have given any reason to prefer the existential phenomenologist's metaphysics to the naturalist's. Worse still for me, we will have established once and for all the incompatibility of naturalism and existential phenomenology by locating a difference in their respective metaphysics. Moreover we will have done so in a way that is completely independent of idealism, since we have seen in section 5 that the existential phenomenologist isn't committed to idealism. This will leave me unable to dismiss the conflict between phenomenology and naturalism as the outcome of a mistaken commitment on the part of the phenomenology to idealism.

Fortunately we need not leave matters there; we haven't yet got to the bottom of the existential phenomenologist's argument against naturalism. So far I have argued as though the problem arose from the impossibility of describing what it is for something to be ready-to-hand by reference to the context-free properties the theories

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of the natural science deal in. In fact the problem lies with our being-in-the-world. Before anything can show up for us as ready-to-hand we must know our way about in the world. This is equally true of our present-at-hand modes of understanding – before we can understand an entity as present-at-hand we must know how to find our way about in the world in which this entity exists. This is knowledge we have in virtue of our being-in-the-world. It is not only an entity's readiness-to-hand that causes problems for the naturalist then. It is also our being-in-the-world. It is this which the existential phenomenologist denies the naturalist can explain.

Why might it be thought that being-in-the-world isn't susceptible to explanation by the natural sciences? The existential phenomenologist claims that being-in-the-world accounts for our access to entities, whether they be understood as ready-to-hand or as present-at-hand. For being-in-the-world is the condition of the possibility of intentionality conceived of as transcendence. In particular being-in-the-world explains how we can have access to the entities and properties the natural sciences describe.

To see how being-in-the-world makes possible our access to the natural world it will be useful to distinguish scientific *understanding* from scientific *practice*. Scientific understanding aims to identify and describe the nature of entities independent of us and our peculiar concerns and interests. However we achieve such an understanding only through certain practices which constitute scientific method.

The theories and models of the natural sciences can be understood as tools which must be mastered before one can participate in scientific activity. When one learns a theory one learns how to apply the theory to various situations, and one learns how to perform operations within the models defined by the theory. The way one learns the theory and its application is through the use of theory to solve problems.²⁷

Thus while the objective of science is to achieve a disinterested, disengaged understanding of reality, this can only be achieved through scientific practices. Like any other activity the scientist must have mastered certain skills and techniques

²⁷ I am indebted here to Rouse (2000), also see Rouse (1996).

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before he can fully participate in a science. Before one can participate in a science one must have mastered its practices. One must have become familiarized with the scientist's way of doing things. We saw above how being-in-the-world makes possible our mastery of practical skills by giving us a sense of what is appropriate and what is not. Scientific understanding is made possible by a person's being-in-the-world just as much as any other kind of understanding. Being-in-the-world is just as much a necessary requirement for scientific understanding as it is a necessary requirement for any other kind of understanding.

The existential phenomenologist's descriptions of being-in-the-world explain how we can make sense of anything whatsoever including the entities and properties our scientific theories uncover. Being-in-the-world isn't something science can explain because being-in-the-world supplies the conditions for the possibility of doing science.

The substance of the existential phenomenologist's argument against naturalism is that being-in-the-world makes possible both our operative and cognitive modes of understanding. I shall argue in the final part of my thesis that the phenomenon of being-in-the-world is something that cognitive scientists and neurobiologists are beginning to recognise.²⁸ Thus being-in-the-world may well be a phenomenon that can be incorporated within a naturalistic theory of the mind.

Once we think of being-in-the-world as a naturally occurring phenomenon however, the existential phenomenologist's argument against naturalism will have lost its force. We won't need to think of being-in-the-world transcendentally as Heidegger did.

Carman (2003: 23-30) compares the role that being-in-the-world plays in existential phenomenology to the role of space, time and the categories in Kant's epistemology. Space, time and the categories constitute the conditions for the possibility of knowing in the account Kant gives of knowledge. Carman presents Heidegger as arguing that being-in-the-world plays the same role with respect to what

²⁸ See for instance the account of the enactive, embodied approach to the study of cognition described in Clark (1997) and Varela, Thompson and Rosch (1991).

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I have called our “operative” and “cognitive” modes of understanding. Being-in-the-world, like Kant’s conditions for knowing, is a universal and necessary condition for understanding, and that it constitutes such a condition is something which can be known a priori.

The real ground for the conflict between phenomenology and naturalism lies in the transcendental nature of the phenomenologist’s philosophical project. I shall argue that there is nothing in the notion of being-in-the-world which requires us to conceive of it transcendently. Thus the naturalist can appeal to being-in-the-world as what accounts for our experiencing an entity as ready-to-hand.

There is an objection that needs to be overcome first before I can make such an argument. We saw the existential phenomenologist complain earlier in this section that the naturalist levels-off the different ways in which entities exist. The naturalist it was argued can only ever give us an account of a reality that is there anyway independent of our particular human ways of responding to reality. Standing behind this worry is a conception of the naturalist as forming what Williams (1978) calls an “absolute conception” of reality. The worry the phenomenologist raises is that there are certain facts that must be left out from any absolute conception of reality. These are facts that involve our human perspective on the world, and our particular ways of responding to the world that are a reflection of this perspective.

In the next chapter I will connect this worry with the problem of the explanatory gap, the worry that our naturalistic explanations of mind leave out what is essentially subjective about our experiences. I will argue that the explanatory gap is genuine, and the reason it exists is that naturalistic explanations of mind do not seem to make room for the existence of facts that essentially involve us as conscious subjects.

Now the very same difficulty which the next chapter will argue is responsible for the existence of an explanatory gap has also been presented above as an argument against naturalism by the phenomenologist. A naturalised phenomenology of the kind I wish to develop recognises the existence of facts that involve an essentially human perspective on the world. Such an account of the mind can not only help the

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naturalist to overcome its difficulties with the explanatory gap. It can also reveal one of the grounds for the phenomenologist's anti-naturalism to be unfounded.