

HEIDEGGER AND WITTGENSTEIN ON
THE PROOF OF AN EXTERNAL WORLD

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Heidegger and Wittgenstein both argue that attempts to prove the existence of the external world are misguided. The aim of this paper is to outline the positions of the two thinkers on this topic, and to clarify some of the epistemological implications of their claims. I shall not attempt to criticize either position in this paper, but merely lay out what is going on in order to build critically at some other time.

I shall begin with Heidegger's position. I shall comment mainly on the few passages in Being and Time in which his treatment of these issues bears comparison with Wittgenstein's treatment in On Certainty. These passages appear in Sections 13 ("A Founded Mode in which Being-in is Exemplified. Knowing the World"), 15 ("The Being of the Entities Encountered in the Environment"), 33 ("Assertion as a Derivative Mode of Interpretation"), and 43a ("Reality as a problem of Being, and whether the 'external world' can be Proved").

To begin with, Heidegger's discussion of the problem of the external world in Section 43a can be summarized as follows. The idealists such as Kant begin their proofs of an external world with a worldless "subject" - the "in me" - and try to show how one can cross the epistemic gap from this "in me" to "objects" or a world "outside me." The realists such as Moore begin with an object or entity "outside me" - a hand, for example - and try to show that if one knows that "here is a hand," then one can prove the existence of an external world. But according to Heidegger, in either sort of proof "the question of the 'Reality' of the 'external world' gets raised without any previous

→ someone rather than A is that it would have been a much more interesting paper to do, at least some of the latter.

what makes somebody an "idealist"?

clarification of the phenomenon of the world as such."¹ This phenomenon is, for Heidegger, already disclosed to us in our ordinary practical activities, or prior to the adoption of a standpoint of theoretical cognition. On the one hand, by overlooking the phenomenon of the world, the idealists also overlook the fact that the epistemic or worldless "subject" is only one mode or

possibility of man's basic state or Being-in-the-world. If the world is already disclosed to man in this way, then the idealist effort to prove the existence of the external world is senseless.

On the other hand, by overlooking the phenomenon of the world, the realists also overlook the fact that together with the world, the entities within it (hands, etc.) have already been disclosed to man in his practical commerce with them. If entities within the world are already disclosed to man in this way, then the realist effort to prove the existence of the external world is pointless. As Heidegger says, more generally, "the 'scandal of philosophy' is not that this proof has yet to be given, but that such proofs are expected and attempted again and again."²

I now want to take a look at the assumptions underlying Heidegger's claims about the proofs of the external world in Section 43a. In that section, he says that "knowing is a founded mode of access to the Real. The Real is accessible only as entities within-the-world the world is disclosed essentially along with the Being of Dasein; with the disclosedness of the world, the 'world' [as entities within-the-world] has in each case been discovered too."³ This statement, and the resulting claim that it is pointless to try to prove the existence of the external

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being that
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commerce?
the idealist
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immediately
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other
"subjective"
phenomenon!

is the "point"
of the proof
to convince
someone
of another
thing that
already
known?

So? does that
undermine or attack
at all what
you are doing?

is already
known? or, what
is the point of a
"proof" that the
phenomenon is
already given?
Marshall
produces to
what arguments
could be given
in what

10. is the concept of knowledge he is working with like the one that we could with

world, rest on assumptions worked out in most of the book prior to Section 43a. It will be sufficient for my purposes to focus on certain passages in Sections 13, 15, and 33. There is one passage in each section that ^{which} ought to be quoted at length. Each passage gives an indication of the way Heidegger distinguishes knowing or theoretical cognition, as a founded mode of Being-in-the-world, from circumspective concern, as the founding mode of Being-in-the-world. Because most of his analysis of "everydayness" in Being and Time requires an investigation of the latter mode, Heidegger could be accused of paying no attention to or minimizing the status of "knowledge." But one of his intentions, I think, is to get at the foundation of knowledge. This involves, first, working out the nature of a pre-theoretical familiarity with the world, and then, showing how knowledge is based on this prior familiarity. The accusation is warranted, to the extent that Heidegger gives a fairly complete accomplishment of the first task, but only a rough outline of the second.

they - but there is a model of knowledge that has generally appeared for these proofs - i.e. deduction is highly warranted inductive inference.

The first passage, from Section 13, lays out the way in which knowing, as a founded mode of human being, arises out of Being-in-the-world, as the founding state of human being:

Proximally, this Being-already-alongside is not just a fixed staring at something purely present-at-hand. Being-in-the-world, as concern, is fascinated by the world with which it is concerned. If knowing is to be possible as a way of determining the nature of the present-at-hand by observing it, then there must first be a deficiency in our having-to-do with the world concernfully. When concern holds back from any kind of producing, manipulating, and the like, it puts itself into what is now the sole

what does that mean - can you be fascinated by something? still there? he's not just staring at the world - i.e. assume there is a model - if so then it's the basis for an answer.

remaining mode of Being-in, the mode of just tarrying alongside Looking at something in this way is sometimes a definite way of taking up a direction towards something-of setting our sights towards what is present-at-hand. It takes over a 'view-point' in advance from the entity which it encounters. Such looking-at enters the mode of dwelling autonomously alongside entities within-the-world. In this kind of dwelling as a holding-oneself-back from any manipulation or utilization, the perception of the present-at-hand is consummated. Perception is consummated when one addresses oneself to something as something and discusses it as such. This amounts to interpretation in the broadest sense; and on the basis of such interpretation, perception becomes an act of making determinate. What is thus perceived and made determinate can be expressed in propositions, and can be retained and preserved as what has thus been asserted. This perceptive retention of an assertion about something is itself a way of Being-in-the-world; it is not to be interpreted as a 'procedure' by which a subject provides itself with representations of something which remain stored up 'inside' as having been thus appropriated, and with regard to which the question of how they 'agree' with actuality can occasionally arise.⁴

The second passage, from Section 15, further specifies the difference between circumspective concern and its founded mode, theoretical cognition:

where something is put to use, our concern subordinates itself to the "in-order-to" which is constitutive for the equipment we are employing at the time; the less we just stare at the hammer-Thing, and the more we seize hold of it and use it, the more primordial does our relationship to it become, and the more unveiledly is it encountered as that which it is-as equipment. The hammering itself

all the
may be
the
this.
phil issue
is, what
will be
is there
that it
is true?
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answer;
here is
under?
there
is wisdom?
question
person
something
which is
false - wrong
this - the
mit I issue
for which there is
no wisdom
possible? If
it is the latter,
not an argument
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wisdom, when
it is appropriate
+ when not required

uncovers the specific 'manipulability' of the hammer. The kind of Being which equipment possesses—in which it manifests itself in its own right—we call "readiness-to-hand." Only because equipment has this 'Being-in-itself' and does not merely occur, is it manipulable in the broadest sense and at our disposal. No matter how sharply we just look at the 'outward appearance' of Things in whatever form this takes, we cannot discover anything ready-to-hand. If we look at Things just 'theoretically,' we can get along without understanding readiness-to-hand. But when we deal with them by using them and manipulating them, this activity is not a blind one; it has its own kind of sight, by which our manipulation is guided and from which it acquires its specific Thingly character. Dealings with equipment subordinate themselves to the manifold assignments of the 'in-order-to'. And the sight with which they thus accommodate themselves is circumspection.⁵

The third passage, from Section 33, further specifies the nature of assertion as a founded mode of circumspective interpretation:

The entity which is held in our fore-having—for instance, the hammer—is proximally ready-to-hand as equipment. If this entity becomes the 'object' of an assertion, then as soon as we begin this assertion, there is already a change-over in the fore-having. Something ready-to-hand with which we have to do or perform something, turns into something 'about which' the assertion that points it out is made. Our fore-sight is aimed at something present-at-hand-in what is ready-to-hand. Both by and for this way of looking at it, the ready-to-hand becomes veiled as ready-to-hand. Within this discovering of presence-at-hand, which is at the same time a covering-up of readiness-to-hand, something present-at-hand which we encounter is given a definite character in its Being-present-at-hand-in-such-and-such-a-manner. Only now are we given access to properties or the like. When an assertion has given a

That there is a
will not it possible, for all our know-
the biggest experience with the
evil genius giving you all the best of the world?

again - all
of the way he
a correct
psychological
historical
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an encounter
with the
word. Was a
philosophical
kind to move
doubting that
Dr. Weiser then
for we have (an argument)
in the existence
themed. Could not
dispute to say

definite character to something present-at-hand, it says something about it as a "what"; and this "what" is drawn from that which is present-at-hand as such. The as-structure of interpretation has undergone a modification. In its function of appropriating what is understood, the 'as' no longer reaches out into a totality of involvements. As regards its possibilities for Articulating reference-relations, it has been cut off from that significance which, as such, constitutes environmentality.... . This levelling of the primordial 'as' of circumspective interpretation to the "as" with which presence-at-hand is given a definite character is the specialty of assertion.⁶

Circumspection or circumspective understanding is a sort of "knowing one's way about" that guides one in ordinary practical dealings with the world. The world itself, as a totality of involvement or reference relationships of things to each other and to one's concerns, is that which has already been disclosed to one or with which one's circumspective concern is already familiar. The world is a sort of "workshop" in which circumspective concern operates. In this basic mode, one is ordinarily absorbed in the "work" at hand, and thus pays no attention to the structure of the workshop - the tools and the reference relationships constituting them - that make the work possible. If a tool's involvement relationships with the work are cut, however, these relationships and ultimately the tool as a thing come into explicit view. When a tool breaks down, attention is drawn away from the work at hand to the involvement relationships that have been interfered with. For example, the hammer is too heavy to be used effectively. One's cognitive mode now shifts from circumspective

absorption in the work to circumspective interpretation of the workshop or world. That is, one begins to interpret, to develop what has already been disclosed to circumspective understanding, or to see something as something - the hammer as too heavy.

When a breakdown occurs in the workshop, two alternatives relevant for Heidegger's analysis present themselves. One can either interpret circumspectively with a view to repair or replacement of the tool and then return to circumspective absorption in the work, or further develop the interpretation of something as something. To accomplish the latter, one's attention must shift completely away from the tool's place in a context of involvements in the workshop (its "readiness-to-hand") and just look at the tool as a thing (its "presence-at-hand"). One's cognitive mode now shifts further, from circumspective interpretation to theoretical cognition. In this mode, one can investigate the tool as a thing having definite properties, and communicate one's knowledge in the form of assertions - "The hammer is heavy," or "Here is a hammer."

For Heidegger, then, knowing is derivative in the sense that one can know only on the basis of what has already been disclosed to circumspective concern as the basic cognitive mode of human being. "The pointing-out which assertion does is performed on the basis of what has already been disclosed in understanding or discovered circumspectively What we have shown earlier in relation to knowing the world, holds just as well for assertion."⁷ Since knowing is a derivative or founded mode, or since the world has already been familiar to circumspection before the theoretical mode of cognition is adopted, there is no need to prove the existence

*what we have
is there
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presented -
in the
claim that
the world
my
knowledge?
are
arguments?
existence?
philosophy?
possible
sources of knowledge*

of the external world. Even if one were to attempt such a proof, one's evidence would be no more adequate than that already accessible to the ordinary cognitive mode of circumspection. Indeed, one's "epistemic" evidence for the existence of the external world may even be less adequate than one's "circumspective" evidence. For the theoretical mode of cognition attends only to "things" and their "properties," while the "world" is the kind of thing with which circumspection is closely familiar. The deficiency in the first kind of evidence and the tendency to disregard the second kind are perhaps the main factors motivating the attempted proofs in the first place.

I now want to turn to Wittgenstein's position. While his views on the possibility of proving the existence of the external world may have relevance for the proofs of Kant and other idealists, he seems to focus his attack primarily on the realist proof of Moore. In general, Wittgenstein argues that Moore's proof cannot go through, because it rests on a claim of knowing something that cannot be substantiated. Wittgenstein considers several senses of "knowing," but the sense required for Moore's proof to go through must meet several demands, none of which Moore's claim that he knows that "here is a hand" meets. The claim to know in this sense must answer the question of how one comes to know, must be able to be tested, and must show adequate evidence. Since Moore has met none of these demands, his claim to know boils down to a bare assurance.

If Wittgenstein's treatment of the problem of the external world had ended here, he would only have shown why Moore's proof of the existence of the external world fails to go through, and not

no need for what purpose? Lambert - 8
there is a need for the possibility of negation has arisen?

is it supposed to be a source - i.e. is it supposed to remove "ordinary" doubts?

develop this by being specific about Witt. arguments

again - the distinction between the two types of proofs is not clear at all -

why any attempt at such a proof is senseless. There is one other deficiency in Moore's claim to know, which serves as a clue enabling Wittgenstein to complete his project. The proposition, "Here is a hand," is something one cannot claim to know the truth of, not only because the claim fails to meet the requirements of justification, but because "Here is a hand" is not something, in most contexts, that is subject to doubt. And only that which it is possible to doubt or to have grounds for doubting can be known.⁸ But if "Here is a hand" is not subject to doubt in most contexts, then we can still "know," in a different sense - that of being certain - that "Here is a hand." If one can know in the sense of being certain that "Here is a hand," then one can also know in the sense of being certain that there is an external world. Finally, if one can be certain that there is an external world, then any attempt to prove its existence is pointless. What, then, is the nature of this "certainty," and how can we come to be aware of it?

Wittgenstein says that "Moore chooses precisely a case in which we all seem to know the same as he, and without being able to say how,"⁹ and that "I have known something the whole time, and yet there is no meaning in saying so."¹⁰ That is, we all know, in the sense of being certain, all along that "Here is a hand," but in most contexts it makes no sense to claim that we do. In most contexts, we use the word "hand" without attending to the implicit certainty we have that hands exist. For Wittgenstein, one learns to use words in a language-game like one learns to use tools in a workshop. The game, like the shop, forms a system or world in which each word or tool has its place and function. One learns one's way about in the

we do
Wittgenstein
this is a
"knowing"

?

language-game by learning to recognize things by their names,¹¹

and by learning to do so without any doubt.¹² "Children do not
[at first] learn that books exist, that armchairs exist, etc., etc.,
they learn to fetch books, sit in armchairs, etc., etc."¹³ For the
most part, one directly takes hold of a word in using it, just like
one grasps a tool.¹⁴

But the child also can come to learn that a mountain exists, *sounds like you take hold of the book not the word!*
because he already, so to speak, "swallows this consequence down"
in learning that someone has climbed a mountain.¹⁵ By modifying
one's language-game or shifting the context, one can bring to
explicit awareness what one had been implicitly certain of all
along. However, one can come to know that a mountain exists, in
a modified game, only on the basis of what one has already learned
about mountains in an original game. That is, one needs to adopt
a modified standpoint or different game in order to attend to the
existence of mountains, but one has already been implicitly familiar
with or certain of the existence of mountains in the original
standpoint or game. The original game or "world-picture" is a
matter-of-course foundation, that goes unmentioned, of all that we
can come to be explicitly certain of.¹⁶ The ultimate evidence one
has for the existence of things is this world-picture, which is
neither true or reasonable, nor false or unreasonable, itself, but,
like life, is "there" as an inherited background of thought and
action. "My life shews that I know or am certain that there is a
chair over there, or a door, and so on. - I tell a friend e.g. 'Take
that chair over there', 'Shut the door', etc.etc."¹⁸

Heidegger's and Wittgenstein's approaches to the problem of

the proof of an external world have some interesting epistemological implications, particularly for the foundationalist program. It seems that, for both thinkers, there are some beliefs that either cannot be justified in the strict foundationalist manner (i.e., on the basis of a primal, immediate intuition of evidence), but that need no such justification, because an appeal to a different kind of ground (Being-in-the-world or a founding world-picture) is sufficient to justify them anyway. Moreover, it seems that it is a good thing to hold these beliefs (that there is an external world, etc.), even if they can only be justified in a non-foundationalist manner. Neither Heidegger nor Wittgenstein would claim, I think, that "knowledge" of the strict foundationalist sort is not a "highly prized state" to be in. In contexts where beliefs are open to doubt, Wittgenstein seems to subscribe to the foundationalist imperative. And with the qualifications discussed above, Heidegger evinces a high respect for the "guiding" role of theoretical investigation:

in knowing, Dasein achieves a new status of Being towards a world which has already been discovered in Dasein itself. This new possibility of Being can develop itself autonomously; it can become a task to be accomplished, and as scientific knowledge it can take over the guidance for Being-in-the-world. But a 'commercium' of the subject with a world does not get created for the first time by knowing, nor does it arise from some way in which the world acts upon a subject.¹⁹

To conclude, it seems to be a question, for Heidegger and Wittgenstein, of recognizing that the foundationalist and the non-foundationalist modes of justification both have their appropriate realms of application, and that one mode need be no more "highly prized" than the other.

is the difference between just the nature of these beliefs? Or the idealist say they are subject matter

State reports - H & W say they are objective - outer state for reports? (No!)

but if both are legitimate, where is the answer to the question - does our knowledge include knowledge of the world? H & W would say

Notes

1. Heidegger, Martin, Being and Time (Macquarrie and Robinson trans.), New York, Harper & Row, 1962, p. 247.
2. Ibid., p. 249.
3. Ibid., pp. 246-47.
4. Ibid., pp. 88-89.
5. Ibid., pp. 98-99.
6. Ibid., pp. 200-01.
7. Ibid., p. 199.
8. Wittgenstein, Ludwig, On Certainty (Paul and Anscombe trans., Anscombe and von Wright, eds.), New York, Harper Torchbooks, 1972, p. 18e (121-22).
9. Ibid., p. 12e (84).
10. Ibid., p. 61e (466).
11. Ibid., pp. 46e-47e (355) (522).
12. Ibid., pp. 68e-69e (522).
13. Ibid., p. 62e (476).
14. Ibid., p. 67e (510).
15. Ibid., p. 21e (143).
16. Ibid., p. 24e (167).
17. Ibid., pp. 15e (94), 73e (559).
18. Ibid., p. 2e (7).
19. Heidegger, supra note 1, p. 90.

(4) What do you think about Witt's claim that we can know our P only if we can doubt it? (5) even if everything H says about the encounter in the world were correct, would we have answered the question? (How?)

The paper is a good beginning of a paper - but it stops at just the point where the issues get interesting. The real diff. between the realist & idealist? (1) What is the nature of the "proof" (question)? Do H's + W's "answers" to the sceptic answer the sceptic's question? How? (2) Do H's + W's explicitly embrace a foundationalist approach?