# The Need for a Hermeneutical Logic: Heidegger's Treatment of Concepts and Universals

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There exists a certain dissatisfaction with Heidegger's treatment of concepts and universals that points to the need to develop a hermeneutical logic.[1] It is a dissatisfaction that can be easily misunderstood and misplaced. Henry Pietersma, for instance, writes: "Without telling us what he thinks a concept is, Heidegger has not done full justice to the cognitive nature of such [subject-predicate] statements."[2] He maintains this criticism in *Phenomenological Epistemology* in the summary of his chapter on Heidegger. Phrasing the criticism in this manner, the Heideggerian may feel cause to complain. In his treatment of Kant in *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, Heidegger is clear that understanding and intuition/sensibility are not related to each other as "mere juxtaposition,"[3] but rather there exists a prior original unity that acts as a common root for both of these stems of knowledge; such an original unity has been obscured in the isolation and separation of the elements. This original unity is a synthesis of pure thinking and pure intuiting and is anchored in the temporalizing of temporality in the power of the imagination—something that Kant himself was beginning to understand but "shrank back from this unknown root."[4] In dealing in such fashion with the understanding in Kant, Heidegger has told us what he thinks a concept is: it arises through the power of the imagination and ultimately from a certain understanding of Being. Where is the difficulty?, we can well imagine a Heideggerian asking. Pietersma's criticism, however, is not without merit. There is a sense in which Heidegger has not done full justice to the cognitive nature of statements involving concepts where such a genetic account offered as a response is insufficient.

What I would like to accomplish in this paper is twofold. First, I would like to discuss what is this dissatisfaction with Heidegger's account. What is the criticism that is being leveled at Heidegger and what work on Heideggerians' part does it require? I suggest that the problem resides in the relationship Heidegger maintains between the "apophantic" and "existential-hermeneutical as," a derivation that is justifiably problematic. To develop this critique of Heidegger, I will draw upon issues in philosophical logic but more importantly the challenge of the classical realist regarding concepts and universals. This challenge is best expressed in the form of a question: what prevents an understanding of concepts and universals as abstract objects existing independently of human cog-

nition? From the very posing of this question we observe that a genetic account along the lines offered in *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics* is inadequate. Heidegger gives similar derivative accounts of how we come to see objects as objects, namely, as "present-at-hand." Yet unless one wishes to interpret Heidegger, wrongly, as an idealist concerning material objects, such an account does not suggest that material objects do not exist independently of us. Why does the same not hold true for concepts and universals? It is in answering these questions that the relationship between the apophantic and hermeneutical as gains priority and where we find the need to develop a hermeneutical logic. Second, by enlisting the resources of Robert Brandom, I will give an example of the kind of work that needs to be done in the development of a hermeneutical logic and a more satisfying response to the challenge of the classical realist concerning concepts and universals.

What is the "apophantic as"? The apophantic as refers to assertions such as "This hammer is heavy," whose defining characteristic as apophantic is that they are object-oriented. They make theoretical statements concerning objects and their various properties. Often such assertions are treated as objects in their own right, namely, as propositions. As ideal abstract entities, they are said to possess propositional content and meaning. They possess truth values or, as for Frege, they name truth values where such values dwell in Plato's heaven.

What is the "existential-hermeneutical as"? This is the interpretive situation we find ourselves in when engaged in practical concerns, in our various involvements in everyday living. Instead of stating "this hammer is heavy" where our interest is in its objective characteristics we say "pass me the hammer" in order to build a house for the sake of shelter. Heidegger describes a situation where a worker in an act of circumspective concern lays aside an unusable tool in his task as an example of our existential involvements. Such an act already embodies an interpretation, and such circumspection Heidegger states has its own "sight" and ways of interpreting—hence the existential-hermeneutical as. Furthermore, we have a different understanding of Being when we use something as a tool, what Heidegger calls *zuhanden*, as opposed to viewing it as an object, what Heidegger calls *vorhanden*, and similarly with assertions. The assertion as embedded in our everyday activities of practical concern such as when we state "pass me the hammer" does not have the same mode of Being or understanding as the assertion considered as a hypostatization of meaning embodied in the proposition which then refers to a truth value; certain "existential-ontological modifi-

cations" (BT, 157/200) have occurred to the assertion as used in order to arrive at an understanding of it as a proposition.

The apophantic as is said to arise out of the hermeneutical as through such modifications. Heidegger will speak of the "ontological genesis" (BT, 357/408) of the theoretical attitude from our everyday practical involvements. The priority given to *zuhanden* is that it is only in a world of meaningful involvements that typifies our tool-using capabilities that anything like objectivity can arise. The reverse is not the case. It is plausible to suggest that an object becomes as such when it is decontextualized or "de-worlded" out of our meaningful involvements. But it does appear mysterious how objects, discrete, atomistic, concrete particulars, devoid of all meaning and significance can somehow be welded together to form a world of meaningful involvements that concerns us. This is even more mysterious if we agree with Heidegger that a "world" is not an aggregate of objects but rather an "environmentality."

This talk of "arising out" and ontological genesis suggests a derivation: the derivation of the apophantic as from the hermeneutical as, and similarly the derivation of *vorhanden* (present-at-hand) from *zuhanden* (ready-to-hand). Such a derivation thesis plays a dual role in Heidegger's thought. It clarifies the relationship between two modes of being we understand, and also in numerous places it serves as a diagnosis of how certain philosophical problems, which are in fact pseudoproblems, arose. It is fine to objectify objects, and the understanding of *Vorhandenheit* we possess applied to objects is warranted. I think Heidegger does give an ontological independence to extant entities contra idealist readings of him, but that is the subject of another paper. I also think that *vorhanden* cannot be collapsed into *zuhanden* which is a common interpretation found in many Heidegger commentators, especially the pragmatist variety, but that too is a subject for another paper. However, it is incorrect to understand ourselves as objects, and it is unwarranted to hypostatize an assertion as a meaning entity, proposition, or Platonic form. Heidegger avoids all forms of Platonism. Continually in section 33 of *Being and Time* he goes to great lengths to state that we are directed towards the entity itself and not to any meaning entity, Platonic form, or representation that mediates reference. It is Heidegger's claim that numerous seemingly unsolvable problems that have troubled philosophers result from false objectifications. He would regard a robust realism concerning universals which the classical realist desires to be one such false objectification.

We are now in a position to understand the critique of Heidegger being offered here. If the derivation thesis is to serve this dual role then

both aspects must be successful. Heidegger must be able to show how *vorhanden* arises out of *zuhanden* and furthermore in its diagnostic role why it is an illegitimate extension of *Vorhandenheit* when it is applied to assertions and universals. The relationship between *vorhanden* and *zuhanden* is not what is of primary interest here, nor is it where the real strength of this critique resides. There is also a certain dissatisfaction that attaches to Heidegger's description of how when a tool breaks, goes missing, or when something blocks our activity we are led to object-ification. Why is it that such interruptions of our activity have, in Heidegger's words, the "function of bringing to the fore the characteristic of presence-at-hand" (BT, 74/104)? What is the inner connection? Why does not the person simply go mad when such breakdowns occur and not complete his project?

For various arguments I cannot pursue here, I think that Heidegger can ultimately be saved from such criticisms. Although Heideggerians need to do more work in demonstrating and arguing for the various intermediate transitional steps between *zuhanden* and *vorhanden*, and thus we are justifiably dissatisfied, the point above concerning the plaus-ibility of objectivity arising out of a world of significance and involvement, and yet the implausibility of the reverse direction, is sufficient in itself to suggest a priority to *zuhanden*. What is of particular interest is the challenge of the classical realist. What prevents an understanding of concepts and universals as abstract objects existing independently of human cognition? Why is it an illegitimate extension of *Vorhandenheit* when applied to assertions and concepts? This concerns the diagnostic role of Heidegger's derivation, and there are conditions and constraints for such a diagnostic role to fulfill.

To ascertain what these conditions and constraints are and to show that this critique has greater ramifications than the debate concerning universals and concepts, I would like to draw an analogy with issues in philosophical logic. With the relationship between the hermeneutical *as* and apophantic *as* we have a critique of logical formalism and Platonism. Just as Heidegger is brilliant at describing what understanding of Being underlies concepts in *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, in *Meta-physical Foundations of Logic* Heidegger brilliantly shows how a parti-cular understanding of Being underlies logical systems—specifically, in this work, Leibniz's logic. What is lacking here? What I am suggesting is that demonstrating that a certain understanding of Being underlies our use of logic and then critiquing that understanding of Being as not primordial, though necessary, is not yet sufficient. The machinery of formal logic is impressive and is not devoid of accomplishments. We have

to give an accounting of how the accomplishments of logic, its formal procedures of derivations, deductions, and proofs, are to be understood in such a way that appeals to Platonic entities are not necessary. Mohanty writes that Platonism is the "original sin"[5] of formal logic, and he gives the example of how logicians who seek to ban propositions in a nominalist spirit slip them in through the back door by being driven to the notion of "eternal sentences."[6] We have the seeds for such an accounting in the relationship between the apophantic and hermeneutical *as*. However, if such accomplishments are only possible through repre-sentational locutions such as viewing propositions and the "True" and the "False" as objects, as we find in Fregean semantics, then we would have a powerful argument against Heidegger's refusal to hypostatize such entities. In other words, we would have a powerful argument against the apophantic as being strongly derived from the hermeneutical *as*.

Pointing to a more primordial understanding of Being will not help us here. We would still want to ask which ontology is to be the master and why. What is required of Heideggerians is to show how these formal accomplishments can be explained within the constraints of our hermen-eutical situation: how an analysis of our practices in concrete practical life situations which in turn has a certain understanding of Being un-derlying them, can be shown to underlie and explain what has been accomplished in formalism. Otherwise, the position that formalism must become, or rather always was, concrete starts to lose its persuasiveness. This is what is meant by the need for a hermeneutical logic.[7]

This is what ultimately underlies the challenge of the classical realist concerning concepts and universals. Pietersma, for instance, asks of Heidegger, "Do we draw from a particular entity a property which that particular exemplifies but which is itself multiply exemplifiable?"[8] He gives the example of Plato and Aristotle's wisdom as shared through exem-plifying a universal.[9] Pietersma intends this to be a criticism of Heidegger in that he does not enter into the meaningful debates concerning uni-versals and particulars as traditionally posed. Thus, Heidegger refuses to recognize that there are purely cognitive theoretical problems, according to Pietersma. But consider what such questions are really asking for. The work that universals and concepts accomplish in such statements must be accounted for through an understanding of the hermeneutical *as* in such a way that appeals to universals in the realist sense are not necessary, if we are to be disabused of our realism concerning them. Otherwise we can accuse Heidegger of a genetic fallacy and substantiate Pietersma's thesis that universals and concepts present us with purely

cognitive theoretical problems that require purely cognitive theoretical solutions, which talk of derivation and understandings of Being obscures.

I do think that the relationship Heidegger maintains between the apophantic and hermeneutical as is fundamentally correct. However, I also appreciate the power of this critique. Our question then becomes, is there a way we can understand *circumspective concern* which defines our existential-hermeneutical situation in such a way that it is clear how concepts arise out of, and whose work is accounted for through such *circumspection*? At this stage I would like to adopt two key ideas of Brandom's from his work *Making it Explicit*: the idea of an inferential understanding of conceptual content and that of materially good inferences. The inferential understanding of conceptual content contrasts with the traditional "understanding of content exclusively according to the model of representation of states of affairs."[10] This traditional understanding is the pre-Kantian idea—notably present in empiricism but also in Plato and Aristotle—that concepts are grasped individually and defined by what they are able to represent. Such a separate and independent grasp of the concept is said to figure in judgments and are incorporated into inferential relations. I have the concept of "redness" that represents red, for instance, and I am able to employ it in a judgment: "the rose is red." From the grasp of this concept, I can then infer "this is not green" or "this is colored" where this concept is considered as separate and distinct from such inferences. This distinctness is defined representationally: it is because "red" represents something other than "green" that the concepts are thus differently grasped and are different whether as "general names" (empiricists) or different objects as universals (Plato). We extend this understanding of the representational definition of concepts to other terms in our semantics. Singular terms are said to represent objects, and whole sentences are said to represent "states of affairs" or name truth values while, of course, predicates are our concepts. This is the traditional model with which we are familiar. "However there is a minority semantic tradition that takes *inference* rather than representation as its master concept."[11]

Such an inferentialist semantics was the project of the early Frege, however the initial idea is accredited to Kant. It was Kant who saw that concepts are only concepts in judgments; they do not stand on their own. But it was Hegel who began to bring this idea to fruition. The dialectical logic, mediation—"his term for inferential articulation, is derived from the role of the middle term in syllogistic inference"[12]—and determinate negation—"his term for material incompatibility, from which, he takes it, the notion of formal negation is abstracted"[13]—brought home

the idea that concepts are only concepts when they are inferentially articulated. The movement is not from representations and grasp of concepts to inferences as we find in the traditional approach. It is rather inferences that lead to representations, just as if the world were all one color we would not have the concept of "red" or "color." Concepts require other concepts in order to be: "one cannot have just one concept."[14] It is only when concepts are in such an inferential web that they can be conceptually contentful. Inferential articulation is intrinsic to concepts. Part of the intrinsic nature of concepts is not only that they are inferentially articulated but differentially articulated as well. The concept "red," for instance, can only be as such if we can infer "this is colored" and "this is not green." Without such a web of relations the concept cannot be, and there is nothing to say concerning it. Thus, the traditional and empiricist idea of singularly or atomistically grasping a concept is jettisoned. Furthermore, such inferences do not happen out there. We are the ones inferring. It is a practice, a *know how*, that we do, which for Brandom occurs in the game of giving and asking for reasons. Hence inferential capability, which is the *sine qua non* of concepts, is a practical ability.

What is the idea of a materially good inference? This idea contrasts with the traditional approach that is based on "an understanding of the goodness of inference exclusively on the model of formal validity."[15] It is here that Brandom hones in his critique of formalism in logic. What is a "material inference"? The best way to elucidate this term is, as Brandom does, by providing examples. Borrowing from him, I infer from "Today is Wednesday" that "Tomorrow is Thursday," from "Pittsburgh is to the west of Philadelphia" that "Philadelphia is to the east of Pittsburgh."[16] Understanding the content of the concepts today and tomorrow, east and west, makes these inferences correct and possible. It is part and parcel of the material content of the concepts themselves that licenses and indeed requires these inferences as part of their nature. In the inferences above we have not specifically employed logical concepts; the inferences are made strictly on the basis of the content of the semantic nonlogical concepts we are using. As any of us who have taught symbolic logic will recall, these inferences are treated in a formalist vein as enthymemes: there are premises that are unstated or suppressed. When I infer "the streets are wet" from "rain," what I am doing, according to this story, is implicitly employing the logical concept of the conditional "if it is raining, then the streets are wet," and then utilizing the straightforward logical rule of inference *modus ponens*, I detach the conclusion of the wet streets from this conditional. These formal moves

of the conditional and *modus ponens* define the inference and, according to the formalist, are what must be antecedently grasped and implicit in any inference we make; logical form takes priority in the order of explanation of inferential activity. The idea of a material inference based on the semantic content of concepts themselves denies this and suggests that it has gotten the order of explanation backwards. It is material inferences based on and enabling the content of nonlogical concepts that define inferential practice and form the basis of our understanding of logical form. Logic *expresses, makes explicit*, what is happening at the level of such concrete, material, inferential practice.

These ideas are of assistance to us in two respects. First, in *Being and Time* Heidegger refers to language as a "totality of words" (BT, 161/204) which "has a 'worldly' Being of its own" (BT, 161/204) and "which we may come across as ready-to-hand" (BT, 161/204). What does this mean, and how do we build a semantics from such sketchy comments? Where do we begin? With respect to the first question, a "worldly" being that we may come across as ready-to-hand means that language has a holistic structure. Just as a hammer which is ready-to-hand intrinsically and holistically refers to nails, boards, and other equipment we can state that a word in this totality of words refers to other words in order to be meaningful, hence linguistic holism. However, maybe describing this as a set of reference relations is not our best route. Reference or denotation has representational and atomistic connotations, i.e., how "A" considered separate and distinctly on its own can refer to "B" considered separate and distinctly on its own. Reference has this connotation of external relations which is the antithesis of what Heidegger is trying to state in describing the "environmentality" of the workshop. Perhaps we should speak of *inferential relations*, the concrete material inference. How one word or concept refers to another in a holistic structure that has a "worldly" being of its own may be difficult to grasp, but we do understand how a word or concept is inferred from another. These inferences which are concrete, practical, and material, in which formal logical vocabulary comes later on the scene, may be what we need in order to understand how language is "ready-to-hand." As Brandom's book testifies, by developing a viable inferentialist semantics we can put some flesh on Heidegger's skeletal comments. This answers our second and third questions.

Can we inject a little more substance into the notion of *circumspective concern*? There must surely be more to circumspective sight than Dreyfus's "Zen-like flow"[17] interpretation. Could it be that the worker, given her understanding of the antecedent conditions governing her

task, has inferred that the hammer is too heavy, that part of circumspective concern is an inferential ability? Since this is a material inference, it is concrete and practical prior to any logical analysis and formal treatment. It therefore does not involve the type of theoretical assertions that is the target of Heidegger's critique. We can see how Heidegger's treatment of the origin of concepts in an understanding of Being in *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics* connects with the relationship between the apophantic and hermeneutical as, thus giving greater coherence to Heidegger's project. We can turn to Heidegger's reading of Hegel, of how there is a "step back" into an understanding of Being that underlies mediation and inferential practice. By understanding such inferential practice as similarly differential practice, we have a smooth transition to the "diaresis and synthesis" structure of apophantic statements which Heidegger describes in section 33 of *Being and Time*. There are some significant differences between Brandom and Heidegger that prevent an easy "insert Brandom here" attitude and which needs to be argued. However, there is potential here for real developments.

In conclusion, to respond to the challenge of the classical realist, concepts can only be what they are when inferentially articulated. Such inferential articulation is a practical ability which as such is "ready-to-hand"; therefore, the apophantic as arises out of the hermeneutical as. Why is it an illegitimate extension of *Vorhandenheit* to apply it to concepts? Because concepts are inconceivable as self-contained, discrete objects when their inferential articulation is understood. This is what prevents an understanding of concepts and universals as abstract objects existing independently of human cognition. It is in this manner that the derivation thesis in its dual role can be successful.

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## Notes

1. References to Heidegger's *Being and Time* in what follows are to the translation by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1962), and are cited as **BT**. The German pagination is given followed by the page number in the Macquarrie and Robinson translation.

2. Henry Pietersma, *Phenomenological Epistemology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 107.

3. Martin Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, fourth edition, trans. Richard Taft (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 24.

4. Ibid., 110.

5. J. N. Mohanty, "Heidegger on Logic" in *Martin Heidegger: Critical Assessments. Vol. 3: Language*, ed. C. MaCaan (New York: Routledge, 1992), 117.

6. Ibid., 117.

7. This term is borrowed from Mohanty; see ibid., 114.

8. Pietersma, *Phenomenological Epistemology*, 104.

9. Ibid., 105.

10. Robert Brandom, *Making it Explicit* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 130.

11. Ibid., 93.

12. Ibid., 92.

13. Ibid., 92.

14. Ibid., 89.

15. Ibid., 131.

16. Ibid., 98.

17. This is how Dreyfus himself refers to his interpretation. See Hubert L. Dreyfus, "Response to John Searle" in *Heidegger, Coping and Cognitive Science: Essays in Honor of Hubert L. Dreyfus. Vol. 2*, eds. Mark Wrathall and Jeff Malpas (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000), 330.