

# Hermeneutic Conditions and Phenomenological Necessity

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My aim in what follows is to contribute to recent discussions concerning the place of phenomenology within the tradition of transcendental philosophy. Very broadly, the issue here is whether phenomenology aspires to provide transcendental results, and if so, whether it can hope meet those aspirations. This is a large and many-faceted question; my aim here is to explore one rather narrow slice of it. I shall for the most part confine my attention to the version of the phenomenological enterprise found in Division I of *Being and Time*. And I shall concern myself not with the full range of questions raised by the idea of a transcendental inquiry but rather myopically with a set of questions concerning the distinctive logical modality of purported transcendental results. This modality can be identified in various ways, but we can see it at work in the oft-repeated thought that *transcendental philosophy aims to identify the conditions on the possibility of certain facts or features of our experience*. (The archetype for this sort of claim is of course Kant's thesis that the application of the categories is a condition on the possibility of self-conscious experience.) If A is a condition on the possibility of B, then it would seem that A *must* obtain, given the actuality of B. We might accordingly frame the issue as a question about the modality of necessity in the context of Heideggerian phenomenology. Even so narrowed, the issues here are still pretty large and thorny. I don't pretend here to be able to resolve them; my hope is that I can at least sharpen the questions and perhaps thereby render them more tractable. In pursuing these issues I shall pay particular attention to a recent illuminating analysis proposed and elaborated by Taylor Carman.

## §1 Transcendental Philosophy and the Logical Modality of *Being and Time*

Is Division I of *Being and Time* an exercise in transcendental philosophy? Does it aim to identify conditions on the possibility of certain facts or features of our experience? Let me begin by briefly considering two kinds of evidence which *suggest* (though they do not require) an affirmative answer to this question. The first evidence concerns Heidegger's use of the notion of *Existenzialien* –

“*existentialia*” in Macquarrie and Robinson’s translation, or “existentials” in Stambaugh’s. Much of Heidegger’s phenomenological investigation in Division I is organized as the enumeration of various traits of *Dasein* that are described as existentials: mineness, being-in-the-world, being-with, *das Man*, care, etc. A good deal of subtle interpretative debate has been invested in recent years in determining the content of these distinctively Heideggerian notions, but what exactly is meant in calling them *existentialia*? What distinguishes these features from other features of *Dasein*? The answer seems to be that *existentialia* are essential features of *Dasein*, constituents of its distinctive mode of being. Heidegger uses the term “existence” [*Existenz*] as the generic term for the mode of being of *Dasein* – that which distinguishes *Dasein* as the kind of entity that it is. The *existentialia* fill out this general characterization of *Dasein*’s mode of being with something like a set of attributes without which *Dasein* would not be what it is.

The lineage of Heidegger’s notion of an existential can be traced to Kantian transcendentalism, by way of the mediating figure of Wilhelm Dilthey. In his pioneering but incomplete *Introduction to the Human Sciences*, Dilthey laid out an agenda for extending Kant’s distinctive transcendental approach in philosophy.<sup>1</sup> Kant’s categories, according to Dilthey, provide the basic conceptual framework for applying the notion of an object, and as such articulate the essential concepts required for the sciences which deal with objects – the *Naturwissenschaften*. But Kant’s project is incomplete, accordingly to Dilthey, insofar as it fails to provide an analogous account of the categorial framework required for applying the notion of Life [*Leben*] or Spirit [*Geist*], and accordingly of the categories essential to the historical or human sciences.<sup>2</sup> Accordingly, Dilthey proposed to supplement to Kant’s categories with what he called “the categories of life.” Most narrowly these categories are the concepts required in order to identify something as what he calls “a psycho-physical life-unit” – effectively the categories necessary to any minimally adequate biography.<sup>3</sup> More broadly they include the concepts necessary for the identification of any cultural or historical artifact, undertaking, or institution.<sup>4</sup> Like Kant, Dilthey insisted that such categories must be *brought* to empirical science rather than derived therefrom. One could never gain the concept of an object empirically if the very possibility of experience of objects presupposes the application of the Categories. So analogously, one could never investigate something *as a human life* unless one already had available the conceptual framework that makes such experience possible.

Heidegger’s relation to Dilthey is complex, but in his use of the notion of an *existentialia* he seems to be following Dilthey’s lead. In *Being and Time*, his initial introduction of the concept comes in close proximity to his discussion of Dilthey, whom he describes as “on his way towards the question

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<sup>1</sup> References to Dilthey’s works are given to volume and page of the English *Selected Works*, edited by Makreel and Rodi (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985- ). Dilthey’s *Introduction* is found in Vol. I.

<sup>2</sup> See, e.g., Dilthey, *Works* III, 197-198: “For this reason I have designated the basic task of all reflection about the human sciences as a critique of historical reason. The problem that needs to be solved for historical reason was not fully addressed by the Kantian critique of reason. ... We must leave the pure and refined air of Kant’s critique ... and do justice to the completely different nature of historical objects.”

<sup>3</sup> Dilthey, *Works* I, 85.

<sup>4</sup> See, for instance “The Categories of Life” Dilthey, *Works*, III, 248-264. Dilthey never seems to have settled on a final list of the Categories of Life, but one of his lists runs as follows: Lived Experience, Duration, Meaning, Significance, Value, Whole & Part, Development.

of Life,” albeit “limited [in] both his problematic and the set of concepts with which it had to be put into words.”<sup>5</sup> His formal explanation of the term *existentialia* follows closely in the grooves Dilthey had established:

All *explicata* to which the analytic of *Dasein* gives rise are obtained by considering *Dasein*'s existence-structure. Because the being-characteristics of *Dasein* are defined in terms of existentiality, we call them '*existentialia*'. These are to be sharply distinguished from what we call 'categories' – determinations of Being for entities whose character is not that of *Dasein*. ... *Existentialia* and categories are the two basic possibilities for characters of Being. [SZ §9, 44-45]

Like Dilthey's categories of life, then, *existentialia* are introduced in an attempt to delineate the categorial framework that distinguishes, as Heidegger puts it, a *who* from a *what*.<sup>6</sup> If this much is correct, then Heidegger's notion of an *existentiale*, together with the role of this notion in his phenomenological explication of *Dasein*, provides a first reason for treating *Being and Time* as a transcendental investigation. For in this deployment of the notion of an *existentiale* we find one key ingredient of the transcendental recipe. To apply the notion of an *existentiale* is to make claims in the modality of necessity -- not claims about how *Dasein* happens to be, or actually is, or the way most *Daseins* are, but about how something *has to be* if it is to count as a *Dasein* at all.

This first evidence in support of a transcendental reading of Division I is bolstered by a second body of evidence, this drawn quite directly from the idiom in which Heidegger's major claims are characteristically introduced. Again and again we see Heidegger advancing claims in the characteristic modal form of a transcendental thesis. I shall confine myself here to three examples. Exhibit A comes in connection with Heidegger's claims about *Dasein*'s understanding of Others:

[B]ecause *Dasein*'s Being is being-with, its understanding of Being already implies the understanding of Others. This understanding, like any understanding, is not acquaintance derived from knowledge about them, but a primordially existential kind of Being, which, more than anything else, MAKES such knowledge and acquaintance POSSIBLE. SZ 123-124

Exhibit B – concerns the conditions on the possibility of moods and affects:

And ONLY BECAUSE the senses belong ontologically to an entity whose kind of Being is Being-in-the-World with a state-of-mind, CAN they be touched by anything or have a sense for something in such a way that what touches them shows itself in an affect. SZ 137

Exhibit C – comes in the context of Heidegger's claims about thrown projection:

ONLY BECAUSE the Being of the there receives its constitution through understanding and through the character of understanding as projection, ONLY BECAUSE it is what it becomes (or alternatively does not become) CAN IT say to itself 'become what you are' and say this with understanding. SZ 145

In each case we find the claim that some trait or feature of *Dasein* is the condition on the possibility of some one of *Dasein*'s capacities. The capacities are typically one or another ontic feature – acquaintance with other people, being touched by something, being able to understand a certain injunction. These are in turn said to be made possible only by some further, typically ontological

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<sup>5</sup> SZ §10, 46-47.

<sup>6</sup> “The entities which correspond to them require different kinds of primary interrogation respectively: any entity is either a '*who*' (existence) or a '*what*' (presence at hand in the broadest sense).” [SZ §9, 45]

feature of *Dasein*. Similar claims occur in almost every major section of *Being and Time*, and in connection with each of the major new concepts that Heidegger introduces as Division I unfolds. For my purposes here I want to steer clear of the problem of understanding the specific *content* of these claims; my concern is rather with their logical *form*. In particular, what we should note in each case is the *modality* of Heidegger's claims, which explicitly invoke claims of possibility and so implicitly make claims to necessity. If a certain ontological structure (e.g., being-with) is a condition on the possibility of some particular ontic feature (e.g., knowledge about others) then the ontological structure *must obtain* for any entity exhibiting the ontic feature. In this we should recognize the characteristic modality of transcendental philosophy, at least as it is orthodoxly understood.

## §2 The Semantics of 'Dasein'

In considering the force of such claims, and how they might be warranted, I want to worry my way through a question about the interpretation of the word "*Dasein*", which is of course one of Heidegger's central terms of art. First let me be clear, however, that it is not my intention to revisit the spirited debate over the proper *individuation* of *Dasein* – whether "*Dasein*" is a mass term or a count term, for instance, or whether it properly takes the indefinite article. I am going to assume that that debate has in all essentials been settled; whatever "*Dasein*" means, Heidegger means to say that there are as many of them in this room as there are bodies.<sup>7</sup> But it is important to recognize that this alone does not suffice to specify a semantics for Heidegger's term. Moreover, some of the open semantic questions come to have quite a direct bearing on the problem of understanding the status of Heidegger's modal claims in *Being and Time*.

In approaching this issue, let me start by contrasting two distinct and opposed accounts of the semantics of Heidegger's term. Call the first the extensionalist account. On this reading, the meaning of the term "*Dasein*" is established extensionally, that is, by specifying its referents. This is accomplished by means of a coextensive term, such as "human being", "*homo sapiens*" or "man." The extensionalist account is rarely spelled out explicitly among Heidegger's commentators, but it often seems to be implicit in the ways in which Heidegger's technical term is introduced into commentary and analysis. Pierre Keller introduces the term "*Dasein*" by putting it in parentheses following the term "human being."<sup>8</sup> David Cerbone emphasizes the virtue of introducing a term whose referent is understood but the sense of which remains to be determined.<sup>9</sup> One commentator who offers explicit attention to the semantic details is Frederick Olafson:

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<sup>7</sup> The debate over this question was inaugurated by Haugeland 1982. The objections to Haugeland's position are laid out concisely in Dreyfus 1991, 14. For a more extensive analysis see Carman 2003, 35-43.

<sup>8</sup> Keller 1999, 100. See also Moran 2000, pp. 193, 206.

<sup>9</sup> "Heidegger uses this idiosyncratic locution [*Dasein*], ... in order to exclude as many assumptions and prejudices as possible concerning the kind of beings we ourselves are. Other terms, such as "man," "human being," "*homo sapiens*," and so on, already carry connotations from years of circulation in philosophy, theology, anthropology, psychology, and biology, ..." (Cerbone 2006, 42).

[T]he concept of a human being and the concept of [*Dasein*] are extensionally equivalent in the sense that they apply to the same entities, [but] they are not intensionally equivalent because they take these entities in different ways. (Olafson 1987, 53)

As we shall see, Olafson's position is not quite as univocal as this makes it seem, but we can at least see here the main outlines of the extensionalist approach: the initial meaning of a novel term is fixed by specifying a known range of entities to which it applies. We then use the extension, together with the ontological facts about those entities, to establish an intension for the term.<sup>10</sup>

The extensional account of the semantics of "*Dasein*" brings with it certain commitments about the structure of Heidegger's investigation. If the term "*Dasein*" is fixed extensionally, then it is natural to read the analytic of *Dasein* as what I will call a *de re* ontological inquiry. That is, it asks about the mode of being of a certain set of entities that have been identified extensionally. Hence for instance when Heidegger claims that "*Dasein* is an entity which, in its very Being, comports itself understandingly toward being"<sup>11</sup> this would be read *de re*, as a claim about the comportment of a particular set of entities that have been antecedently specified. Notice also that on the extensionalist accounting, there can really be no question about whether there are non-human *Daseins* – e.g., whether dolphins or chimpanzees or Alpha Centurians or robots might be *Dasein*. Correlatively, there would seem to be no scope for asking whether there might be some normally functioning humans – perhaps in a culture quite unlike ours – who are not *Dasein*. On the extensionalist interpretation, these questions are settled from the outset – not by any facts about such entities, but simply by the semantics of the term.

The purest alternative to the extensionalist approach would be a purely intensionalist account. On this reading, what is initially fixed is the intension or sense of the term "*Dasein*," leaving the question of extension to be settled independently. On this reading, the claim that every *Dasein* has an understanding of being, or that every *Dasein* comports itself toward its own being can be taken as implicit definitions of a technical term. In this case the question of whether Alpha Centurians or dolphins are *Dasein* is open; it is the question – no doubt hard to decide but nonetheless meaningful – as to whether those creatures have an understanding of being and ontological self-concern. It would also be open in principle to discover what is ruled out in advance by the extensionalist approach – namely that some human beings are not *Dasein*. Notice that on this reading, the existential analytic would be a *de dicto* ontological inquiry. To say of *Dasein* that, e.g., it is subject to moods, would be to say (*de dicto*) of beings with an understanding of being, that they are one-and-all subject to moods.

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<sup>10</sup> Although I shall have little to say about the issue here, it is worth noting that this approach assumes that all human beings are of the same ontological type. This may seem an obvious assumption, but it is far from uncontroversial, and it is not at all clear how it can be defended once it is called into question. To get a sense of what questions are being begged here, one need only think of the many religious discourses that talk of the birth of "a new being" upon one or another kind of religious conversion. Closer to home, Husserl's position in *Crisis* edges toward a conception of ontological distinction within the human race. Once what he calls "European Man" has discovered the infinite ideals constitutive of reason and science, some human beings come to be oriented by a totally new set of demands and ideals. They demand universally true principles admissible by proof and rules of conduct that hold everywhere, for all agents and in all circumstances. This might well be understood as a kind of ontological transformation within human history. At any rate it would seem unfortunate if this possibility were simply excluded by fiat, as the extensionalist approach threatens to do.

<sup>11</sup> Heidegger SZ §12, 52-53. (Citations to *Being and Time* are given to the German pagination.)

Despite his apparent endorsement of the extensionalist position, some of Olafson's remarks seem to betray an intensionalist semantics. He writes in his preface, for example:

In the lectures [the concept of being] is developed much more fully and in a way that demonstrates just how closely it is linked to the concept of *Dasein* – that is, the kind of entity that human beings prove to be on Heidegger's analysis ... (Olafson 1987, xvi)

Here the suggestion is that "*Dasein*" has a *conceptual* link to the concept of being; moreover the thesis that human beings are *Dasein* is something *emerges* in the course of an investigation. These suggestions fit poorly with the extensionalist semantics, since the claim that human beings are *Dasein* would not under that interpretation be the sort of thing to be discovered or proved; it would be a trivial consequence of the semantics of the term. Moreover, the suggestion of a *conceptual* link between "*Dasein*" and "being" would seem to require that these terms are fixed intensionally, most straightforwardly by defining *Dasein* by appeal to the idea of having an understanding of being or having ontological self-concern. In that case one could indeed hope to *prove* that human beings are *Dasein*; though just what sort of proof would be required is a matter we will have to consider. For an unambiguously intensionalist approach we can look to George Steiner; Steiner introduces Heidegger's term with an explicit definition: "A being which questions Being, by first questioning its own [being], is a *Da-Sein*" (Steiner 1978, 80).

Although I have made reference here to the question of whether non-human animals or computers could be *Dasein*, I want to be clear that these are not the questions that interest me in this context. I raise these questions about the extension of Heidegger's term only with the aim of clarifying the logical form of the claims Heidegger makes *about us*. This seems to be worth getting clear about for its own sake, but it also bears quite significantly on the problem of establishing or assessing those claims. Allow me to comment briefly on this in order to show something of what is at stake.

Start with the issues about modality. The first and crucial point here is that modal operators function quite differently in *de dicto* and *de re* contexts. Recall the stock example: If I say, *de dicto*, that the tallest philosopher in the room is a philosopher, then I have uttered a necessary truth – a tautology. But if I say, *de re*, of that same individual that he is a philosopher then my claim is contingent. Depending on the context of utterance I will have said of Charles Taylor or Paul Churchland or someone else that *that individual* is a philosopher, and this is anything but a tautology. Accordingly, the choice between *de re* and *de dicto* interpretations of Heidegger's phenomenology makes a considerable difference to the logical form of its modal propositions. It should also be clear that the question of what can be claimed to hold necessarily of *Dasein* varies crucially with the semantics one chooses for the term. To take the most obvious point: on the Extensionalist semantics it is a necessary truth that all and only human beings are *Dasein*, while on the Intensionalist semantics it is a necessary truth that every *Dasein* has an understanding of being. But these necessities are not interchangeable. So it turns out that the choice between the Extensionalist and the Intensionalist semantic models has dramatic consequences for the interpretation of Heidegger's doctrines, quite apart from idle questions about the mode of being of Alpha Centurians.

The choice among semantic models for “*Dasein*” also has consequences for the methodology of phenomenology. Let me here emphasize one dimension of this issue, to which I shall return below. Phenomenology is often characterized as a descriptive undertaking, and indeed Heidegger himself goes so far as to say that the phrase “descriptive phenomenology” is a tautological expression.<sup>12</sup> So it is worth considering under what semantic model one could hope to discover something about *Dasein* by description. Here I mean to allow that description could take a variety of different forms. It might be a kind of flat reporting based on bare observation, but it could alternatively be the sort of thick interpretative description favoured by both Heidegger and Sartre. Either way, however, it would seem that a descriptive methodology must in the first instance describe something particular. I can describe Paraguay’s own-goal in the opening match against England. I can describe the crowd’s reaction. I might try to describe and articulate my own emotional reaction to the event, or perhaps even my state-of-mind such that I reacted in that way. But in all these cases the object of my description is one or another kind of particular – whether a particular event or episode or psychological state. If I am an existential phenomenologist I might undertake to describe the distinctive character of my being-in-the-world. But if what I am offering is a *description* then this must also be a special kind of particular. The question we must consider concerns the circumstances under which descriptions of particulars might be used to warrant general claims.

The answer to this question comes out rather differently, as it happens, depending on whether one chooses the Extensionalist or the Intensionalist semantic model. On the Intensionalist model, rich description of a few particulars would seem to be a rather risky, even irresponsible way of warranting claims about *Dasein* as such. For one would have no particular reason to suppose that the features one has described are attributable *de dicto* to *Dasein* as such, rather than simply being accidental features of the particular *Dasein* one chose to describe. The Extensionalist would seem to be in somewhat better shape, as long as it is safe to assume that the human race is ontologically homogenous. For in that case, the description of the mode of being of one *Dasein* would *ipso facto* be a description of the mode of being of all. In both cases, however, one is effectively relying on some resource that goes beyond mere description. To put the point in the logician’s terms, the move from a particular claim (‘a is F’) to its corresponding generalization (‘All x are F’) is warranted only under the special circumstance that a is a perfect exemplar of its kind. For the Extensionalist this circumstance is guaranteed under the assumption of ontological homogeneity; the Intensionalist seems to require some additional resource to warrant the inference.

### §3 Hermeneutic Conditions

I want to turn now to consider the way in which these and related issues have been handled in Taylor Carman’s elegant and illuminating study, *Heidegger’s Analytic*. Carman’s book is important

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<sup>12</sup> SZ §8, 35.

for my purposes for two reasons: first because it is a book that has done a lot to shape and advance my understanding of Heidegger's position, and secondly because it very squarely sets *Being and Time* in the transcendental tradition, and explicitly sets out to discharge the obligations that such a reading incurs.

Once again here my approach will be myopic, and accordingly I set aside a whole raft of issues on which Carman's book makes important contributions. I do this in order to hone in on two features of the book that are pertinent to the issues under discussion here. First, it is important to know – for reasons that will become clear shortly – that Carman's book is *very unkind to Husserl*. The second chapter of *Heidegger's Analytic* is called "The Critique of Husserl", and Husserl emerges from Carman's mill a battered and bruised figure. I won't go into this here in any detail, but confine myself to a brief catalogue of Carman's complaints. Husserl's phenomenology, we are told, is "at once uncritical and incoherent" (54); it is "caught in a vicious circle" (54). Husserl "never acknowledges the interpretative character of his own inquiry", but adopts "a pretense of scientific rigour" (55). He relies on "ontologically obscure distinctions" (56), uncritically takes for granted the "primacy of the present [temporal moment]" (61), and relies on "unexamined ontological categories" (87). According to Carman, "Husserl's [phenomenological] findings are not findings at all, ... but metaphysical prejudices regarding the being of human beings" (95). As the capstone to this barrage, Carman quotes from Heidegger's contemptuous letter to Löwith: "I am now convinced that Husserl was never a philosopher, not even for one second in his life" (58).

I want to come back to consider the ramifications of this stance toward Husserl, but for now I set it aside in order to focus on what is ultimately the more important contribution of Carman's book: its account of Heidegger's relation to Kant, and more specifically to the Kantian project of transcendental investigation. If Carman's Heidegger is mercilessly critical of Husserl, he is, by contrast, deeply indebted to Kant. There is, according to Carman, a deep analogy between Kant's project in the *Critique of Pure Reason* and Heidegger's project in Division I of *Being and Time*, an analogy which informs both the project and strategy of Heidegger's investigation. The very idea of an existential *analytic* of Dasein is "a self-conscious allusion to the Transcendental Analytic that makes up the central constructive core of the first Critique" (10). Carman elaborates this analogy with considerable subtlety, but once again I want to pick out two features that are particularly important for our purposes here. The first concerns a corollary of this approach, namely that the claims of Division I are explicitly to be understood as making transcendental claims, with the distinctive logical modality characteristic thereof. Carman quotes Heidegger's own description of his project (in *Basic Problems*) as an inquiry "into the *conditions of the possibility* of the understanding of being as such" (Carman, 18, emphasis added). Thoroughgoing though the repudiation of Husserl may be, there is thus still a sense in which Heideggerian ontology, as Carman approaches it, is to be understood as transcendental phenomenology. It is this, above everything else, that marks out the central stake of Carman's study. Unlike those who would dismiss the transcendental tropes of *Being and Time* as, for instance, an unfortunate backsliding into the idiom of the predominant neo-Kantianism of the day, or an alien

presence that Heidegger soon saw fit to excise, Carman embraces the transcendental ambitions of Heidegger's analytic, and sets out to defend them.<sup>13</sup>

This brings us to the second key feature of Carman's elaboration of the analogy with Kant. For how are Heidegger's transcendental ambitions to be framed and defended? The key to Carman's reconstruction lies in the notion of a hermeneutic condition. Carman introduces this notion in self-conscious imitation of Henry Allison's controversial notion of an epistemic condition. For Allison, an epistemic condition is a condition necessary for knowledge of an object or an objective state of affairs.<sup>14</sup> Carman takes over this notion but crucially modifies it. For Heidegger the aim is not to identify conditions necessary for *knowledge*, but rather conditions necessary for finding *meaning*, or for interpretation:

Heidegger, I shall argue, is interested ... in the conditions of the possibility of Interpretation ... . Interpretation, for Heidegger, means explicit understanding, making sense of something *as* something – primitively, *entities as entities*, that is, as *being*. (12)

The body of Carman's text is thus his attempt to show that and how Heidegger's existential analytic of *Dasein* systematically exhibits the conditions necessary for the discovery of meaning in this sense.

At this point I must beg forgiveness for passing over the rich texture of Carman's treatment of these conditions in order to return to the mode of unseemly quibbling over semantics. For my purposes here, the key thing about Carman's strategy is that in taking over and adapting Allison's notion of an epistemic condition, he takes over and redeploys the distinctive and robust logical modality distinctive of that transcendental approach. Allison's epistemic conditions track conditions *necessary* for knowledge; Carman's epistemic conditions are meant to track conditions *necessary* for interpretation. So naturally I want to know: under what semantic regime are these modal claims deployed and defended?

In considering this question, we can first go back to our initial semantic distinction: is Carman an Extensionalist or an Intensionalist about the semantics of "*Dasein*"? On this point I find Carman's position hard to pin down. Some of his formulations strongly suggest that he is following the Extensionalist semantic model. Hence in his introduction, Carman writes:

The argument of *Being and Time* therefore begins by referring ontology back to what Heidegger calls an 'existential analytic of *Dasein*,' that is, an account of the basic structures of human existence ... . (Carman, 9)<sup>15</sup>

This certainly suggests that "*Dasein*" must be coextensive with "human being". But when he comes explicitly to consider the meaning of *Dasein*, he does so in ways that seem to prejudice the Intensionalist semantics:

What is *Dasein*? What kind of entity exists in such a way that its existence involves an understanding of being, and consequently rests on the conditions of the interpretability of entities as entities? (Carman, 35).

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<sup>13</sup> For an interesting account of the transcendental idiom of *Being and Time* as an alien discourse in Heidegger's project, see Raymond Guess, *Outside Ethics*.

<sup>14</sup> Allison 1983, 10; Allison's initial definition actually characterizes epistemic conditions as conditions necessary for the *representation* of an object or objective state of affairs, which brings it somewhat closer to Carman's notion of an epistemic condition.

<sup>15</sup> Add additional examples??

Carman's answer to this question is "embodied human agents understood as concrete particulars" (Carman 36), but notice that this way of framing the question privileges a particular definition of *Dasein*, which is then employed to identify suitable referents.

This seeming ambiguity in Carman's position has further consequences for his discussion. The most important of these concern the proper scope and specification of the hermeneutic conditions Carman seeks to identify. On this point Carman spells out his position in some detail. Following Allison's lead again, he claims that hermeneutic conditions are neither causal conditions (whether psychological or physiological) under which interpretation takes place, nor logical conditions (conditions that would follow simply from the bare *concept* of interpretation or meaning). This seems like the right place to locate phenomenological investigation – if indeed there is any space left over outside these two kinds of conditions. But in specifying this point, Carman again and again deploys a formulation that, from the perspective of my semantic obsessions, is crucially indeterminate. An inquiry into hermeneutic conditions, we are told, is "an inquiry into the conditions of anything making sense *to us* as anything" (12); it aims to provide "an account of the conditions of *our* having an explicit understanding of being" (13).<sup>16</sup> What concerns me here is of course the proper interpretation of the personal pronouns in these formulations, which recur regularly through the body of Carman's analysis.<sup>17</sup> In one way, of course, these pronouns are innocent enough: "our" here means "Dasein's"; the understanding or 'making sense' is *Dasein's* understanding. But the scope of Carman's claims, their logical form, and ultimately the sort of the evidence required to warrant them, vary dramatically with the way in which this "our" is specified. Is Carman's account meant to provide a *de re* account of the conditions under which *human beings* find meaning in their encounter with things? Or is it meant to provide a *de dicto* account of the conditions under which anything with an understanding of being and ontological self-concern finds such meaning?<sup>18</sup>

In at least one passage in his study, Carman explicitly addresses the questions about modality which are my central concern here. I quote the relevant passage in full:

Reading the analytic of *Dasein* as an account of hermeneutic conditions might seem to promise a series of knock-down transcendental arguments that would demonstrate their necessity in true Kantian fashion. I do not believe that Heidegger provides such arguments, but neither do I think that his project avoids them as a matter of principle. And like the necessity of the forms of intuition and the categories in Kant, the necessity of the hermeneutic conditions Heidegger advances in the form of existential structures of *Dasein*, though stronger than mere causal necessity, will of course be considerably weaker than logical necessity. (29)

By this point it will come as no surprise to Taylor to hear that I am not satisfied by this. On the one hand it seems right to try to locate phenomenological or hermeutic necessity somewhere between

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<sup>16</sup> Emphasis altered in both quotes.

<sup>17</sup> A few other examples among many: page 23, 27 ...

<sup>18</sup> It is worth remarking that these alternatives also play out in Kant's own version of the transcendental project. Kant seems to provide different answers to this question for different epistemic conditions. Space and time are said to be specifically forms of *human* intuition, whereas the categories are said to be necessary for any being that engages in judgment. In both cases this is contrasted to the possibility of a divine intellect, which is not subject to the same conditions, but the boundaries of the class contrasted to the divine intellect are defined differently in the two cases. <<Add some references.>>

logical and causal necessity. But simply making these negative claims falls short of a positive specification of the relevant modality. But the more serious problem here concerns the admission that these modally robust results are not supported by arguments sufficiently robust to warrant them. Even Allison has now conceded that the notion of an epistemic conditions serves merely as a heuristic device – a kind of hunting licence to use in looking for conditions of a distinctive sort.<sup>19</sup> The real work in Kant’s argument must come in trying to establish that certain conditions actually constrain the possibility of knowledge. And it is just this work that transcendental arguments are called in to perform. If *Being and Time* gives us transcendental claims without transcendental arguments, this sounds suspiciously like giving us conclusions without premises, dogmas unsupported by reasons.

But here I can feel myself rising (or falling) to match the rhetoric of “The Critique of Husserl,” so let me change tack and consider whether there might be a way out.

#### §4: An Alternate Semantic Model?

So far I have considered two approaches to the semantics of “*Dasein*” – one fixes its meaning extensionally, the other intensionally. But of course these two positions do not exhaust the range of semantic possibilities. A third approach worth considering takes the initial significance of the term to be fixed by an exemplar, with the extension of the term fixed by similarity to that exemplar. On this approach, “*Dasein*” would operate in something like the way that natural kind terms work, at least under one of the standard treatments of the semantics for such terms. The word “gold” might initially be given meaning by ostension of a sample; both its intension and its extension would then be fixed by further investigation. We fix its intension by determining the chemical composition of the sample; we can then determine its extension by looking for other samples with the same composition. One version of this approach might be suggested by Heidegger’s claim – in the very first sentence of Division I – that “we are ourselves the entities to be analyzed.”<sup>20</sup> Instead of reading this in the extensionalist way – as a reference to the same class picked out by the term “human being” – we might instead read Heidegger’s “we” as in the first instance picking out Heidegger and me, or better: Heidegger and his reader. *We* would then be like the exemplars of gold: “*Dasein*” refers to Heidegger and his reader and to anything else that is relevantly like those exemplars. This approach shares something in common with each of the other two. Like the intensionalist approach, it leaves the extension of the term unspecified. Anything that is like Heidegger and his reader in the relevant way would be a *Dasein*; hence the question of whether *Dasein* is coextensive with “human being” would be left open. Like the extensionalist approach, however, this reading underwrites a *de re* account of the existential analytic. The constituent claims of Division I would in the first instance be *de re* claims about the exemplary instances of *Dasein*, themselves picked out by ostension rather than by description.

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<sup>19</sup> See Allison 2004: *Kant's Transcendental Idealism: An Interpretation and Defense, Revised and Enlarged Edition*, p ##. <<fill ref>>

<sup>20</sup> Heidegger SZ §9, 41, emphasis added.

I will call this approach Exemplar Semantics. One question about Exemplar Semantics concerns its stability as a genuine alternative to the two approaches we have already discussed. The problem, of course, is to determine what “being like in the relevant sense” amounts to. On this semantic approach, the claim that, e.g., *Dasein* is subject to Anxiety, would in the first instance be a claim about Heidegger and his reader. But this would not be the limit of the burden of the thesis; it would also amount to the claim that anyone else relevantly like Heidegger and his reader is also subject to Anxiety. But who is that exactly? If the claim is to be truth-evaluable then its scope must somehow be made determinate. Is the claim that all *philosophers* are subject to Anxiety? Or that anyone who reads existentialist writings is subject to Anxiety? Clearly not. But as soon as one tries to specify the scope of the thesis one seems to be pressed toward one of the other two semantic options. Either one determines the claim by appeal to some antecedently known extension (the extensionalist approach) or one specifies it by privileging some specific attributes shared by Heidegger and his ‘we’ – e.g., that each has an understanding of being and is an issue for himself (the intensionalist approach). So it is far from clear that Exemplar Semantics represents a stable middle ground.

At one time I thought that this objection was fatal, but I now wonder if there may be scope for managing it. The key thing to remember is that in the case of the exemplar of gold, we start out with more than just the sample. My ring is an sample of gold, but of course it is also a sample of a round thing, and of something I am wearing and of something I bought in New York City. I am able to use it as a meaning-fixing exemplar only because I start out *both* with a sample *and* with a context of inquiry. “Gold” has in its extension my ring *and anything like it in the context of chemistry*, and more specifically, anything like it in atomic structure. It is this context of inquiry that serves to delimit the significance of “like in the relevant sense.” Now in the case of “Dasein”, I also start out both with an exemplar and with a context of inquiry. The exemplar, I am proposing, is Heidegger and me; the context of inquiry is ontology. On this semantic analysis, then, “Dasein” refers to Heidegger and to me and to anything else which shares our mode of being.

This may seem to push us back toward Intensionalist semantics. After all, my distinctive mode of being is, let us presume, that I have an understanding of being and ontological self-concern. Accordingly, as on the Intensionalist account, the extension of “Dasein” will be fixed only once we know which things have that ontological character. Unless we know how far that extension reaches (and it seems clear that we do not know), we do not know the full burden of general claims about the existential traits of *Dasein*. Nonetheless there is a crucial difference between the Intensional semantic model and the Exemplar approach, at least when it comes to making modal claims. In our chemical example, the claim “my ring is gold” comes out as a *de re* necessity. So does the claim that gold has atomic weight of 197. Why is that? Because the intension of the term gold is determined by the chemical composition of my ring, which is to be of atomic weight 197. So similarly, it is a necessary truth of Heidegger and his reader that each are *Dasein*-exemplars. Moreover, anything that pertains to the ontological character of Heidegger and his reader would amount to necessary features of *Dasein*.

[[add a couple of paragraphs here in the mode of “Husserl’s revenge”: Exemplar Semantics and the intuition of essences.]]

I want to be careful, however, not to oversell the merits of this proposal. I do not think that it solves the problem of interpreting or assessing Heidegger's modal claims in *Being and Time*. At most it manages to shift the locus of the problem. By way of conclusion let me try to bring out two features of this shift. The first point concerns the problem we explored above concerning the fit between descriptive methods in phenomenology and modally qualified phenomenological doctrines. As I argued above, on either the Extensionalist or the Intensionalist semantic models for "*Dasein*", phenomenological description – no matter how rich and revealing – must be supplemented by some other form of argument or evidence. For the Extensionalist we need some reason to endorse the hypothesis of ontological homogeneity in the human race; for the intensionalist we need some way of reassuring ourselves that the *Dasein* we have described is a perfect exemplar of its kind. On this point, it seems, Exemplar Semantics offers a promising way out. First of all, the Exemplarist is not committed to the problematic assumption of ontological homogeneity. But more importantly, the Exemplarist has a cheap guarantee that the object of description is a perfect exemplar of its kind. Just as the chemical composition of my ring will fix the chemical composition of gold, so the ontological composition of our exemplary *Daseins* will fix the ontological composition of *Dasein* as such.

But a problem remains. In our example about "gold", we can say that all and only those features of my ring pertaining to its atomic structure would come to figure as essential properties of gold. The fact that my ring is mine, or that it is round, or that it symbolizes my love for my wife ... , all these are by comparison contingent properties of my ring, and do not figure in the meaning of "gold." So analogously, in the case of *Dasein*, all and only those features of Heidegger and his reader which are part of their ontological character can be said to be necessary features of *Dasein*. Accordingly we still stand in need of some method for distinguishing those features from others. I don't think this is a hopeless problem, though I have not here tried to propose a method for solving it. Absent such a solution one might think that we have effectively come back full circle. For surely it is by way of Heidegger's modal propositions that he seeks to identify ontological features. While there is considerable truth in this complaint, there is nonetheless a crucial difference introduced by the Exemplarist proposal. For the question as to whether, say, being subject to Anxiety is a necessary feature of *Dasein* is now no longer a question about whether *all human beings* are subject to Anxiety, or even whether all ontological self-concern brings with it vulnerability to Anxiety. Indeed what is at issue is not even a claim in the mode of generality, much less of necessity. It is rather an interpretative question about (Heidegger and) me: namely whether *my* being subject to Anxiety is a feature of *my* ontological make-up. We still need a way of answering this kind of question, but in a fundamental respect its logical form has shifted.