Sichbenehmen and Sichverhalten
—Why Heidegger is not an Anthrochauvinist

Introduction

In his book *Reconstructing the Cognitive World*, Michael Wheeler charges Heidegger with anthrochauvinism, the thesis that the behaviour of animals “… cannot be counted as meaningful … in anything other than some derived sense.” (p.157) Animal behaviour is not inherently evaluable according to standards of success and failure, prudence or imprudence, opportuneness or inopportuneness, and the like. It is not, as Wheeler prefers to say, intrinsically normative.

According to Wheeler, Heidegger’s anthrochauvinism is bound up with how he understands worlds. As Wheeler interprets Heidegger, worlds are “culturally determined domains of significance” which constitute the only available source of normativity. They are, claims Wheeler,

… involvement-wholes, the holistic networks of behavioural norms within which agents (of the right kind) always find themselves, and onto which they project themselves in self-interpretation. These networks are established by cultures; so to be “in-a-world” (and thus for one’s behaviour to be normative) is to have been initiated into a culture. (p.158)

So non-human animals, because they do not have culture in the sense in which humans do, are neither in-the-world nor Dasein. In consequence, they cannot display intrinsically normative behaviour.

Wheeler describes anthrochauvinism, surely rightly, as implausible. He then points out that in the WS 29/30 lecture *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* Heidegger provides an account of animality (*Tierheit*) which credits the animal with inherently meaningful behaviour.¹ So Wheeler now charges Heidegger not just with anthrochauvinism, but also with inconsistency.² (p.303) But are these charges justified? Let us look at Heidegger’s lecture.
§ 1: Is Heidegger an Anthrochauvinist?

Heidegger certainly insists on an absolute divide between humans and animals, or rather, between animals which are, and animals which are not, Dasein. Indeed, he does so precisely in *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*. Here Heidegger claims that humans, precisely because they are Dasein, *comport themselves* towards entities whereas animals merely *conduct themselves* in relation to what they see, what they grasp for, etc. Human beings *verhalten sich zum Seienden* whereas animals *benennen sich in Beziehung auf das, was sie hören, wonach sie greifen.* What, then, does Heidegger mean by the *Sichbenehmen* of animals, which I will translate their conducting themselves? Crucially, Heidegger speaks of *Sichbenehmen* not just to distinguish the behaviour of animals from the *Sichverhalten* of Dasein but also to distinguish it from the mere process of inanimate, indeed anorganic entities like stones. As a *Sichbenehmen*, the behaviour of animals is not a doing and acting (*Tun und Handeln*), as is the behaviour (*Verhalten*) of humans, but rather a driving (*ein Treiben*), with which we intimate that the activity of an animal marks it out as so to speak a being-propelled-by-compulsion. (WS 29/30, § 58 H 346; my translation)

The gist of this odd passage is clear: the behaviour of an animal, although purposive unlike the flight of a stone through the air, is not *rationally* purposive because it is driven by instincts and urges. Crucially, Heidegger’s odd formulation intimates that animal behaviour is non-rationally, compulsively purposive in a very distinctive sense. The animal behaves in the distinctive, neither stone- nor Dasein-like manner marked by the verb *Sichbenehmen* because the animal is *benommen*: the conducting of itself (*Benehmen*) characteristic of the animal is precisely a holding-in (*Ein-Behalten*) and taking-in (*Ein-Nehmen*), this without any kind of reflectiveness (*Reflexion*). An animal’s conducting of itself (*Benehmen*) is, as a mode of Being in general, only possible on the basis of the animal’s character as taken up or pre-occupied with itself (*Eingenommenheit des Tieres in sich*). We characterise the *specifically animal way of being present to itself* (*Bei-sich-sein*), which has nothing to do with the selfhood of the self-
comporting human being as person—that Being-taken-up-with-itself within which each and every phase of its conducting of itself is possible—as dazedness (Benommenheit). (WS 29/30, § 58 b), H 347; my translation)

Heidegger points out that the word Benommenheit

is typically used to characterise a determinate psychological condition of a human being which can last for some greater or less length of time. Thereby we mean that condition which lies between consciousness and unconsciousness. …

[But] (g)iven all that has been said thus far, in speaking now of dazedness as the essential structure of the animal, there can be no question of simply transposing this condition, familiar to us from human self-experience, to the animal, as its chronic state, and maintaining that the animal, in contrast to the human being, is perpetually dazed—which would immediately entail that the animal could in principle be free of this condition. (WS 29/30, § 58 b), H 348; my translation)

In getting about its environment, the animal is dazed or semi-oblivious as to itself and what it is doing. The animal’s non-rational, compelled purposiveness is thus its failing to be ‘with it’ while doing what it does. So the animal’s lack of rationality is not primarily its inability to articulate reasons for what it either has done or will do. Rather, this lack is primarily inability to regulate self-transparently what it does while it is doing it. Precisely for this reason Heidegger describes the contrasting case of Dasein as he does: Dasein comports itself towards entities, indeed does so understandingly, precisely because it has a transparency of purpose and behaviour not possessed by the animal which consists in its regulating itself in the light of its understanding of the situation and itself. Heidegger acknowledges that there is a sense in which one can describe animals as self-regulating, when, namely, one describes them as self-steering, -sustaining and -organising systems. But Dasein is self-regulating in a manner which implicates a sense of individual self and an understanding of one’s own existence (die jeweilige Existenz). In short, the terminology of self-comportment (Sichverhalten) is meant to insinuate Dasein’s character as regulating itself and its behaviour in a distinctively self-aware fashion which implicates a sense of who one is and of this particular situation in its difference to others one has been in.
Evidently, this divide between humans and animals permits animal behaviour to be *inherently* meaningful, that is, *intrinsically* normative. For the divide is not between inherently meaningful and merely derivatively meaningful behaviour, but between self-consciously meaningful behaviour and behaviour which, while objectively meaningful, hence objectively normative, is not available as such to what behaves in this manner, hence is not *self*-evaluable and -revisable in the light of what gives it its objectively meaningful character. That this is what Heidegger means is shown both by his choosing term *Sichbenehmen* in the first place and by his elaboration of this choice. Having introduced the term, Heidegger immediately goes on to point out the fundamentally evaluable character which behaviour described as a *Sichbenehmen* has in everyday speech:

A stone cannot conduct itself [*vis-à-vis* entities in the manner of a mole]. But a human being certainly can: he conducts himself well or poorly. But *our* conducting-ourselves—in this distinctive sense—can only be so because it is a comporting-oneself-towards … . (WS 29/30, § 58 a), H 345-346; my translation)

Behaviour which is a *Sichbenehmen* is thus objectively meaningful or normative. Indeed, it is so across a wide range of evaluative predicates: we can describe individuals as conducting themselves well or poorly in the sense of fulfilling or offending norms of etiquette, we can describe them as doing so *in a moral sense* and crucially we can also describe them as doing so *in a prudential sense*—as when we say that Jones conducted himself cleverly or stupidly. Of course, in the ordinary, everyday use of the term, people who conduct themselves well or poorly are assumed to know, or at least be able to know, themselves to be so doing. For this reason, such people are not *just* conducting, they are also comporting themselves towards entities. But *actually* possessing such knowledge is not essential, at least not in all cases. And so Heidegger can legitimately appropriate the term for those kinds of behaviour, precisely animal behaviours, in which there is no possibility of such knowledge, of such *self-understanding* and *self-evaluation*. 

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If, however, animal behaviour is for Heidegger inherently meaningful, although not available as such to what engages in it,\textsuperscript{vii} then he has always already accomplished what Wheeler recommends as the antidote to anthrochauvinism. Wheeler suggests revising Heidegger’s position by admitting the idea of a biological background, a set of evolutionarily determined behavioural norms that constitute an externally constituted holistic network of significance within which animal behaviour is cognitively situated. A biological background is thus what defines an animal’s ecological world.\textsuperscript{viii} To identify such a structure, we would need to specify a network of normatively loaded patterns of behaviour performed by the particular animal in question. (p.159)

But we now see that there is no need for this revision. At the same time, we also see that, strictly speaking, Heidegger is not anthrochauvinistic. Insofar as chauvinism is false prejudice, Heidegger is not being chauvinistic in distinguishing between humans and animals in the way he does. As far we know, only human animals are Dasein and Dasein, because it comports itself understandingly, i.e., not just towards entities but also towards its own Being, engages in behaviour not merely objectively or intrinsically meaningful, but also subjectively so. And it is surely plausible to maintain that meaningful behaviour of this subjectively accessible kind is a function of “culturally determined domains of significance.”\textsuperscript{ix} (p.158) Heidegger rightly maintains that worlds as Wheeler understands them are the only sources of normativity of the kind in which Heidegger is interested, namely, normativity accessible to the entities whose behaviour it governs. Not only is there no anthrochauvinism in Being and Time, there is also no conflict between Being and Time and The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics.

§ 2: The Dreyfus Connection

But if this is so, why does not Wheeler see it? Robert Brandom points out that Dreyfus, Haugeland and Okrent interpret our everyday engagement with equipment as an autonomous, preconceptual, prepropositional, prelinguistic level of intentionality—namely, practical, skill-laden, norm-governed directedness toward equipment treated as available. … [On this view] (i)t may or may not be
the case for any particular community of [entities which display such intentionality], that on this practical base a theoretical superstructure of conceptual, propositional, linguistic, or in Heidegger’s terminology thematic intentionality is erected. (Tales of the Mighty Dead, pp.328-329)\(^x\)

In short, those who interpret Umgang as representationless coping in the manner of Dreyfus must allow that intelligent beings incapable of self-conscious reason and of representation at the agential level can display such behaviour.\(^xi\)

Now although Wheeler calls our everyday engagement with equipment smooth rather than absorbed coping (p.129), he understands this more or less in the manner of Dreyfus.\(^xii\) This explains why he regards any restriction of meaning or normativity to culturally determined domains of significance and involvement-networks as an illegitimate anthrochauvinism. If smooth coping is possible before worlds and culture, then the meaning and normativity which makes smooth coping possible must also be. Yet Heidegger regards the meaning and normativity with which he is concerned as a product of culture and involvement-networks. At this point, Heidegger’s insistence that such meaning or normativity is only culturally\(^xiii\) possible must appear as something to be explained away, as chauvinistic prejudice.

The problem is, though, that Wheeler has not seen what kind of meaning or normativity Heidegger is concerned with: not any old meaning or normativity but such as is self-consciously accessible to those governed by it, of which it is very plausible to say that culture and indeed language and tradition are its only sources. Nor are the texts responsible for this oversight: Being and Time is replete with references to the character of Dasein as a self, as the entity which can think, “I am”.\(^xiv\) In any case, Heidegger’s interest in being-a-self (Selbstsein) and distinctively self-conscious access to meaning or normativity is explicit in contemporaneous texts, e.g., the lecture Basic Problems of Phenomenology of Sommersemester 1927\(^xv\) and, perhaps most dramatically, in The Metaphysical Foundational Grounds of Logic in Leibniz, the last Marburg lecture, held in Sommer Semester, 1928.\(^xvi\) Not any defect in the texts but rather the conviction that Heidegger to be read à la Dreyfus has occluded
Heidegger’s real concerns. How, then, must we interpret Dasein’s everyday engagement with entities, in particular, with equipment, if we are to avoid Dreyfusian occlusion?

§ 3: Umsicht und Umgang—A Reconstruction

Consider the following paragraph from Sein und Zeit:

What is ready-to-hand is neither theoretically grasped nor is it initially circumspectly thematic even for circumspection. What is distinctive about the initially ready-to-hand is that in its ready-to-handedness it so to speak draws itself back precisely in order to be truly ready-to-hand.\textsuperscript{xvii} That upon which everyday engagement (der alltägliche Umgang) initially dwells are indeed not the tools themselves; rather the work, whatever on the occasion is to be produced, is that with which one is primarily concerned, hence also something ready-to-hand. (Sein und Zeit, § 15, H 69-70; my translation)

The key claim here is that in everyday engagement with entities Dasein and its behaviour are \textit{primarily} directed towards the work.\textsuperscript{xviii} To say that Dasein and its behaviour are \textit{primarily} directed towards the work is \textit{not} to say that the work is all Dasein and its behaviour are directed towards. Dasein is directed towards the work precisely \textit{as the work}, that is, as what it is currently working on. So the directedness of Dasein and its behaviour is differentiated affair: one must distinguish a \textit{primary} directedness towards the work which positively entails a \textit{secondary} directedness towards the individual entities implicated in this process, whether these be the entities worked upon, the individual tools used, whatever other entities facilitate their use, e.g., the work bench, the vice, etc., and last but not least the tool-user’s body and limbs.\textsuperscript{xix} For of course not even the entities worked upon are, strictly speaking, the work. The work is the finished product and this is not yet there; what is there is merely something \textit{on its way towards} the finished work. How are all these details to be brought together in a satisfactorily unified description, as a phenomenologically sensitive nose tells us they must?
Let us take the stock example of my hammering a nail into a piece of wood, as part and parcel of making a wood joint within a wider activity of, say, building a house. Clearly, the hammer, the nail, the bit of wood I am driving the nail into all are all bound up together as a distinguishable phase of self-correcting behaviour within the segmented process of my making a joint and ultimately a house. All the items implicated in it—hammer, nail, bit of wood and even bodily limbs—are temporally unified as working-together towards something, namely, the joint I need to make in order to build my house. But how do we conceive this integration, the fact that these items belong together in a way in which certain currently incidental entities do not, e.g., the saw hanging on the wall or indeed my sudden shaking of the head when a fly lands irritatingly upon my forehead? In particular, how are we to understand the self-regulating character of my behaviour as a temporally unified working-together of diverse entities towards something, a working-together which forms a clearly demarcated phase within the overall flow of my behaviour?

It will not do to appeal to my intentions. For we want to know how intentions structure behaviour, not that they do. The key lies, I believe, in what Heidegger calls circumspection (Umsicht). The everyday use and manipulation of equipment (Umgang) is, says Heidegger, “not blind, but rather has its own kind of sight which guides it and gives it its sure-footedness.” In order to guide, circumspection of the most basic kind implicated in my skilful hammering must be a distinguishable but not separable proper part of my behaviour. In this spirit, Heidegger says, speaking of making (Herstellen) generally, “(s)ight is not an appendage to productive intentional behaviour but belongs positively to it and its structure, guiding such intentional behaving.” Furthermore, it guides in the sense of something implicit in behaviour which registers when things are heading off track, in order that behaviour can be a bringing them back on track. Precisely thereby circumspection imparts to the behaviour it guides unity over time as a distinct phase of self-regulating and, where necessary, self-correcting behaviour. But if this is what sight does, what must it see in

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order to accomplish it? That is, in what way must it be contentful if it is to guide behaviour, thereby giving this latter its unity?

In order to answer these questions, thereby fleshing out Heidegger’s sparse account, I propose the following hypothesis:\textsuperscript{xxiii} circumspection of that most basic kind implicated in my hammering is a perceiving-how the nail I am hammering is going in. Only as such can it keep behaviour on track relative to its goal. And this character as being kept and, where necessary, brought back on track \textit{just is} the character of my hammering behaviour as a working-together of hammer, nail and limbs towards something. My hammering behaviour is thus only the distinguishable, self-maintaining phase of intelligent, goal-directed behaviour it is because integrated into it is a perceptual, in this case visual tracking of how things are going with what I am doing.\textsuperscript{xxiv} The word ‘how’ is obligatory; only it captures the character of the circumspection I display while hammering as \textit{temporally horizontal}, as a perceiving where things are headed. No perceiving-that, hence no propositional awareness, will do. Only this temporally horizontal character enables circumspection to guide in the sense of \textit{anticipating} where things are headed before they actually get there. Thereby circumspection of this most basic kind imparts to my behaviour its distinctive temporal unity as the hammering of a nail in.

What, then, is it to perceive while hammering how things are going with my hammering? When Heidegger describes the work as what one is aware of, and says that the entities one is using to work on it draw themselves back, he is certainly not claiming that the latter withdraw entirely. Rather, he is to be understood as implying that they recede \textit{into the background}. In the use and manipulation of equipment one has an organised field of awareness in which the work occupies centre stage. But it only thus \textit{comes forward} because the entities one is working upon it with \textit{draw back}. In other words, one has multiple different yet functionally interconnected awarenesses of the entities implicated in one’s behaviour. In perceptually tracking how the nail I am hammering is going, the nail is clearly the primary material entity of which I am
aware, just as Heidegger says. But precisely because I am aware of the nail in this way, I am also aware, in different way, of the hammer I am wielding and indeed, in yet another way, of the various limbs I am using in hammering. I am aware, indeed I am seeing how the nail I am hammering is going in in response to how I am hammering, i.e., in response to how I am holding and swinging the hammer— which latter I know, because I am an expert hammerer, through how the hammer feels in my hands as I swing it.

Now this surely plausible phenomenological characterisation suggests an important point: circumspection of the kind one has in expertly wielding equipment is the result of multiple senses working indissolubly and holistically together—in the case of human beings, primarily vision, in second place haptics, but in principle other senses, too. Thus, the sound of my hammering might well be telling me how I am hammering. It is at least plausible to maintain that this kind of multi-modal experience can neither be philosophically analysed, nor psychologically explained, in classically empiricist fashion as the synthesis of discrete representations provided independently by the different senses. The multi-modal character of my experience is not derivative but original.\textsuperscript{xiv}

The idea that circumspection is an originally multi-modal, future-oriented perceiving-how definitely has a Heideggerian ring to it. Yet it may have an implication unpalatable to some. We can get at this by considering an observation made by Clark and Grush. “Skilled reaching,” they write, is the smooth approach of an arm and hand system towards some target object. Success in this class of actions depends, in part, upon the brain receiving and responding to a stream of proprioceptive feedback, especially when visual feedback is not available: feedback concerning the orientation, position and trajectory of the arm/hand system as the movement progresses. There is, however, a widely appreciated and seemingly insurmountable problem. The proprioceptive feedback is often (for very fast movements) require, it seems, faster than it is available. For such feedback to be used to smooth-out fast on-
going reaching activity, it needs to be available before the minimum naturally possible delay has lapsed. (Clark and Grush 1997, p.6)

The issue here is not simply empirical but also conceptual:xxvi Feedback mechanisms, by their very nature, do not provide information on future states of the overall behaviour system and its operating environment.xxvii But sometimesxxviii a goal-directed process or system needs information so to speak tensed in the future since otherwise the information would come too late to be effective. Thus Clark and Grush postulate the existence, at the subagential level, of a neural subsystem which provides predictions of where the overall behaviour system will be, given the current state both of the system and its operating environment.xxix

But, I want to ask, does this move really make sense? On any non-metaphysically loaded understanding of the term it is a perfectly satisfactory explanation to say that I behave as I do because I see how the nail is going in and respond accordingly. Moreover, the capacity to generate representations at t that things are thus and so at t+n cannot do duty for, indeed presupposes a capacity for perceptual tracking across times t of how things are unfolding at t.xxx This is really just Kant’s insight that a succession of representations is never a representation of succession. The anticipatory mechanisms envisaged by Clark and Grush would not appear to do any real work but rather surreptitiously rely on the agential level perceptual tracking they are presumably meant to explicate. Finally, it is unclear how one could redescribe circumspect perceiving-how in subagentially functionalist terms since such perceiving-how has its defining future-directed character only in relation to agential-level goals and intentions. This brings us face to face with the potentially unpalatable implication mentioned above: to admit, at the agential level, circumspect perceiving of how things are now unfolding is to concede that the whole causal story cannot be told solely at the subagential level. More precisely, it is to concede that the various neural and physiological processes materially responsible for my seeing how the nail is going in can only be placed in a wider context of physico-physiological interactions insofar as one has the agential story to tell. It is in part because I see how the nail is
going in and adjust my behaviour accordingly that events unfold at the subagential level as they do.

If this is so, then at the subagential level one should neither look for nor postulate, representations in any sense stronger than the fact that various subagential inner states will display non-accidental causal correlations with relevant real-world events. At this level, there is only the task of identifying the various physical, physiological and neurophysiological processes which materially suffice for what is occurring at the agential level. This intimates, of course, that in saying that the whole causal story cannot be told subagentially one is not implying that the agential could float free of the subagential. The position here is consistent with the claim that there could be no agential level without some kind of subagential one, that is, without some kind of material constitution which the agential level informs.

The thesis that circumspection of the kind I have when hammering my nail is a genuinely anticipatory, temporally extended, representational yet also non-propositional awareness of where things are headed might now provoke the following objection: Surely, when hammering away, I am not adjusting my hammering behaviour for the reason that the nail is or is not going in as it should. This would imply that my seeing how such and such is the case leads me to form various beliefs that such and such is case, e.g., that the angle at which the nail is going in is such and such, which I recognise to be not as it should, which further belief gives me a reason for adjusting my behaviour.

Yet no such absurdly deliberative account of everyday engagement with entities is entailed by the account of circumspection just given. In seeing how the nail is going in, I am not necessarily noticing the angle at which it is going in at all. I am thus not necessarily noting by how much the nail’s angle diverges from what it should be. I simply see how the nail is going in and respond as needed. Of course, what causes me to respond is the fact that the nail’s angle diverges too greatly. But I do not necessarily cognise this fact, nor does this cognition play a role in generating my
behavioural response. With this we can return to and clarify the absolute divide Heidegger admits between animals which are and animals which are not Dasein.

§ 4: Back to the Absolute Divide—Dasein’s comporting Itself *Understandingly*

Animals which are Dasein—as far as we know, these are only human beings—comport themselves towards, rather than conduct themselves *vis-à-vis*, entities because they do so *understandingly*. The normative character of their behaviour is for Dasein in way it is not for what is not Dasein. Now we have just seen that this must not be cashed as a matter of Dasein’s *actually* reasoning or deliberating about how well or poorly things are going with what it is doing when engaged with entities. Yet it will also not do simply to say that Dasein *could* deliberate about the meaningful or normative character of its behaviour and various relevant happenings within its operating environment. If the transparency of purpose and behaviour which distinguishes Dasein as Dasein were nothing more than a capacity for self-conscious *prospective* or *retrospective* inference, then we would potentially restore incapacity to distinguish Dasein’s *unreflective* engagement with entities from that of animals which are not Dasein.

So the transparency which singles Dasein out as Dasein must be a reflective awareness of behaviour, context and in particular self of which Dasein is capable *precisely while engaged in what it is doing*. It must be an inherently *online* awareness which enables Dasein to adjust and revise its behaviour, even while engaged in it, in ways not open to animals that are not Dasein. Thus, Dasein is able to focus on how it is *now* swinging its hammer and note various properties of *its* swing, those, for example, which make it less than ideal.\textsuperscript{xxxi} Similar, it is able to focus on its hammer as it swings it and note various properties of the hammer which make it less than ideal to swing. Evidently, the characterisation of this kind of awareness requires us to use the reflexive pronoun: Dasein comports itself *understandingly* towards entities in the sense that while doing so it is *able to* comport itself to itself *as* itself. It can be aware of the hammer swing *as* *its*. 
Crucially, self-transparency in this sense involves no concessions to conceptions of intelligent behaviour as involving universal, all-purpose reasoning. For one thing, such truly self-reflective self-regulation does not always take place but only in specific cases which presuppose the completely non-reflective kind of self-comportment as that which reflection would correct. For another and more important thing, this distinctively self-reflective kind of self-regulation and self-revision is not a process of universal, all-purpose reason at all, at least not as orthodox cognitive science understands the latter. For it is a matter of becoming explicitly aware of one’s own behaviour in order to identify certain features which impact upon its effectiveness, for example, the fact that one is holding the hammer slightly too close to the head, or again that the balance between hammer head and handle is not quite right. It is the kind of thing a boxer engages in when trying to improve his left cross, thus the kind of thing coaches get boxers to do when training them.

For such simultaneous identification is precisely insight into how one is doing what one is doing while one is doing it. As such, it involves a hermeneutic unpacking or, as Heidegger would say, a laying out (Auslegung). And what it lays out is precisely the content of circumspection, understood as above, namely, as in itself unreflective perceiving-how. One can see this by considering the perfectly possible case in which Auslegung does not occur simultaneously with the behaviour upon which it reflects. In this kind of case, recollection is involved—recollection, however, of that vivid, re-living kind which implicates an original perceiving of what one recollects. When I reflect upon how I held my hammer and recognise that I was holding it too close to the head, I do so by vividly recalling how things went then when I hammered. So my recollection-how presupposes a perceiving-how whose content it makes, with appropriate temporal modifications, its own. Vivid recall would not be possible had I not perceived how things were going with my hammering while hammering. And this perceiving, although not a representing-that, surely qualifies as a representing on any minimal, agential understanding of the term.
Wheeler, however, rejects the suggestion that circumspection is representational, at least in any Cartesian sense. In consequence, his account of circumspection tends to oscillate between the uninterestingly true and the interestingly false. Thus, at one point he describes circumspection as “a non-subject-object form of awareness” (p.132) in which there is “no conscious recognition … [of] objects, that is, as independent things with determinate properties.” (p.131) Few would disagree that when using and manipulating entities I do not consciously or explicitly recognise objects. And why should not any form of awareness, whatever it is of, be thoroughly representational and mental? The claim that circumspection is representationless becomes relatively uncontroversial if representation is only ever context-independent representation of the present-at-hand constructed out of raw sensory inputs à la Berkeley and Marr. Thus, Gestalt psychologists and the mature Husserl would reject this view. Perhaps in order to avoid such uncontroversialness, Wheeler elsewhere identifies circumspection “with the human agent’s … embodied knowledge of how to use equipment in accordance with” what, a sentence before, is described as “(i) the appropriate uses to which an item of equipment can be put, and (ii) the normatively constrained public practices that shape the human agent’s acts of projection.” (p.132) But this cannot be right: Heidegger intends a form of awareness and a form of awareness is never a capacity, disposition or skill. Nor could circumspection guide behaviour were it identical with either a capacity for behaviour or indeed the behaviour itself.

Ultimately, these difficulties derive from the Dreyfusian conviction that Heidegger is out to attack ‘representation’ in some seriously controversial sense. This conviction blinds one to Heidegger’s real concern, namely, that self-transparency which, as already intimated, makes Dasein’s everyday engagement with entities “flexible” and “adaptive” in degree and manner unlike that displayed by animals that are not Dasein.¹ Dasein’s distinguishing character as comporting itself understandingly towards entities is occluded and so Heidegger’s insistence on Dasein’s uniqueness can
only appear as prejudice. By contrast, the unashamedly representational, albeit non-propositional, hence non-apophantic sense of circumspection admitted here brings this hermeneutic character clearly into view.

Let me stress again that nothing said here makes our everyday unreflective engagement with entities a matter of conscious or unconscious reasoning—as if Dasein made its individual bodily movements in virtue of seeing *that it makes sense* to make them now. The *causes* of Dasein’s individual bodily movements can be as they are for those higher animals which are not Dasein. Such animals also perceptually track how things are going with what they are doing. But they are not self-aware in *that* sense of the term which *precedes*, as a condition of possibility, all capacity to wield reasons in retrospective or prospective justifications of behaviour—that self-transparent awareness of what it is doing while it is doing it which Dasein *can* display, even though mostly it does not, even though mostly it need not.

§ 5: A Critique of Wheeler and Dreyfus on Circumspection

Wheeler rightly observes that Heidegger does not give much positive account of circumspection. (p.132) But neither does Wheeler; by and large, he sticks to purely negative characterisations of it: as we have seen, he describes it as “a non-subject-object form of awareness” (p.132) in which there is “no conscious recognition … [of] objects, that is, as independent things with determinate properties.” (p.131) In general, Wheeler tends to equivocate between the interesting but implausible claim that since our using and manipulating entities is representation-free, Heidegger must *identify* circumspect seeing with the behaviour it guides; and the uncontroversial claim that it involves no *conscious* representations even though it involves a form of awareness, viz., circumspection.

These problematic features appear to be inherited from, and certainly they are shared by, Dreyfus’s account of circumspection. Central to Dreyfus’ Heidegger interpretation is the programmatic claim is that having beliefs, desires and perceptual experience in any genuinely representational sense is an intermittent condition
(Dreyfus 1991, p.5), so much so that “when I start to deliberate, I do not just notice mental states that were already there; I start to have beliefs and desires” (Dreyfus 1991, p.78) and that in general “mental content arises whenever the situation requires deliberate attention” (Dreyfus 1991, p.70). But these claims backs Dreyfus into a corner from which he, no less than Wheeler, finds it difficult to say what circumspection is, given that it is at least not always a matter of deliberate attention. Thus sometimes he tends to identify it with the whole of behaviour: “Heidegger’s more primordial intentionality is … appropriately called aboutness, but in this case it is not the mind which is directed but the person going about his or her business.” (Dreyfus 1991, p.68) Elsewhere he explicitly identifies with know-how in the sense of a general skill in getting about the world—see Dreyfus 1991, p.103. And at another point, he identifies it implicitly with a specific ability-to-do, in this case, to get an effective or maximal grip on it—see Dreyfus 1991, p.133.

True, Dreyfus no less than Wheeler insists that circumspection is a mode of awareness. Indeed, he describes it as “a form of experience, opening onto the world and the things in it.” But Dreyfus immediately goes on to qualify this, claiming that

this experience can only be characterized as openness. It is not mental, inner, first-person, private, subjective experience …, separate from and directed towards nonmental objects (Dreyfus 1991, p.68)

This will not do. If circumspection can only be characterised as openness, then it becomes impossible to understand how it could guide behaviour. No doubt circumspection is not first-person in the sense of being matter of explicitly thinking to myself, “Now the nail is going in straight, oops, now it is bending a little to the right … .” But who would ever have thought this? Certainly neither Husserl nor John Searle. As a proper part of my hammering behaviour which must be described in perceptually psychological terms, circumspection certainly qualifies as mental, hence as inner and subjective experience, in any ordinary, metaphysically untendentious sense. And it is certainly separate from the non-mental entities it is directed at. It thus
qualifies as a representation in that minimal sense in which, as Dreyfus recognises (1991, p.50), Husserl and Searle understand the notion.

But if circumspection is representational on a minimal, agential, phenomenologically plausible and metaphysically untendentious understanding of the term, in what way is it representational? What is the nature of its intentional content? Here there is insufficient space to do full justice to this question. Surely, however, this content cannot be some kind non-conceptual *Gestalt*, along the lines of what Wakefield and Dreyfus once called G-intentionality. For one thing, no Gestalt, no picture is *intrinsically* directed to some particular entity or state of affairs, as opposed to some type-identical one. What makes a photograph a picture of Napoleon rather than some other type-identical individual is the context of intention and interpretation in which it is embedded. Yet my seeing how the nail I am hammering in is going in involves intentional directedness at this particular nail here and now, the one that is in my current *Da*. And there is nothing in Heidegger to suggest that this directedness is not intrinsic.

For another and more important thing, if my intentional content were Gestalt- or even picture-like, it could not play the role it plays in guiding behaviour. I am not seeing a ‘shape’, no matter how temporally and dynamically evolving one understands the notion of shape, as when one sees how the wings of bird in flight move. This is shown by the fact that I am not seeing how in any sense which could be mimetically or aesthetically exhibited. If you ask me how a kangaroo hops or a Currawong sings, I could perform some sufficiently similar act of mimesis. And of course if you asked me how I hammered such and such nail in, I could also illustrate this, i.e., show you how I swung the hammer. But this is not the how at issue when I am actually hammering a nail in in order to make a wood joint. Here, I am seeing how the nail is going in, either well or poorly, and so the how I am responding to is how much the nail’s actually going in does or does not diverge from how it *should* be.
going in, given my goal. Given this prescriptive character, how the nail is going in can only be conceptually represented in my seeing-how.\textsuperscript{xlviii}

At this point, it becomes imperative to clarify just how the term ‘conceptual’ is being used. For the standard view is that to be conceptually contentful is to be propositionally so, i.e., something to which the schema ‘that \( p \)’ applies, or, if not propositional in this sense, then at least sub-propositional.\textsuperscript{xlix} Clearly, if this notion of the conceptual is allowed to stand, then there can be no room for the idea of a conceptual seeing-how. But by a conceptual content I mean something which can occur as the content of a state, experience or act with conditions of satisfaction in Searle’s sense. And my seeing how the nail is going in certainly qualifies as conceptual according to this definition: it is satisfied in the manner appropriate to a genuinely cognitive state or experience if and only if there is a nail I am hammering in and it is going in in response to how I am hammering it in in the way I am seeing it going in.\textsuperscript{l}

Evidently, if the primary form of practical circumspection is ground-floor level perceptual tracking of how things are going with what one is doing, then Heidegger must be read as breaking with the standard view that to be conceptual is to be propositional. To put the point in another, cruder way, if we understand the primary form of circumspection in the manner indicated, then Heidegger must be read as breaking with the view that all representation is knowing-that—in which case on this reading Heidegger could agree with the claim that in the everyday use and manipulation entities no representations are to be found, at least at the agential level. But the need to attribute to Heidegger such a break is hardly unwelcome. Heidegger claims that prior to the \textit{apophantic}, that is to say, the \textit{assertional} ‘as’ there is the hermeneutic ‘as’—see \textit{Sein und Zeit}, §§ 32-33. And the hermeneutic ‘as’ is a matter of \textit{understanding}, that is, of seeing \textit{how} rather than \textit{that} concepts apply there now. This hermeneutic ability complements all capacity for discursive judgement and inference, as an ability required by Reason if it is to be Reason at all, that is,
genuinely *self-understanding*, hence *rationally* subject to ‘normative’ constraint. Crucially, preparedness to break with the apophantic prejudice goes hand in hand with another virtue, not just of Heidegger, but of the phenomenological tradition generally: preparedness to take seriously the *temporal character* of perceptual experience and thus of thinking itself.\(^{11}\) The apophantic prejudice makes it hard to provide a plausible account of what it is to track entities across time *in a genuinely perceptual manner*, and what it is to perceive entities *in a genuinely tracking fashion*.

Interestingly, Wheeler would not necessarily object to breaking with the apophantic prejudice. For in his efforts to provide a positive account of circumspection, he says the following about the light-seeking robot constructed by Franceschini and his team: in the case of this robot,

> we should say that external objects (other than lights) are represented as (something like) avoidance regions or motion barriers. Given this move, one might well argue, it seems to me, that what is being represented here is not knowledge that the environment is thus and so. It is knowledge of how to negotiate the environment, given a particular context of activity. (p. 198)

I do not understand what it means to speak of representing how to negotiate the environment. Certainly it does not make sense to speak of representing an ability and in any case how would such a representation play a role in actualising the ability? But perhaps the idea here is that external objects are represented *imperatively*—as if the world were telling the robot, “Avoid me!,” and the like. There is, I think, something right in this, the suggestion, namely, that there is a kind of perception, indeed a kind of *circumspection*, which consists in the perceiving of relevances or saliences. Moreover, it is truly Heideggerian: as early as 1921, in an account of Book X in Augustine’s *Confessiones*, Heidegger speaks of what he calls significances (*Bedeutsamkeiten*), describing them as “sometimes *prospera* (enabling, facilitating, speaking to one, that is, carrying or transporting one in the direction of significance), sometimes *adversa* (inhibiting, working against that which is strived for).” (Heidegger 1995, p.207; my translation) I cannot elaborate the general idea and have given an...
account of what Heidegger means by it elsewhere.iii For current purposes it suffices merely to note that once one realises that it makes no sense to identify a representing-how with a skill or capacity, one can really only coherently regard it as a genuinely representational, indeed conceptual: in the uninterrupted course of one’s moving across the room, one simply sees how a chair is standing there in the way of one’s further progress, and, without any kind of hitch or disturbance, moves smoothly around it. Perhaps, then, Wheeler is on his way to recognition of such a genuinely non-apophantic yet genuinely conceptual kind of representation.

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i See note 7 to p.158, pp.303-304

ii Indeed, Wheeler finds a general instability in Heidegger’s treatment of animals—see p.303.

iii See WS 29/30, § 59, H 350.

iv See WS 29/30, § 53, H 325. See also § 53, H 332, § 56, H 339-340, and § 61 a), H 376, where Heidegger acknowledges that one can attribute to animals a cut-down kind of selfhood (Selbstheit) — selfhood in a sense which does not imply personhood.

v See WS 29/30, § 67, H 407-408.

vi The claim that Dasein is defined by its character as self-conscious precisely in the traditional sense of being an entity capable of thinking in the first-person, and in particular, capable of thinking, “I am”—Descartes’ sum!— might provoke howls of protest to the effect that Heidegger is trying to overcome the Cartesian tradition, etc. But that Heidegger does indeed begin in this way with Descartes is absolutely undeniable, for this is implicit in Heidegger’s claim that the entity whose understanding of Being we must investigate in order to address the question of Being is we ourselves, who are asking the question of Being. Elsewhere in Being and Time Heidegger says, “Sollte das »cogito sum« als Ausgang der existenzialen Analytik des Daseins dienen, dann bedarf es nicht nur der Umkehrung, sondern einer neuen ontologisch-phänomenalen Bewährung seines Gehalts. Die erste Aussage ist dann: »sum« und zwar in dem Sinne: ich-bin-in-einer-Welt. Als so Seiendes »bin ich« in der Seinsmöglichkeit zu verschiedenen Verhältnungen...

Note, incidentally, the allusion to Kant’s famous question “Was ist der Mensch?”, an allusion which reveals the transcendentally philosophical character of fundamental ontology.

To say that Heidegger does indeed wish to begin with the self or even the ‘subject’ is not, however, necessarily to deny that Heidegger wants to overcome the Cartesian tradition (although it does require one to have a more sophisticated view of what the Cartesian tradition is than that underpinning the howls of protest). That Heidegger wants to start with Descartes in order not to end with him is in fact evident in the passage just quoted: Note its reference to the priority of the particular existence of the individual human being. This is an allusion to the transcendentally philosophical status of what Heidegger in *Sein und Zeit* calls *Jemeinigkeit*. And in thus alluding to the particular existence of the individual human being, Heidegger is intimating his conviction that, *pace* Descartes, Kant and Husserl, one cannot abstract from the *personhood* of the entity which is capable of thinking, “I am.” Thus, Heidegger says, “‘pace’ Descartes, Kant and Husserl, not just self-conscious selfhood, but a sense of self, of *who* one individually is, is an
essential feature of rationality, hence must be investigated by any transcendental philosophically-driven fundamental ontology. Note how Heidegger, precisely in his lecture, links self-consciousness and personhood and identifies it as what sets human Sichverhalten and Verhaltenheit apart from animal Sichbenehmen and Benommenheit: “Alles Verhalten aber ist nur möglich in der Verhaltenheit, Verhaltung, und Haltung// gibt es nur, wo ein Seiendes den Charakter des Selbst, wie wir auch sagen, der Person hat.” (WS 29/30, § 64, 397-398)

But only available to us interpreters of it. As Hegel might say, it is meaningful an sich, but not an und für sich—although as an sich it is, of course, für uns.

Note how Wheeler speaks here of “extending the notion of world” to include animals—see p.159.

Wheeler’s identification of these with worlds does not seem to be right: “Unter Welt können wir … auch nicht den ontischen Zusammenhang der Gebrauchsdinge verstehen, der Dinge der geschichtlichen Kultur im Unterschied von der Natur und den Naturdingen, wohl aber gibt die Analyse gerade der Gebrauchsdinge und ihres Zusammenhangs einen Anhalt und Weg, das Phänomen der Welt erstmalig sichtbar zu machen.” (SS 28, § 11, H 233) What Heidegger means by a world—‘world’ in that sense which can take an indefinite article and appropriate adjectives, thereby denoting a world potentially nested in another such world or at least in the world—is that wherein involvement-wholes (Bewandtnisganzheiten) are contained. The carpenter’s workshop, viewed simply as a spatial arrangement of entities (walls, tools, workbench, hooks for hanging up tools, etc.) is not the work world of the carpenter, nor, if I happening to be doing something in the work shop, my current Umwelt. For the workshop in this sense, the sense in which it is a Bewandtnisganzheit, is transferrable from place to place, hence has no location in the world. Note that implicit in this is a conceptual distinction not just between the notion of a Bewandtnisganzheit and a world, but between the notion of a world (in the sense potentially qualifiable by adjectives such as ‘public’, ‘work’, ‘domestic’, and perhaps even ‘late modern’) and the notion of the world: that which forms the point of termination for any nesting of a world in another.

Strictly speaking, Brandom is wrong to claim, as he also does in this passage, that interpreters such as Dreyfus, Haugeland and Okrent simply must take the view that since the preconceptual, prepropositional, prelinguistic level of intentionality can occur independently of any superstructure of conceptual, propositional, linguistic, in other words, representational intentionality built on top of it, Heidegger should in all consistency say that Dasein and being-in-the-world “can already be discerned at this level.” It is open to such interpreters to attribute to Heidegger the view that
Dasein is, by definition, an entity capable not just of such non-representational intentionality, but of the representational kind as well. This means that such interpreters can simply dodge the issue of whether Heidegger should concede Dasein and being-in-the-world to non-human animals incapable of first-person thought and reason. But of course this is only a dodge; the substantive issue still remains, namely, that on their reading Heidegger should in all consistency regard animals as capable of relating to entities in at least some of ways in which humans, in virtue of their displaying Dasein, relate to entities. And at least according to Wheeler in *Being and Time* Heidegger says things which commit to denying that animals are thus capable, while in *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* he denies it explicitly.

Brandom sees it as one of the great merits of his way of pragmatising Heidegger, which consists not in de-representationalising the psychological but in de-psychologising, i.e., externalising the representational, that he can read Heidegger in a way which does not force him to regard Heidegger as guilty of either anthrochauvinism or inconsistency. At the same time, in response to the intuition underlying the charge of anthrochauvinism he insists that he is not being beastly to beasts.

Brandom can only say this because he identifies a capacity for self-consciousness, reason and representation with a capacity for “conceptual, propositional and linguistic intentionality.” But Dreyfus, Haugeland and Okrent would not disagree with this.

See pp.133-134, where Wheeler says, “Since the subject-object dichotomy is not in force here, but since the presence of such a dichotomy would be necessary for any inner states// involved to count as representations, representational explanation is not appropriate for the case of smooth coping.”

And, one might add, only linguistically and historically possible (in the distinctive sense in which humans exist linguistically and historically). Once one appreciates what kind of meaning or normativity Heidegger is interested in, one sees that Guignon is right to insist on the essentially linguistic character of Dasein—see Wheeler, p.159.

See in particular § 44 b), H 211. Indeed the term *Sichverhalten*, which Dreyfus regards as expressive of Heidegger’s anti-representationalism, in fact indicates, at least to those who appreciate its roots in Kierkegaard and ultimately German idealism, a concern not with representationlessly meaningful but with self-consciously meaningful behaviour.

See SS 27, § 15, H 225-228.
See in particular SS 28, § 11, H 240-241! See also WS 29/30, § 67, H 407-408.

“Das Eigentümliche des zunächst Zuhandenen ist es, in seiner Zuhandenheit sich gleichsam zurückzuziehen, um gerage eigentlich zuhanden zu sein.”

Wheeler pays no attention at all to this crucial claim. Nor indeed does Dreyfus, although at one point he does say that when hammering a nail, “(a)ll I am aware of is the task, or perhaps what I need to do when I finish ...” (Dreyfus 1991, p.65)

Which, I hasten to add, is not to imply that one is aware of one’s limbs in the way in which one is aware of the tools one is wielding with them. That one is aware in some secondary sense of one’s limbs just as one is aware in some secondary sense of the tools one is using does not entail that these secondary senses are the same. Note that in WS 29/30 Heidegger indirectly rejects the view that one is related to one’s limbs as if they were just so many tools more.

Sein und Zeit, § 15, H 69. Macquarrie and Robinson have Heidegger say that the everyday use and manipulation of equipment “has its own kind of sight, by which our manipulation is guided and from which it acquires its specific Thingly character.” This is one of several points at which Macquarrie and Robinson mistranslate. How they get from “seine eigene Sichtart, die ... ihm seine spezifische Sicherheit verleiht” to “its own kind of sight ... from which it acquires its specific Thingly character” is hard to see. A mistranslation which appears to have misled Wheeler is the following: in § 15, H 69, of Sein und Zeit Heidegger writes, “Die Seinsart von Zeug, in der es sich von ihm selbst her offenbart, nennen wir die Zuhandenheit.” This Macquarrie and Robinson translate as follows: “The kind of Being which equipment possesses – in which it manifests itself in its own right – we call “readiness-to-hand”.” (p.98) Unfortunately, this translation suggests that the kind of being which characterises equipment is ready-to-handedness (which is also the manner in which equipment shows itself in its own right for what it is). This leads Wheeler to conflate being ready-to-hand with being equipment, which immediately creates a problem for Wheeler because Heidegger regards natural entities as capable of being ready-to-hand. Wheeler solves the problem by declaring that natural entities can be equipment. But there is no need for this drastic move. Macquarrie and Robinson fail to see that the relative clause is a determining, not a non-determining one. So Heidegger is not saying that the kind of Being possessed by equipment is ready-to-handedness, but merely that the kind of Being in which it shows itself for what it is, that is, as the equipment that it is, is ready-to-handedness. This is confirmed by the ‘definition’ Heidegger gives of Zuhandenheit in his lecture Prolegomena zur Geschichte des Zeitbegriffs: “Zuhandenheit aber ist Anwesenheit eines nächst verfügbaren Umweltdinges, so

Heidegger fairly clearly implies that circumspection can display different degrees of explicitness, depending on how smooth the behaviour it is guiding proceeds—see § 16, H 73 and H 75—, and indeed can assume different forms, depending on the precise nature of the using and manipulating of equipment—see § 32, H 148-149, and SS 25, § 23 b) β., H 265, where Heidegger speaks of two kinds of Umsicht, a thematising and a non-thematising one. We are here concerned with the latter, non-thematising kind “die den genuinen besorgenden Gebrauch des Dinges führt”, i.e., that simplest and most basic form of circumspection which guides the kind of use and manipulation in which all aspects work well. No doubt this is, as Wheeler also realises, a rare occurrence—see p.143.

SS 27, § 11, H 154; my translation.

As with any interpretative hypothesis, this claim is only testable by the way it combines phenomenological plausibility with a capacity to explain and render coherent diverse claims made by Heidegger across his texts.

So the description “hammering a nail in order to make a wood joint” only applies non-defectively to me to the extent that I am, in hammering my nail, seeing how the nail I am hammering is going in. And how it is going in is a matter of the nail’s being on track or off track — relative, of course, to the goal of my activity, the wood joint, namely, I seek to make.

Perceptual experience through one sense organ is, in the case of vision, derivative and possibly in the case of the other senses not really possible—which constitutes the sound basis for the prioritising of vision in philosophy since it is, for us humans at least, the most informationally dense, hence primary form of perceptual experience.

Clark and Grush do not see or at least do not emphasise. They tend to put the point as if it were simply an empirical matter of feedback mechanisms being, as they put it, ‘laggardly’—see Clark and Grush, p.6.

Feedback in the colloquial sense of the term is a report back on current opinions about, and effects of, actions previously undertaken.

As is shown by chemical processing plants and their need for so-called emulators—see Clark and Grush, p.6.

The example provided by Clark and Grush (p.6) of emulators in chemical processing plants does not contradict this.

See Clark and Grush, p.9.

In any case, we introduced the idea that circumspection is a matter of perceiving how things are going because no truly propositional state or experience—no believing, judging or perceiving that things are going thus and so—could ever truly capture awareness of temporal flow and change in the sense of awareness of where things are headed. If this is true of agential level representation, then it should also between true of whatever ‘representations’ one is inclined to find at the sub-agential level. But it is hard to see, given that the search for predictive representations and anticipatory mechanisms will probably have to treat the individual senses as working independently of one another to produce their respective representational bits, how these representational bits could be anything other than representations that such and such is the case.

Perhaps such simultaneous self-reflection is not the most efficient way to pick up on faults in how one swings a hammer. No doubt this kind of improvement in the capacity to use equipment, of which surely only Dasein is capable, will be more effectively accomplished with the help of another, who is more expert than Dasein itself, and who can observe and comment upon Dasein’s behaviour while it is engaged in it. Precisely for this reason do would-be golfers and boxers employ coaches and personal trainers. Nonetheless, adjustment and learning of this kind will be something Dasein simply has to do at some point for itself; it will have to see for itself that, e.g., it is holding the hammer in some subtly inept way.

Thus, to use an example from Husserl, my vivid recollection of how the theatre I went to yesterday was illuminated implicates awareness of how the theatre perceptually appeared to me yesterday as illuminated.

Note how implicit here is the possibility of making precise sense of Heidegger’s that Dasein understands itself (as itself) from out of the things it has to do with. It is a radical failure of interpretation not to see or accommodate the fact that Heidegger is providing an account of self-consciousness.

See pp.24-26 and pp.168-171. In one way they do so rightly, of course, because representations involved are certainly representations—that, i.e., belief-like.

The notion of context-independence is unclear in Wheeler because he gives so few examples of what a context-independent representational content is. He does recognise that one needs to distinguish the notion of determinateness from that of context-independence—see p.164 and p.174. Unfortunately, on p.164 he attributes
a confusion of these things to Heidegger. Here, too, Wheeler seems to have been misled by the translation: Macquarrie and Robinson have Heidegger say, “Values would then be determinate characteristics which a thing possesses, and they would be present-at-hand.” Wheeler sees in this claim the implicit but false assumption that “if a property is determinate, then it is context-independent” (p.164) —the underlying assumption here being that to be present-at-hand is to be context-independent. But in fact Heidegger says, “Werte sind vorhandene Bestimmtheiten eines Dinges.” (Sein und Zeit, § 20, H 99) The word Bestimmtheit means determination, i.e., property of, or predicate applicable to, an entity. So there is no reason here to think that Heidegger is assuming a distinction between determinate and indeterminate properties. Moreover, what Heidegger actually says is consistent with his allowing that there are determinations which are not present-at-hand. Wheeler has been misled by the inaccurate translation of Bestimmtheiten as ‘determinate characteristics’, which does indeed insinuate a distinction between determinate and indeterminate characteristics (whatever this distinction might be).

Or rather, what Wheeler takes Heidegger to mean by the present-at-hand. What Wheeler means by context-freedom and by an independent thing with determinate properties is very unclear. Does he mean by context-freedom lack of all indexicality? And does he wish to suggest that whatever content circumspection has lacks determinate form—as if one could not represent it linguistically by appeal to some range of perfectly everyday nouns and at least certain kinds of perfectly representational linguistic predicates? All this intimates that Wheeler’s account of the present-at-hand is so unclear that one cannot really determine whether it accurately reflects Heidegger’s understanding of it (which is itself unclear).

When Dreyfus sets out to characterise what the allegedly representationless character of Dasein’s everyday engagement with entities accomplishes, he often speaks of how it enables Dasein effortlessly and unthinkingly to do what work last time: it is a matter of having a skill and this is, claims Dreyfus, to “come into a situation with a readiness to deal with what normally shows up in that sort of situation.” (Dreyfus 1991, p.117) But in saying things like this, Dreyfus does not explain how the absence of representations facilitates successful coping; rather he just asserts that it does. Moreover, he just asserts that it does in a fashion which leaves it open to the orthodox cognitive scientist to add, “And this readiness is a result of the agent’s calling up and manipulating the appropriate representations.” In other words, he does not bring out adequately his own good point, namely, that a
skill is a readiness to deal with certain kinds of things in situations which are
relevantly different from previous ones in which one had to deal with this kind of
thing. In fact, Dreyfus’ thought here must surely be that we must speak here of
skills rather than representations and information processing precisely because a
skill is a mattering of application: Dasein applies, hence creatively adapts, what
worked last time to a situation which is relevantly different from the situation
encountered last time. But how can we make sense of such truly flexible adaptive
tweaking of what worked last time to new conditions without appeal to the idea
that Dasein sees how the general behavioural pattern or habit applies in these new
conditions?

Interestingly, Wheeler relates how Christopher Peacocke had suggested to him that
“on purely phenomenological grounds, reasonable doubt might be cast on [the
claim Wheeler and others who follow Dreyfus attribute to Heidegger] that, in
hitch-free practical activity the human agent has no awareness of itself as any sort
of subject (or “subject”).” (p.143) Peacocke’s phenomenological intuitions are
sound but on the interpretation provided here, so, too, are Heidegger’s.

Dreyfus writes, “In Being and Time Heidegger speaks of “that familiarity in
accordance with which Dasein ... ‘knows its way about’ [sich ‘auskennt’] in its
public environment” (405) [354]. … Of course, we do not activate this most
general skill on only certain occasions; it is active all the time. In Basic Problems
Heidegger calls it the “sight of practical circumspection ..., our practical everyday
orientation” (BP, 163)” (Dreyfus 1991, p.103)

Dreyfus writes, “A thing is near to me when I am able to get a maximal grip on it.
‘When something is nearby, this means that it is within the range of what is
primarily available for circumspection” (142) [107].” (Dreyfus 1991, p.133)

Certainly not Husserl, whom Dreyfus mentions at this point. In Ideen I Husserl
explicitly distinguishes between Akt and Erlebnis: the former is, the latter is not, an
intentional state or experience of which one is explicit aware as one’s own—see §
84, H 188-190.

Or indeed, one might add, Descartes and Kant.

See Jerome Wakefield and Hubert L. Dreyfus, “Intentionality and the
Phenomenology of Action”, edited by E. Lepore and R. Van Gulick, John Searle
and His Critics, Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1991. Note that it is not
clear how Dreyfus could say this since even if it were G-intentional, my
circumscriptive seeing would surely still be representational. This may reflect an
unclarity in Dreyfus’ position which it took some time to rectify: in an article
published in 1988 with his brother Stuart, Dreyfus seems to be arguing not for a

Note that this claim is consistent with the thesis that my seeing-how only has its distinctive intentional directedness insofar as both it and I exist in the world together with at least the spatiotemporal location at which the nail is located just in case there really is the nail I take myself to be hammering in. (This is said in order to allow for the possibility of error.)

Any other mode of representation would implicate, or so one might say, a naturalistic fallacy.

In the manner of Sellars’ intuitions or what Husserl once called nominal representations (nominale Vorstellungen) before rejecting the assimilation of perceptual intentionality to naming as thoroughly misconceived.

This is not to imply that the specific way the nail is going in is conceptually represented in the intentional content of my seeing-how the nail I am hammering is going in. Nonetheless, my seeing-how consists in seeing the particular way in which the conceptual determination “The nail I am hammering in is going in” is being made true by what I am doing. If I should choose, as I need not in order simply to hammer, I can reflect on this and make it explicit—sometimes linguistically but also, crucially, mimetically or aesthetically. The capacity for such mimetic or aesthetic explication of how conceptual contents apply there is essential to being able to grasp them self-consciously.

For indeed Heidegger’s break with the apophantic prejudice is prepared by Husserl, hence is something inherent in the phenomenological tradition. (Indeed, it is what sets this tradition apart from the analytic and neo-Kantian traditions). Precisely when Husserl breaks with his previous terminology of nominal representations, he is countenancing the thought that there can be conceptually contentful items which find no analogue in language. Admittedly, Husserl never breaks clearly with the apophantic prejudice, which is why he remains unable, having dropped the idea that perceptual experience can be understood on the model of naming, to say precisely how perceptual experience is intentionally contentful. This chronic unclarity has led to substantial disagreement in the literature on just what Husserl regards as the intentional content of perceptual experience.

See C.B. Christensen “Heidegger’s Representationalism” (in The Review of Metaphysics, Vol. 51, No.1, September, 1997, pp.77-103); and C. B. Christensen,