

# Metaphysizing Epistemology: Reflecting on Heidegger's *Being and Time*

Bachelor's thesis

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# Contents

Abstract .....	3
Introduction.....	4
Chapter 1: Developing an Understanding of Heidegger’s Epistemology.....	6
1.1 Introductory notes.....	6
1.2 On knowledge .....	7
1.2.1 Ready-to-hand and present-at-hand .....	8
1.2.2 Skepticism.....	8
1.2.3 Practical understanding: Towards a conception of knowledge .....	11
1.3 On truth .....	12
1.3.1 The traditional account of truth: The correspondence theory .....	12
1.3.2 Heidegger’s notion of truth.....	13
1.3.3 Asking the right questions .....	15
1.3.4 Primordial truth .....	16
Chapter 2: Reflecting on Heidegger’s Epistemology.....	19
2.1 Introductory notes.....	19
2.2 The traditional account of knowledge.....	19
2.3 Knowing that versus knowing how .....	20
2.3.1 The ‘how’ and its presence in the ‘that’ .....	21
2.3.2 The importance of the primacy of practice .....	23
2.4 Propositional truth revisited .....	25
Chapter 3: Conclusion.....	29
Bibliography .....	31

# Abstract

This thesis develops an understanding of Heidegger's epistemology. First, an extensive interpretation of how the concepts of truth and knowledge are outlined in *Being and Time* is presented. In order to evaluate their relevance, the findings are compared to the traditional account of knowledge as justified true belief and the correspondence theory of truth. We can learn about the ontological structure of what knowledge *is*, by means of giving a sound description of what it means to *be* a human being. Furthermore, since Heidegger adheres to a primacy of practice, theoretical knowing is construed as always being constrained by practical understanding. In comparison to the correspondence theory, Heidegger can give a less mysterious explanation how an assertion can relate to that which it asserts about.

**Keywords** – Heidegger, Being-in-the-world, knowledge, truth

# Introduction

The concepts of knowledge and truth play an important role within a multitude of contexts. Science, religion, and our everyday life have been shaped by them, despite there being hardly any consensus about what these concepts *are*. Within recent philosophy, there has been a tendency to pair epistemology with the (more) analytic philosophical tradition. As a result, many philosophical ideas, especially those who have been labelled as being ‘continental’, are left out of consideration. This also applies to Martin Heidegger, a leading figure within continental philosophy. The purpose of this thesis is, therefore, not to argue for or against a (particular) epistemological stance. Rather, it aims to investigate *whether* Heidegger’s ideas can be considered as a useful addition to the more traditional epistemological positions and, if so, *what* these additions might be.

In order to bring this about, we will devote the first chapter (1) to developing an understanding of Heideggerian epistemology.<sup>1</sup> This means that we will stay relatively close to Heidegger’s footsteps. First, we will show that he emphasizes the different ways in which we can approach the world and the objects surrounding us. That is, Heidegger argues that we can either approach (objects in) the world as ready-to-hand [*Zuhanden*] or present-at-hand [*Vorhanden*]. It will be clear that Heidegger argues for a conception wherein the former approach is considered standing closest to the nature of human beings. The distinction is used in order to avoid the (skeptical) problem which emphasizes the difficulty concerning how a subject could come out of its ‘inner sphere’ and gain knowledge of an object in the ‘outer sphere’. Moreover, it is used to introduce his ideas about (our) Being-in-the-world, which greatly affects his understanding of the nature of knowledge. According to Heidegger, the fact that we have a cognitive ability to obtain knowledge at all, is due to our practical attitude towards the world we find ourselves in. In the following section (1.3) we will focus our attention to Heidegger’s thoughts about the nature of truth. We will take the correspondence theory of truth as our starting point, not in the least because Heidegger also uses this conception to develop his own ideas about the nature of truth. It will become clear that he does not want to undermine the significance of the correspondence theory per se. However, he does express his concerns about the fact that correspondence theorists do not sufficiently take the ontological foundation of their truth-conception into account. This ontological foundation is exactly what Heidegger wants to put forward. This leads to a conception of (propositional) truth not as being a relation of correspondence between a statement and its object, but rather an *uncovering*. He

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<sup>1</sup> By this I mean a Heidegger-inspired epistemology, to be precise, because he did not intend to develop an epistemological doctrine explicitly.

finds aid for this claim by means of an ontological analysis, out of which follows that all truth is essentially founded upon the fundamental structures of our (or: Dasein's) being.

In chapter (2), we will distance ourselves from the trails we saw Heidegger set out in the previous chapter in order to reflect on and subsequently evaluate the relevance of his ideas. We do this by giving a short overview of the justified true belief-thesis in section (2.2). It will become clear that Heidegger's notion that the possibility of knowledge is grounded within our existence, is not all that different from what the *belief* condition inherently prescribes. However, his efforts to define knowledge – as peculiar as he does – are not to be considered irrelevant. Heidegger's focus on investigating the (ontological) nature of human beings can provide novel and valuable insights concerning the question what knowledge *is*. In section (2.3), it will be argued that the distinction Heidegger makes between the ready-to-hand and present-at-hand is comparable to the 'knowing how' / 'knowing that' distinction. We will use this distinction in order to get to the heart of Heidegger's primacy of practice thesis. Returning to an example that Heidegger uses in *Being and Time*, the primacy thesis will be shown to consist of a logical connection. The main upshot of accepting the primacy thesis is that it enables the possibility of explicating the knowledge-how concept. In section (2.4), we will return to the concept of propositional truth to find out whether Heidegger's notion of the Being-uncovering (of an assertion) is able to overcome difficulties that the correspondence theory cannot seem to overcome. It will become clear that Heidegger's uncovering-thesis is more capable to explain how assertions can relate to their objects in the first place. Moreover, we will find out that although a specific reading of Heidegger enables us to come close to solving the identity problem, it is not the case that Heidegger provides us with enough resources to actually achieve this.

In chapter (3), a conclusion follows where an overview of what has been done in this thesis is presented first. Afterwards, we will reflect on how the knowing that / knowing how discussion can be seen to relate to Heidegger's critique on the (traditional) theory of truth as correspondence. Finally, we will argue why Heidegger's ideas can be seen to provide novel insights, as this becomes apparent when we apply them to the context of science.

# Chapter 1: Developing an Understanding of Heidegger's Epistemology

## 1.1 Introductory notes

It is important to remember that in *Being and Time*, Heidegger's inquiry mainly revolves around working out the (forgotten) question of the meaning of Being.<sup>2</sup> A persisting difficulty of our task, then, lies in the fact that Heidegger writes from an ontological point of view. In doing so, he feels obliged to adhere to phenomenological methodology. This is because that allows him to examine "the things themselves"; that is, without the *obscuring* appearances.<sup>3</sup>

In the following [section \(1.2\)](#) we will focus our attention on how Heidegger develops his ideas surrounding knowledge (in *Being and Time*). We choose this text as our starting point, because it is commonly recognized as his *magnum opus*.<sup>4</sup> On top of that, this work is standardly claimed to be one the most significant texts in the canon of what has come to be called Continental Philosophy.<sup>5</sup> In what follows, it will become clear how he manages to provide his readers with an ontological account of what knowledge *is*. After that, in [section \(1.3\)](#) we will discuss his conception of truth (from *Being and Time*). We start with developing an understanding of the theory that formulates how people are generally assumed to conceive of what truth is: the traditional or correspondence theory of truth. Through criticizing this theory, Heidegger develops an idea of what he thinks truth essentially *is*. Moreover, according to

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<sup>2</sup> *Being and Time* will be referred to as follows: Heidegger, *Being and Time*, "section number" ":" "page number(s) English edition" "[page number(s) German edition]". For the English Edition, we will use Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, 35. reprint (Malden: Blackwell, 2013). We will refer to the seventh edition of the German version, as is done within *Being and Time* itself. Heidegger explicitly sets out this aim right before the beginning of "Introduction: Exposition of the Meaning of Being" [Einleitung: Die Exposition der Frage nach dem Sinn von Sein], 19 [1].

<sup>3</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 7: 50 [27–28]. Here he writes: "Thus the term 'phenomenology' expresses a maxim which can be formulated as 'To the things themselves!' It is opposed to all free-floating constructions and accidental findings; it is opposed to taking over any conceptions which only seem to have been demonstrated; it is opposed to those pseudo-questions which parade themselves as 'problems', often for generations at a time." For a more detailed account of why he uses phenomenological methodology, see the rest of section 7.

<sup>4</sup> For example, see Hubert L. Dreyfus and Mark A. Wrathall, "Martin Heidegger: An Introduction to His Thought, Work, and Life," in *A Companion to Heidegger*, ed. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Mark A. Wrathall, Blackwell Companions to Philosophy 29 (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub, 2005), 3; Stephen Mulhall, *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Heidegger and Being and Time*, 2. ed, Routledge Philosophy Guidebooks (London: Routledge, 2005), 27.

<sup>5</sup> Michael Wheeler, "Martin Heidegger," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Winter 2018 Edition)*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2018/entries/heidegger/>, par. 1 (consulted 1 March 2020).

Heidegger, the possibility of truth at all, rests upon the fundamental structure of human beings (or Dasein).

## 1.2 On knowledge

Especially in section 12 and 13 of *Being and Time*, Heidegger shows himself to be dissatisfied with how people have come to understand the knowing of the world as simply consisting of a relationship between the world (object) and the mind (subject). He argues that we have come to a point in time wherein this subject-object relationship is *presupposed*. Although this is not considered problematic per se, it does have the potentiality to become disastrous [*verhängnisvoll*] if its ontological meaning is “to be left in the dark.”<sup>6</sup>

What are the underlying structures that make up the basis for knowledge, or how can we intelligibly speak of knowledge at all? Can traces of the phenomenon be found in the world and nature surrounding us – that is, excluding the human being? This could mean, for example, that studying the behavior of non-human animals could yield relevant insights about what knowledge is.<sup>7</sup> In approaching these questions, we find that Heidegger deems material objects and living organism – that is, other than Dasein or the human being - incapable of knowing.<sup>8</sup> It will become clear that Heidegger performs a phenomenological analysis of knowledge. We shall see that the possibility of knowledge is grounded within *our* Being as Being-in-the-world. It is for this reason that Heidegger is arguably enabled to claim that: “If knowing 'is' at all, it belongs solely to those entities which know.”<sup>9</sup> We will critically reevaluate this *apparently tautological* statement in [section \(2.2\)](#).

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<sup>6</sup> “But while this presupposition [of the subject-object-relationship] remains unimpeachable in its facticity, this makes it indeed a baleful one, if its ontological necessity and *especially* its ontological meaning are to be left in the dark [my emphasis, SK].” Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 12: 86 [59]. Although Heidegger mentions an ontological ‘necessity’, I decided not to include this term in my text because it is now standardly understood as “true in all possible worlds”. I want to avoid this implication. Moreover, my decision is reinforced by the fact that Heidegger himself stresses the importance of clarifying the ontological meaning as opposed to ontological necessity.

<sup>7</sup> Hilary Kornblith famously defends the claim that knowledge is a *natural kind* and supports cognitive ethologists in their conviction that we can regularly attribute intentional states, such as belief, to non-human animals. Furthermore, it is argued that we ought not to analyze knowledge conceptually, but rather empirically. See: Hilary Kornblith, *Knowledge and Its Place in Nature* (Oxford University Press, 2002), <https://doi.org/10.1093/0199246319.001.0001>.

<sup>8</sup> Heidegger would argue that material objects and/or other living organisms (e.g. plants or animals) cannot know or seek to know, which is due to their different way of existing (cf. human beings) in the first place. See: Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 4: 32–33 [11–12], 9: 67–69 [41–43]. For a contemporary interpretation of Heidegger’s stance on this matter, see Mulhall, *Heidegger and Being and Time*, 15, 36–37.

<sup>9</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 13: 87 [60].

### 1.2.1 Ready-to-hand and present-at-hand

It is important to note that Heidegger differentiates between two ways in which we can approach the world. Approaching objects as ready-to-hand conforms to our natural involvement with the world. It is argued in the first place that we approach the entities surrounding us through their practical use for us. For example: I encounter my armchair proximally as an object I *use* to sit on and which I *use* as a place to store my clothes. This stands in contrast with the second way of approaching my armchair: namely, as an object which is present-at-hand. Here I take the object out of its everyday context and study it accordingly. That way we get to know the armchair as something which is made from a specific fabric, which in turn consists of a composition of even smaller substances, et cetera. In other words: we obtain *factual* knowledge of the object under consideration. The latter approach is characteristic of how objects are studied within science.<sup>10</sup> This scientific (ready-at-hand) approach brings about factual knowledge of the objects in question. According to Heidegger, however, this approach does not comply with our Being-in-the-world that, as *concern*, is naturally fascinated [*benommen*] by the world.<sup>11</sup> We have a natural way of coping with the objects, situations and people we encounter, and from this stems what we might call *practical understanding*.<sup>12</sup> We will explain this concept in more detail in [section \(1.2.3\)](#). Before doing that, however, we will investigate how distinguishing between the ready-to-hand and the present-at-hand relates to a skeptical problem.

### 1.2.2 Skepticism

Heidegger claims that we do not want to speak of knowledge as being some external characteristic (cf. bodily properties) and that it must therefore be “inside.”<sup>13</sup> This raises one of the more persisting epistemological problems (since Descartes); namely: to give an adequate explanation of how a ‘knowing subject’ can come out of its ‘inner sphere’ and seek knowledge of

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<sup>10</sup> In [section \(2.3\)](#) we will – among other things – argue that Heidegger’s understanding of the relation between the ready-to-hand and the present-at-hand is comparable to the analytic distinction between knowing how and knowing that.

<sup>11</sup> This translation does not quite capture all associations of “benommen”. Being fascinated by the world means that one always carries the world along in its being, while at the same time the reverse holds; namely, that Dasein is always carried along by the world. Other associative words come to mind now, such as (being) encapsulated (by) and (being) afflicted (by).

<sup>12</sup> William D. Blattner, “The Primacy of Practice and Assertoric Truth: Dewey and Heidegger,” in *Heidegger, Authenticity, and Modernity: Essays in Honor of Hubert L. Dreyfus, Volume 1*, ed. Mark A. Wrathall and Jeff Malpas, vol. 1 (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2000), 236; Dreyfus and Wrathall, “Martin Heidegger,” 4.

<sup>13</sup> “[I]nasmuch as knowing belongs to these entities [human beings] and is not some external characteristic, it must be ‘inside’”. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 13: 87 [60].



an 'object' which finds itself in an 'external sphere'. How can there be a relation between a thinking thing and an external thing?<sup>14</sup>

Regarding this skeptical problem, Heidegger's response is to fundamentally reinterpret and reconstruct the framework in which it is *made* into a problem at all. Note that this is a specific implementation of epistemological skepticism. We cannot call it "the" skeptical problem at all, because skeptics can take on a variety of arguments which (possibly) have the ability to highlight deficiencies within one's stance.<sup>15</sup> The problem we – alongside Heidegger, that is – consider essentially revolves around the question how a knowing subject can reach out of its inner sphere, into the external realm of objects in order to gain knowledge of the (properties of) objects.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, it is important to note that for several seminal (and classical) epistemological positions, the problem is countered, whereas (we will find out that) Heidegger rather wants to avoid it. This holds for Kant's theory of knowledge, for example.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, merely by representing this problem as though it must be overcome, we see that Heidegger makes a metaphysical assumption which is far from self-evident.

Heidegger argues that we *are* in the first place, and from there knowledge becomes possible. Consequently, if we want to clarify what knowledge *is*, we shall have to start with investigating what it means to be – or what (the meaning of) Being *is* – and not the other way around. The introduction of notions such as "Being-in-the-world" and Heidegger's understanding of "world" are actually developed in order to get rid of the traditional framework in which terms like "subject" and "object" are part of standard terminology. For these latter terms are claimed to inherently carry along with them a variety of conceptions that fundamentally distract us from how the phenomenon knowledge presents itself properly. That is, according to Dreyfus and Wrathall, Heidegger claims that we cannot speak in terms of a

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<sup>14</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 13: 87 [60].

<sup>15</sup> There is an abundance of skeptical challenges for the epistemological discipline – let alone other fields within philosophy. Epistemological skepticism can be either selective or general; both sorts have a different aim in the posed challenges. For a quick overview of the difference and the relevance skepticism (overall) has for epistemology, see: Matthias Steup and Ram Neta, "Epistemology," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Spring 2020 Edition)*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2020/entries/epistemology/>, par. 6.1 (consulted 16 March 2020).

<sup>16</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 13: 87 [60–61]. Mulhall calls this the 'closet of consciousness' myth. See Mulhall, *Heidegger and Being and Time*, 45.

<sup>17</sup> "For Kant, we cannot explain how the object of knowledge becomes possible on the basis of the a priori logical structures of judgement alone. We need additional a priori structures that mediate between the pure forms of judgment comprising what Kant calls general logic and the unconceptualized manifold of impressions supplied by the senses. These mediating structures are the pure forms of sensible intuition, space, and time. For Kant, then, pure formal logic (general logic) must, if it is to play an epistemological role, be supplemented by what he calls transcendental logic – with the theory of how logical forms become schematized in terms of pure spatio-temporal representations belonging to the independent faculty of pure intuition." Michael Friedman, *A Parting of the Ways: Carnap, Cassirer, and Heidegger* (Chicago: Open Court, 2000), 27.

subject obtaining knowledge of an external object, because the subject is traditionally understood as “[having] mental states and experiences which can be what they are independently of the state of the surrounding world.”<sup>18</sup> Heidegger’s Dasein is, for example, *not* comparable to the (traditional) Cartesian subject; it is rather its direct counterpart. In developing an interpretation of the kind of being that characterizes the *human* being – Dasein – vis-à-vis the Cartesian subject, the traditional framework is reinterpreted and reconstructed within his philosophy. In short, one upshot is this: “[A]n analysis of Dasein as essentially Being-in-the-world deprives the sceptic of any possibility of intelligibly formulating her question, whereas a Cartesian analysis deprives us of any possibility of intelligibly answering it.”<sup>19</sup>

We can see that Heidegger’s account of knowledge provides multiple reasons for arguing why our skeptic is indeed deprived of this possibility, the most important of which revolves around the notion of world and its significant influence on our (way of) being. That is, in order to ask her question intelligibly, the skeptic already supposes that this subject’s mental states and experiences can be what they are independently of the state of the world in which she finds herself.<sup>20</sup> If that were the case, it would indeed be mysterious as to how the ideas of the mind relate (correspond) to the objects in the world. Instead of facing this problem head-on, Heidegger decides to avoid it by means of stressing the importance of our *ontological* relation to the world and continues by describing this relation alone. He does this by emphasizing the (*alleged*) fact that the achievement of seeking knowledge is not brought about through a specific relation between present-at-hand subjects and present-at-hand objects. Since Being-in-the-world makes up our fundamental structure, we cannot understand ourselves gaining knowledge independent of this structure. In other words: we cannot abstract ourselves *from* the world, because “our being is intimately and *inextricably* bound up with the world that we find ourselves in [my emphasis, SK].”<sup>21</sup> Moreover, according to Heidegger, we are always ‘outside’ alongside the ‘objects’, through our primary being ‘inside’ as a Being-in-the-world. There can therefore be no question of abandoning an inner sphere in the process of seeking knowledge of objects.<sup>22</sup> This is the sense in which the skeptic is deprived of asking her question.

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<sup>18</sup> Dreyfus and Wrathall, “Martin Heidegger,” 4. “World” is not merely the accumulation of objects surrounding us; rather it is understood as that which makes it possible to have or take on meaningful relations at all, which can manifest in a variety of ways – e.g. in making propositions, using objects as a means towards (practical) goals, engage with other people, et cetera. For example, see Mulhall, *Heidegger and Being and Time*, 96–97.

<sup>19</sup> Mulhall, *Heidegger and Being and Time*, 45.

<sup>20</sup> Dreyfus and Wrathall, “Martin Heidegger,” 4.

<sup>21</sup> Dreyfus and Wrathall, “Martin Heidegger,” 4 (quote); Heidegger, *Being and Time* 14: 94 [66], 18: 114 [83].

<sup>22</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 13: 89 [62].

### 1.2.3 Practical understanding: Towards a conception of knowledge

Now that we have discussed the notion of skepticism, we will return to explicating the concept of *practical understanding* – which we introduced in [section \(1.2.1\)](#). It is important to clarify what this concept means, because we will use it to distance ourselves from Heidegger's trails in the following [chapter \(2\)](#). In what follows, it will be shown that practical understanding is a necessary condition for (theoretical) knowledge. Moreover, showing *that* Heidegger argues for this thesis at all is, for our current purposes, more important than seeking to grasp its (inherent) implications

Throughout *Being and Time*, there are several passages in which Heidegger explicitly discusses what he means by (practical) understanding and how it relates to (theoretical) knowing. In regard to the former concept, Blattner points out that Heidegger distances himself from interpreting this understanding as a part of what one would call the *cognitive* faculty (present-at-hand; theoretical knowledge), when he writes that: "With the term 'understanding' we have in mind [...] neither a definite *species of cognition* distinguished, let us say, from explaining and conceiving, nor any cognition at all in the sense of grasping something thematically [original emphasis, SK]." <sup>23</sup> By contrast, as we learn earlier on in *Being and Time*, understanding has to do with "being able to manage something" or "being competent to do something" instead of "having competence over" (or: cognitive theoretical knowledge of) a "what". <sup>24</sup> The answer to the question how this understanding relates to (the possibility of) obtaining (theoretical) knowledge goes as follows: "If knowing is to be possible as a way of determining the nature of the present-at-hand by observing it, then there must first be a deficiency in our having-to-do with the world concernfully." <sup>25</sup> Heidegger speaks of having the cognitive ability to know – that is, concerning present-at-hand theoretical knowing – as being a specific *modification* of Dasein's more basic, practical involvement with the world as ready-to-hand. <sup>26</sup> In other words: the fact that we have the ability to approach objects in this way (cognitively) *at all*, is due to the fact that we are essentially in-the-world and naturally have a practical (ready-to-hand) attitude towards this world. For Heidegger, the present-at-hand theoretical (scientific) attitude – and the knowledge thus acquired – is *derivative of* the practical ready-to-hand understanding. This claim is equivalent to the idea that Heidegger vouches for a primacy of practice over theory. <sup>27</sup> We will critically evaluate (the implications of) this primacy

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<sup>23</sup> Blattner, "The Primacy of Practice and Assertoric Truth," 234; Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 68(a): 385 [336] (quote).

<sup>24</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 31: 183 [143].

<sup>25</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 13: 88 [61].

<sup>26</sup> He writes: "Knowing is a mode of Dasein founded upon Being-in-the-world." Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 13: 90 [62]; see also Friedman, *A Parting of the Ways*, 48.

<sup>27</sup> Blattner, "The Primacy of Practice and Assertoric Truth," 236; Friedman, *A Parting of the Ways*, 47–48.

in [section \(2.3\)](#). Nevertheless, the idea that we *are* Being-in-the-world and that our proximal everyday attitude towards this world is practical (ready-to-hand), constitutes the first part of Heidegger's doctrine of knowledge.

## 1.3 On truth

### 1.3.1 The traditional account of truth: The correspondence theory

Within Western philosophy, and more specifically the discipline of epistemology, the correspondence theory of truth plays an important part in debates focusing on the nature of truth. There are empirical data, extracted from a survey targeting all regular faculty members in 99 leading (Anglocentrically biased) philosophy departments, which give rise to believe that the correspondence theory is supported by a – albeit weak – majority of professional philosophers.<sup>28</sup> Our intention is not, however, to argue for or against the legitimacy of the correspondence theory vis-à-vis other theories of truth. Instead, we merely want to show that this theory expresses the *common* way philosophers, and perhaps even most people, think about what truth is.

In short, the correspondence theory of truth encompasses the idea that truth is *by some means* connected to reality. Often, this connection is considered to consist of a relationship between three essential components: (1) truth-bearers (also called “true things”), (2) the reality those things describe and (3) the relationship between them.<sup>29</sup> True things, such as thoughts, beliefs, assertions and statements, are often referred to as propositions, whereas the *reality* to which (true) propositions refer is traditionally interpreted as consisting of *facts*. In turn, the concept of facts includes anything that acts as an object of correspondence, such as states of affairs and events.<sup>30</sup> This would roughly mean that we can take a proposition and check ‘what it is about’ with reality, after which we decide whether the proposition is true or not. We will clarify the alleged *relationship* by means of an example. Take the following proposition: “Saar (the cat) is sitting on the mat.” We cannot find out whether this assertion is true by merely investigating the proposition itself, or rather: its intrinsic properties. For example, the statement's color, length, or mass are not relevant in investigating its truth-value. On top of that, we see that the meaning of the terms is not sufficient for establishing its truth-value. In effect,

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<sup>28</sup> David Bourget and David J. Chalmers, “What Do Philosophers Believe?,” *Philosophical Studies* 170, no. 3 (September 2014), 465–500, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11098-013-0259-7> (accessed 15 January 2020).

<sup>29</sup> Joshua Rasmussen, *Defending the Correspondence Theory of Truth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781107415102>, 6 (accessed 1 March 2020).

<sup>30</sup> Rasmussen, *Defending the Correspondence Theory*, 7–8.

we will have to actually find Saar and see her sitting on a mat, if we wish to determine whether the proposition is true. This is an appeal to a reality beyond the proposition itself. Moreover, we see that manipulating reality can crucially impact the truth-value of propositions. For if Saar were to wander off her mat, this would affect the truth-value of the original proposition such that it would become false. This is another argument for the idea that the truth of a proposition consist in relation to reality.<sup>31</sup> This explanation of the correspondence theory is hardly comprehensive, but for the focus of this thesis its simplicity will prove sufficient.<sup>32</sup> For now, we use it primarily as a gateway into Heidegger's thoughts on the essence of truth. In critically evaluating this "traditional" conception of truth, Heidegger simultaneously develops a conception of his own.

### 1.3.2 Heidegger's notion of truth

Heidegger explicitly discusses his conception on the nature of truth in section 44 of *Being and Time*. Here he acknowledges that he too is aware of the prominent position the traditional conception of truth holds. According to him, the origin of this conception can (roughly) be traced back to ancient philosophers like Aristotle. Long afterwards this conception was defined by Aquinas as: "[A]daequatio intellectus et rei" (correspondence of mind and reality).<sup>33</sup> Moreover, Heidegger recognizes three theses which form the core of this definition: "(1) that the 'locus' of truth is assertion (judgment) ; (2) that the essence of truth lies in the 'agreement' of the judgment with its object; (3) that Aristotle, the father of logic, not only has assigned truth to the judgment as its primordial locus but has set going the definition of 'truth' as 'agreement'."<sup>34</sup> By stating that "the locus of truth is assertion", Heidegger means that, traditionally, the assertion (truth-bearer) is understood as the area intended for truth. Even more so, it is an interpretation of truth as being a property of statements *exclusively*. This is consistent with how Rasmussen describes the correspondence theory, as he writes that: "True things [truth-bearers, i.e. propositions] are the primary bearers or exemplifiers of truth: *they are the things that are true*. In addition to truths, we may recognize falsehoods: things that are false [my emphasis, SK]."<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Rasmussen, *Defending the Correspondence Theory*, 1–2.

<sup>32</sup> There is a multitude of possible versions and theories, all of which fall under the heading of 'correspondence'. For a detailed account of such versions and sub-theories, see Rasmussen, *Defending the Correspondence Theory*, 12–18, 120–146.

<sup>33</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 44(a): 257 [214].

<sup>34</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 44(a): 257 [214].

<sup>35</sup> Rasmussen, *Defending the Correspondence Theory*, 7.

This conforms to the idea that Heidegger uses the traditional account of truth as a starting point for the development of his own ideas.<sup>36</sup>

In taking this into account, Heidegger makes the contrast between the *ideal* content of the judgment, or that which is judged, and the *real* psychological process involved in making a judgment. Heidegger states that of the former, we say that it is *true* or not.<sup>37</sup> Why does he make this distinction? Imagine that we were to evaluate the truth of a judgment, and in doing so limit ourselves to empirically study the psychological processes or the *act* of the judgment. In that case, the possibility arises that truth will be understood as being closely related to *who* puts it forward. By contrast, evaluating the ideal content of an assertion leaves little room for such subjectivity, in the sense that it should make no difference who puts it forward. Therefore, in assessing the truth (or falsity) of propositions, the ideal content is what Heidegger prefers to discuss.

Although Heidegger acknowledges the significance of the correspondence theory, he does see room for improvement. That is, we can make a distinction between multiple types of truth. We will discuss two of those. On the one hand, we can ask questions as to how to determine whether a proposition is true or not. Even if we assume that one was to limit herself by taking (a form of) correspondence as her starting point, there are many ways to approach this question. Still, epistemologists traditionally focus their investigation on formulating an answer to the following question: “What does it mean for a truth-bearer to be true”? As we said: Heidegger does not want to undermine the significance of the correspondence theory *per se*. However, he does express his worries about them – i.e. representatives of the correspondence theory – insufficiently (or: not) taking the ontological foundation of this conception into account. On the other hand, therefore, Heidegger urges his readers to consider a question of another ontological level too. The question is this: “What *is* truth?”<sup>38</sup> We now see that Heidegger’s worries emerge from the fact that correspondence theorists *deem* themselves able to make claims about the nature of truth, despite them not considering the ontological fundament properly. According to Heidegger, then, truth (or falsity) is not exclusively a property of truth-bearers. He breaks with the tradition at this point – to some extent, at least. For the truth of propositions inherently supposes what Heidegger calls “pre-predicative

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<sup>36</sup> John Sallis, “Interrupting Truth,” in *Heidegger toward the Turn: Essays on the Work of the 1930s*, ed. James Risser, SUNY Series in Contemporary Continental Philosophy (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 22–23.

<sup>37</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 44(a): 259 [216].

<sup>38</sup> Heidegger claims that Kant also overlooked asking this question. On the other hand, it is acknowledged that Brentano *did* already call our attention to it. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 44(a): 258 [215].

truth”.<sup>39</sup> By this he means that propositional truth is inextricably linked to an overarching, or underlying, concept of what truth fundamentally *is*.

### 1.3.3 Asking the right questions

We need to ask specific questions if we want to find out what truth – in the Heideggerian sense – *is*. Answering these will allow us to develop an understanding which stands closer to the ontological nature (or: essence) of truth. In order to accomplish this, then, we must clarify the relation between assertion and that which it asserts about. For Heidegger sets out to investigate the ontological foundation of this *relational totality*, as opposed to simply presupposing it.<sup>40</sup> Understanding this ontological foundation will lead to getting a better understanding of what truth *is*. This works as follows: the answer to the question how to understand the relational totality, will shed light upon how we must interpret the question concerning pre-predicative truth. The reason for this is that both types of truth share fundamental characteristics on an ontological level. We shall find out that this is no coincidence, but rather due to the *derivative* character of propositional truth. In other words: we are set to find out *what* makes true propositions true, or what truth *is*. In order to bring this about, we first discuss what an assertion *is* according to Heidegger. A more detailed discussion of the alleged relational totality follows. Afterwards, we will see what it is that makes propositional truth true, or: what is *most true*. In short, what we must clarify is how propositional truth is *ontologically* rooted.

Accordingly, Heidegger asks what an assertion *is* and how it relates to truth. Here he comes up with the (in)famous example of the picture on the wall and one’s assertion that it hangs askew. The example describes a situation where someone stands with her back turned to a wall and makes the true assertion that “the picture on the wall is hanging askew.” How is she supposed to confirm her assertion? She would have to turn to the wall to perceive the picture hanging askew.<sup>41</sup> Heidegger clarifies that the relationship between the assertion and the physical thing it asserts about does not exist in comparing a representation of the picture with the actual picture. Heidegger wants to avoid both the options where a representation is interpreted as to signify the physical process of representing, or to signify the image [*Bild*] we might have of the “represented” (the actual picture). On the contrary, it is argued that what is *meant* in the assertion is not a representation of the picture, but the actual picture itself.<sup>42</sup> There

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<sup>39</sup> William J. Richardson, “On the Essence of Truth,” in *Heidegger: Through Phenomenology to Thought*, ed. William J. Richardson (Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 1974), [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-010-1976-7\\_6](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-010-1976-7_6), 213; Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 32: 189 [149].

<sup>40</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 44(a): 259 [216].

<sup>41</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 44(a): 260 [217].

<sup>42</sup> Heidegger writes: “Asserting is a way of Being towards the Thing itself that is,” Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 44(a): 260 [218].

is an important epistemological issue that is not taken into consideration at this point. When asserting that “this picture hangs askew”, we see that the assertion stands in some (yet to be defined) relation to the actual picture. However, the assertion is also about the relation of this picture to its environment. That is, if one were to adjust the picture such that it would hang level, the assertion would be false. In changing reality, the truth-value is also changed.<sup>43</sup> This fact is not explicitly captured or considered in Heidegger’s analysis; rather, it is assumed. The question what happens after one perceives the entity about which they made an assertion is raised instead. The answer goes as follows: “Nothing else than *that* this Thing *is* the very entity which one has in mind in one’s assertion [original emphasis, SK].”<sup>44</sup> For Heidegger, truth is connected to all this in the following way: “To say that an assertion ‘*is true*’ signifies that it uncovers the entity as it is in itself. Such an assertion asserts, points out, ‘lets’ the entity ‘be seen’ (*ἀπόφανσις*) in its uncoveredness. The *Being-true* (truth) of the assertion must be understood as *Being-uncovering* [original emphasis, SK].”<sup>45</sup> Therefore, Heidegger moves from the idea that truth is essentially to be found in the *correspondence* or *agreement* of (beliefs of) the mind with reality, to the idea that an assertion is considered true if it *uncovers* the entity it asserts about as the “very same thing.”<sup>46</sup>

I am aware that the former paragraph contains multiple ideas that need to be explored in more depth, because it seems to raise more questions than it can answer. The question how an assertion is related to the actual thing it asserts about remains unanswered, for example. Consequently, we have yet to find how Heidegger’s stance (Being-uncovering) exactly differs from what the correspondence theory proposes (correspondence). We will discuss these topics in [section \(2.4\)](#). For the time being, however, the former paragraph can best be read as a stepping-stone to Heidegger’s idea of *primordial* truth.

### 1.3.4 Primordial truth

In this section, we will show how Heidegger moves from the idea that propositional truth is Being-uncovering, to an understanding of what truth *primordially is*. Despite Heidegger’s motivations to develop a phenomenologically concise understanding of what truth is, we can only really appreciate his efforts if we start to understand why he goes to all this trouble to get to an understanding of truth as essentially Being-uncovering. That is, Heidegger argues for a

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<sup>43</sup> We discussed this in [section \(1.3.1\)](#).

<sup>44</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 44(a): 260–261 [218]. From this, some have argued for the claim that Heidegger is an adherent of at least some version of direct realism, for it appears as if Heidegger claims that the entities we can *perceive* with our senses indeed exist independently of our mind. For example, see Friedman, *A Parting of the Ways*, 53–56.

<sup>45</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 44(a): 261 [218].

<sup>46</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 44(a): 261 [218].



conception in which the truth or Being-uncovered (uncoveredness) of assertions is understood in a secondary sense. Heidegger continues by claiming that Dasein is primarily 'true', or: uncovering.<sup>47</sup> On first sight it seems as if a regression takes place here and that we, in acknowledging this, have arrived at Heidegger's conception of the essence of truth. Namely, that through our Being-uncovering, the phenomenon 'truth' emerges. That would make our Being-uncovering the necessary condition for truth. However, it would be a mistake to characterize Heidegger as understanding the essence of truth in this way. In virtue of our *Being-uncovering*, we can at most argue that we, unlike other entities, (co-) constitute the ability of *grasping* the truth. But this does not explain how our Being-uncovering is manifested in the first place. Therefore, the phenomenon truth – as Being-uncovering – must be based upon an even more (or: the most) original phenomenon of truth: "What makes this very uncovering possible must necessarily be called 'true' in a still *more primordial sense* [my emphasis, SK]."<sup>48</sup>

The primordial phenomenon of truth upon which the secondary phenomenon of truth essentially rests, then, is found in the most fundamental structures of Dasein. It is referred to by the term *disclosedness* [*Erschlossenheit*]. We ought to understand ourselves as essentially *being* this disclosedness.<sup>49</sup> This refers to Heidegger's conviction that Dasein always finds itself essentially *thrown* into a meaningful world. Consequently, disclosedness should be understood as the manner in which Dasein is open to the world, since it is always 'there' (Da).<sup>50</sup> Moreover, I agree with Sallis when he writes that: "[I]t is a move from truth as being-uncovering to the ground of the possibility of such truth. [I]n order for Dasein to comport itself to things in a way that uncovers them (as in assertion), *world must already be disclosed* [my emphasis, SK]."<sup>51</sup> These basic structures, its Being-in-the-world, the fact that this entity *is* its disclosedness towards the world which in its place constitutes the possibility of uncoveredness at all, lead Heidegger to develop the following definition: "Truth, understood in the most primordial sense, belongs to the basic constitution of Dasein. 'There is' truth only in so far as Dasein is and so long as Dasein is."<sup>52</sup> We now understand that, by saying this, Heidegger means that without Dasein, there could be no such phenomenon as truth. Dasein essentially co-constitutes truth, through the structures that make up Dasein's Being; most fundamentally, its disclosedness. This is where

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<sup>47</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 44(b): 263 [220].

<sup>48</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 44(b): 263 [220].

<sup>49</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 28: 171 [133].

<sup>50</sup> Da-sein, literally translated to There-being, is always necessarily 'there' – i.e. in the world. For a more accurate account of Heidegger's thought on Dasein's disclosedness, see for example: Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 28, 29; Mark A. Wrathall, "Unconcealment," in *A Companion to Heidegger*, ed. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Mark A. Wrathall, Blackwell Companions to Philosophy 29 (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub, 2005), 339; Joseph Rouse, "Heidegger's Philosophy of Science," in *A Companion to Heidegger*, ed. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Mark A. Wrathall, Blackwell Companions to Philosophy 29 (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub, 2005), 175.

<sup>51</sup> Sallis, "Interrupting Truth," 26.

<sup>52</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 44(c): 269 [226].

the final regression takes place. Heidegger first proposes a conceptualization of the phenomenon truth (as Being-uncovering) and later argues that this is not the most primordial phenomenon. For Heidegger ultimately argues that the essence of truth is to be found in Dasein's disclosedness.<sup>53</sup>

It is important to pay close attention to the subtle differences between Dasein's disclosedness and its Being-uncovering. When Sallis writes that the world must already be disclosed in order for Dasein to uncover things, he does not mean that we disclose the world by means of our ability to say true things about the world (or: our Being-uncovering). Instead, we must see our Being-uncovering as constituting the possibility of the truth of assertions, whereas disclosedness constitutes the possibility of truth *at all*. That is why Heidegger claims that disclosedness is primordially true. Moreover, we saw that human beings (Dasein) disclose the world through their practical engagement with that world. When a new Dasein (Being-in-the-world) is born, her world is already disclosed by previous Dasein. At the same time, however, she will disclose the world through her practical engagement(s) with(in) it. In other words: because disclosedness is a fundamental characteristic of all (other) Dasein, the world must already be disclosed when a new Dasein is born.

The fact that Heidegger considers both phenomena of truth – Dasein's Being-uncovering and more primordially its disclosedness – to essentially depend on the fundamental structures of our being, naturally brings about some consequences which at first sight might seem overly radical. These consequences revolve around what it means to say that Newton's laws can only be true as long as Dasein is, or whether all truth has become relative to Dasein's existence.<sup>54</sup> However, what Heidegger means by saying this is not so radical at all. Indeed, truth *is* due to Dasein. That it these laws are considered true, however, does not mean they were false before, in the sense that the entities uncovered have changed somehow. On the contrary, as Heidegger claims: "Once entities have been uncovered, they show themselves precisely as entities which beforehand already were."<sup>55</sup> In other words: entities do not conform with how the world is structured any more or less after being uncovered.<sup>56</sup> That is also the reason why that which is claimed to be true cannot be relative to human existence. Remember that Heidegger understands Being-true (truth) as Being-uncovered, which is only possible through the

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<sup>53</sup> We may also understand our disclosedness as a *transcendental condition* for truth. Henry Pietersma, *Phenomenological Epistemology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 114.

<sup>54</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 44(c): 269–270 [226–227].

<sup>55</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 44(c): 269 [227].

<sup>56</sup> Mark A. Wrathall, "Heidegger and Truth as Correspondence," *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 7, no. 1 (January 1999): 69–88, <https://doi.org/10.1080/096725599341974>, 77–78.

primordial disclosedness of world. In saying something true about the world, one shows essentially how the world *is*. How could this be relative?

## Chapter 2: Reflecting on Heidegger's Epistemology

### 2.1 Introductory notes

In this chapter, we will distance ourselves from Heidegger's trails. We will return to some of the more essential ideas that came up in the first chapter and inquire into what they might add to traditional theories of knowledge and truth. How is Heidegger's concept of knowledge different from what the justified true belief-thesis teaches us, for example? We will explore this in [section \(2.2\)](#). Heidegger makes appeals to a distinction between different types of knowledge, which is common in epistemology. In [section \(2.3\)](#) we will argue that the 'ready-to-hand' and 'present-at-hand' are similar to difference between 'knowing how' and 'knowing that'. We will use this in order to get to the heart of the primacy of practice thesis, which will be explicated accordingly. After that, we will argue that accepting the primacy of practice thesis helps in clarifying what knowing how *is*. Subsequently, we revisit the remaining questions surrounding propositional truth in [section \(2.4\)](#): can Heidegger's ideas enable us to 'go beyond' what the correspondence theory has to offer? Is his notion of Being-uncovering, and the overarching practical background of our being, enough to overcome the identity (or: matching) problem?

### 2.2 The traditional account of knowledge

Knowledge is traditionally defined as consisting of three conditions. That is, a person, *S*, is considered to know something, *p*, if and only if (1) *S* believes that *p*, (2) *p* is true and (3) *S* is justified in believing that *p*. In short, knowledge consists of a subject having a *justified true belief* (henceforth JTB). From the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century until 1963 most philosophers agreed that knowledge was indeed identical to JTB.<sup>57</sup> In what follows, we will see how Heidegger's ideas relate to this traditional account.

From [section \(1.2\)](#) we learned that, for Heidegger, the possibility of knowledge is grounded within our Being-in-the-world. This led him to construct a specific understanding of knowledge. Heidegger formulated this understanding in a statement that we recognized as

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<sup>57</sup> John L. Pollock and Joseph Cruz, *Contemporary Theories of Knowledge*, 2nd ed, Studies in Epistemology and Cognitive Theory (Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1999), 13.

seemingly being *tautological*.<sup>58</sup> We will argue that we can partly characterize his claim this way; for it is not novel at all to claim that we, human beings, are considered to constitute knowledge through our ability to have and utter beliefs. Any adherer of the account of knowledge as JTB could (and probably would) argue for the same idea. Namely, if we understand (the possibility of) knowledge to depend on having the ability to form or have a belief, we can indeed rule out entities other than ourselves in having the ability to know. Without having to consider *truth* or *justification*, we see that a tree, a cat and a chair cannot have (a faculty of) knowledge because all three forms of entities cannot utter a belief; whereas we, *linguistic beings par excellence*, are naturally able to do that. Although we argue that Heidegger does not add novel insights to the traditional concept of knowledge in claiming that it must take a subject with the ability to have a belief in order for there to be knowledge – as this is quite trivial – his efforts to define knowledge are not worthless at all. In other words: we *can* distinguish interesting aspects based on his peculiar way of defining knowledge. Namely, Heidegger's emphasis on inquiring the human subject herself teaches us that if we can give a sound – that is, ontological – description of what it means to be a subject (that is able to hold a belief), we can learn something about what knowledge actually *is*. In short, we can learn something about the *ontological status* of knowledge by means of investigating the ontological structure of human subjects. By centering his attention on the development of said description and by arguing for its relevance, Heidegger creates the opportunity to analyze the human subject the specific way he does. Namely, as an entity that is essentially analyzed as not being isolated from other objects, but as essentially being among them (Being-in-the-world). Typically, Heidegger manages to do this by putting the word “is” in quotation marks.

## 2.3 Knowing that versus knowing how

In the previous chapter, we have shown that Heidegger makes a difference between two ways of approaching the world; namely, as either ready-to-hand or present-at-hand. Whereas the former approach was characterized as revolving primarily around our *practical* involvement with the world and its objects (cf. the armchair example), the latter approach was argued to be characteristic of how objects are studied in science. Namely, by taking an object out of its everyday context, and study it accordingly. This essentially means obtaining *factual* knowledge about the objects. In distancing ourselves from Heidegger and his peculiar way of using language, we see that the “ready-to-hand” and the “present-at-hand” have many similarities with a distinction that is commonly made by (analytic) epistemologists. What we aim for here is

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<sup>58</sup> Remember Heidegger's claim that: “If knowing 'is' at all, it belongs solely to those entities which know.” Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 13: 87 [60].

the distinction between “knowledge-how” and “knowledge-that”.<sup>59</sup> The idea here is that there is a significant difference between knowing facts or truths (knowledge-that) and knowing how to do something (knowledge-how). To know a variety of facts about bicycles is not the same as knowing how to ride one. Furthermore, the idea that, apart from there being a difference, we ought to speak of a degree of *independence* is famously set out by Gilbert Ryle.<sup>60</sup> In this essay, Ryle rejects what he calls ‘intellectualism’. Adherers of this notion would argue that in order for one to become a clever chess player, for example, knowing all the rules, tactical maxims, etc., would suffice.<sup>61</sup> On this view, Ryle explains, “knowledge-how must be reducible to knowledge-that.”<sup>62</sup>

### 2.3.1 The ‘how’ and its presence in the ‘that’

According to Heidegger, knowing how a is fundamental characteristic of human nature. This follows from his view (outlined in [section \(1.2.3\)](#)) that only through a deficiency in our natural state of being, the theoretical knowing (of propositional facts) becomes possible.<sup>63</sup> On top of that, Heidegger writes that “[t]he kind of dealing which is closest to us is [...] not a bare perceptual cognition, but rather that kind of concern which manipulates things and puts them to use; and this has its own kind of ‘knowledge’.”<sup>64</sup> In short, Heidegger is convinced that having knowledge-how (or practical knowledge) to encounter the objects surrounding us stands closest to our nature. Because a certain deficiency must occur for us to move from this natural state (of knowing how) to the state of obtaining knowledge-that, we find Heidegger claiming that knowledge-that is essentially and thereby always constrained by knowledge-how.

We must analyze this claim in more detail – and try to do so without lapsing into Heidegger’s peculiar use of language. This will be done by means of returning to the example of the picture that hangs askew. In the aforementioned example (see [section \(1.3.3\)](#)), Heidegger argues that if, while standing with her back turned to a wall, someone asserts that “the picture on the wall is hanging askew”, she ought to confirm this assertions by means of turning her face towards the wall, in order to perceive whether the picture actually hangs askew. If this is the

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<sup>59</sup> I am aware that it is common to distinguish a third kind of knowledge – that is, knowledge by acquaintance. By virtue of the scope and size of this thesis, we will not embed this kind of knowledge.

<sup>60</sup> Gilbert Ryle, “Knowing How and Knowing That: The Presidential Address,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 46 (1945): 1–16.

<sup>61</sup> Ryle, “Knowing How and Knowing That,” 5.

<sup>62</sup> Ryle, “Knowing How and Knowing That,” 8.

<sup>63</sup> Remember his claim that: “If knowing is to be possible as a way of determining the nature of the present-at-hand by observing it, then there must first be a deficiency in our having-to-do with the world concernfully.” Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 13: 88 [61].

<sup>64</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 15: 95 [67].

case, the assertion is true. How can we recognize the knowing that / knowing how distinction in this example?

In this example, having knowledge-that entails knowing that the picture hangs askew. On top of that, it also requires our subject to know that there is something like 'level' and 'askew' – which includes being aware that there is a spatial arrangement and the relationship between the picture and its environment. Heidegger argues that we can only obtain knowledge-that, through our (primary) being involved in a world practically. That is, before our subject can claim to know (that) the picture hangs askew, it is a necessary condition that she knows *how* to decide whether it hangs askew or not. For example, by using a spirit level correctly. Even more so, she can have knowledge-how without having knowledge-that. Our subject can know how to use a spirit level correctly and understand the concepts 'level' and 'askew' but, upon seeing the picture, have no knowledge-that it hangs askew or not. She is perfectly able to obtain this knowledge (that), however, by using the spirit level correctly. By contrast, one cannot have knowledge-that a picture hangs askew, without knowing how to determine whether it hangs askew or not.

As Mulhall understands it, Heidegger does not claim there to be any way in which one of the approaches is “metaphysically prior” to the other. He writes: “He [Heidegger] does not argue that the primacy such philosophers accord to theoretical cognition and presence-at-hand should instead be accorded to practical activity and handiness – as if building a chair were more imbued with the Being of Dasein than sitting in it to contemplate a ball of wax.”<sup>65</sup> Although Mulhall provides his readers with some interesting insights in Heidegger’s thinking throughout *Being and Time* overall, he misses the point here. His claim is that Heidegger did not argue for a primacy of the ready-to-hand attitude (knowing how) over the present-at-hand attitude (knowing that) or vice versa, and that because of this there is no metaphysical precedence. However, the example he then gives to validate this claim rather consists of two ready-to-hand involvements with the world. For surely building a chair could be seen as having little to do with gaining theoretical knowledge. But more importantly, *contemplating* a ball of wax is not comparable to what Heidegger is referring to with the present-at-hand attitude towards the world. Contemplating is rather an *activity* which is characteristic of our nature as Being-in-the-world.

As opposed to Mulhall, we argue that Heidegger *does* claim that the ready-to-hand approach is *metaphysically prior* to the present-at-hand approach. This is due to the idea that the ready-to-hand understanding (knowledge-how) is a necessary condition in order for to be present-at-hand theoretical knowledge (knowledge-that) at all. Since having knowledge-how is

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<sup>65</sup> Mulhall, *Heidegger and Being and Time*, 42.

a necessary condition for (the possibility) of obtaining knowledge-that, we can see that there is a logical relationship involved. You cannot know that the picture hangs askew without knowing how to determine whether the picture hangs askew. As this fundamentally calls upon our (primary) practical involvement with the world, we agree with Pietersma when he writes that: “[H]e [Heidegger] holds that his distinctively cognitive attitude [present-at-hand; knowing-that] is very different from our practical attitude [ready-to-hand; knowing how]. His real intent, however, is to argue for a much stronger thesis: namely, that such a purely cognitive attitude is not possible except on the basis of antecedent interests and activities of a practical nature.”<sup>66</sup>

Whereas it was difficult to pinpoint the precise implications of Heidegger’s ideas about practical understanding in [section \(1.2.3\)](#), we can now see this more clearly. That is, Heidegger takes this practical understanding to have basic applications to our activities (as Dasein), which precede any appeal to theory or cognition.<sup>67</sup> In fact, such reference to theory or cognition is only made possible through our primary being involved in the world practically – and the understanding related to this.

### 2.3.2 The importance of the primacy of practice

In the section above I have described the implications of the relation between Heidegger notion of the present-at-hand (knowing that) and ready-to-hand (knowing how). To a certain extent it works in our advantage because it supports a claim we made earlier: that Heidegger acknowledges a primacy of practice. The possibility that the relationship is not logical seems excluded. However, this is also something we should also be wary of. This is because it now seems to be the case that the primacy of practice makes up an essential part of Heidegger’s ideas about knowledge. Consequently, one would have to accept the primacy-thesis in order to take Heidegger’s idea that the ‘how’ is always present in the ‘that’ seriously. But why would they do that? Why would they not deny this primacy in the first place – and thereby compromise an important part of Heidegger’s philosophy? It follows that there ought to be a good reason for arguing in favor of the primacy of practice thesis. We will see that this reason simultaneously functions as a fruitful addition to the knowledge-that knowledge-how debate.

Provided that there is indeed a difference between knowing how and knowing that, the main reason for endorsing Heidegger’s primacy of practice thesis is that it enables the possibility to explicate the concept of knowledge-how. By contrast, the JTB-theory only seems able to explain what knowledge-that is. When evaluating whether someone knows how to ride a

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<sup>66</sup> Pietersma, *Phenomenological Epistemology*, 96.

<sup>67</sup> Blattner, “The Primacy of Practice and Assertoric Truth,” 236.

bike, for example, one would have to go through a lot of trouble in order to formulate that knowledge-how into a JTB-proof-proposition. The JTB-theory could only succeed in explaining this by stating that an accumulation of different facts (knowledge-that) would make up one's knowing how to ride a bike. In that case, however, it remains unclear in what sense the two forms of knowledge really differ. That is because, in this view, knowing how is understood merely as a more extensive version of knowledge-that. Therefore, the idea that JTB endorses a view in which knowledge-how and knowledge-that are treated as separate kinds of knowledge seems untenable. For Heidegger, this is no problem at all. Apart from providing his readers with a detailed account of the knowledge-how concept, Heidegger is able to treat both concepts as generally different.<sup>68</sup> Even more so, it seems as though the only way in which we can say anything meaningful about the knowledge-how concept is by accepting the idea of the primacy of practice. In accepting this primacy, we are enabled to read Heidegger's ontological analysis of the fundamental structures of human beings as a clarification of what knowledge-how actually is. By means of the inextricable relation of our being and the world surrounding us – our Being-in-the-world – having knowledge-how is not difficult to explain at all; rather, then, it comes to us naturally.<sup>69</sup>

However, a perpetual argument remains: how could Heidegger *prove* that there is indeed such a practical 'background', to which factual knowledge inherently relates? In what way can following Heidegger's path offer us something other than a 'there just is!' kind of answer?<sup>70</sup> He does not, but he does give good reasons for accepting such a response. He provides us with a theory which, while being dependent of this response, provides us with an explanation of something other theories may not be able to explain properly; 'knowing how'. Heidegger's account is not stronger in comparison to traditional accounts of knowledge in explaining the nature of this practical background per se. However, accepting it *does* offer possibilities to say more about the nature of the knowledge-how-concept, could be an interesting addition to epistemological debates. This issue will be discussed in [chapter \(3\)](#), where we will specify what Heidegger's ideas might add to the context of the scientifically acquired knowledge.

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<sup>68</sup> Heidegger's primacy of practice states that knowing how is a necessary condition for knowing that. However, he still acknowledges knowledge-that and knowledge-how to be genuinely different types of knowledge.

<sup>69</sup> For example, to be able to ride a bike properly entails – among other things – that one can maintain balance, understands the rules of traffic and is aware of the space occupied. The fact that humans *are* able to do this, is easier to grasp when knowledge-how is considered as a *natural* characteristic of human beings.

<sup>70</sup> Denis McManus, *Heidegger and the Measure of Truth: Themes from His Early Philosophy*, 1st ed (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 91.



## 2.4 Propositional truth revisited

In this section we will elaborate on several issues that require further clarification.<sup>71</sup> As we saw, the correspondence theory of truth includes the idea that truth is (by some means) connected to reality. The fact that manipulating reality can crucially impact the truth-value of a proposition is an argument in favor of this claim. It certainly appears that within uttering a proposition, an appeal is being made to a reality beyond the statement itself. A proposition is considered true or false, then, if it corresponds to what there in fact *is* or not. Heidegger, on the other hand, argues for the notion that an assertion is true if it *uncovers* the entity it asserts about as being the same.<sup>72</sup> It is unclear what Heidegger exactly means with this. Consequently, the question how Heidegger's stance differs from – let alone the question whether it adds something fruitful to – what the correspondence theory proposes also remains unanswered.

Considering the above, there are multiple positions one could take. We will examine these positions whilst looking back at the picture that hangs askew. That is, one could argue that that in an assertion, what is 'pointed out' is essentially the entity it asserts about itself. In other words: the actual picture, which exists independently of us – i.e. the entity itself – would be under discussion. This would mean that in asserting that the picture hangs askew, the same object (the picture in reality) is created. For the assertion to be true (being-uncovering), then, it *uncovers* the object as being the same thing. Although this claim seems excessive at first sight, it is imaginable that one would take in this position.<sup>73</sup> It is only in a later work of Heidegger where this thesis is *explicitly* undermined.<sup>74</sup> However, if we come to understand the assertion and that which it asserts about as being dissimilar, the problem *how* these could possibly correspond remains.<sup>75</sup> Furthermore, we ought to develop an interpretation in which it is clear *how* assertions can correspond to the object they assert about, despite their inherent dissimilarities.

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<sup>71</sup> See [section \(1.3\)](#) and its subsections, specifically [section \(1.3.3\)](#).

<sup>72</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 44(a): 261 [218].

<sup>73</sup> The conceivability of this thesis stems from Heidegger's own peculiar way of writing. Take the following quote, for example: "Asserting is a way of Being towards the Thing itself that is. And what does one's perceiving of it demonstrate? Nothing else than *that* this Thing *is* the very entity which one has in mind in one's assertion [original emphasis, SK]." Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 44(a): 260–261 [218].

<sup>74</sup> One of Heidegger's later works shows us the excessiveness of the thesis, as he writes that: "[W]e speak of accordance [correspondence] whenever, for example, we state regarding one of the five-mark coins: this coin is round. Now the relation obtains, not between a thing and a thing, but rather between a statement and a thing". Martin Heidegger, "On the Essence of Truth," in *Pathmarks*, ed. William MacNeill, trans. John Sallis, Reprint (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1999), 140.

<sup>75</sup> This is (also) explicitly captured in "On the Essence of Truth". When discussing the relation between a statement *about* a coin ("that coin is round") and the actual coin itself, Heidegger writes that: "The coin is made of metal. The statement is not material at all. The coin is round. The statement has nothing at all spatial about it. With the coin something can be purchased. The statement about it is never a means of payment. But in spite of all their dissimilarity the above statement, as true, is in accordance with [or: corresponds to] the coin. And according to the usual concept of truth this accord is supposed to be a

Another interpretation of Heidegger portrays the view that he intends to claim that the Being-uncovering (being-true; truth) of an assertion essentially depends on whether it “successfully *reveals* how the thing it refers to is [my emphasis, SK].”<sup>76</sup> What does this ‘revealing’ consist of? Okrent poses a view in which assertions are identified as being functional in the first place. For according to him, Heidegger teaches us that they (assertions) are essentially tools in order to communicate. What is communicated, then, is the meaning of the assertion. From our assertion about the skewed picture, it follows that the assertion determinates *how we should* interpret the actual picture.<sup>77</sup> As Okrent concisely puts it, his view is connected to truth in the following way: “Assertions show us [reveal] how things are to be taken, and they are true if they uncover a thing as it is.”<sup>78</sup> We understand the idea that an assertion functions as a guide – as it were – that shows us how to interpret the entity it asserts about, but is still rather mysterious *how* it is able to this in the first place. Consequently, it is hard to see Okrent’s interpretation of Heidegger ‘going beyond’ what the correspondence theory of truth already suggests, apart from using more idiosyncratic terminology and proposing the idea that propositional truth ultimately depends on (the practical background of) Dasein’s being.<sup>79</sup> Nevertheless, both the correspondence theory as Okrent’s interpretation still seem to rely on a mysterious power allotted to assertions. It is important to note that Okrent does not intend to reject the legitimacy of the correspondence theory per se.<sup>80</sup> By contrast, his intent is to use the uncovering-thesis for arguing that Heidegger inherently adheres to the basic verificationist principle.<sup>81</sup> In short, Heidegger’s Being-uncovering of an assertion is largely equated with the confirming of an assertion, with the addition (compared to traditional verificationism) that practical (pre-cognitive) understanding also plays a crucial part in this process.<sup>82</sup> In doing so, Okrent does not quite solve our problem (*how* can statement and matter correspond?). That is, now the primary question concerns how one could provide (sound) evidence in order to judge whether an assertion is true. Not surprisingly, the practical activity of Dasein is considered as a

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correspondence. How can what is completely dissimilar, the statement, correspond to the coin?” Heidegger, “On the Essence of Truth,” 140.

<sup>76</sup> Mark Okrent, *Heidegger’s Pragmatism: Understanding, Being, and the Critique of Metaphysics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), 102.

<sup>77</sup> Okrent, *Heidegger’s Pragmatism*, 98.

<sup>78</sup> Okrent, *Heidegger’s Pragmatism*, 99.

<sup>79</sup> Okrent, *Heidegger’s Pragmatism*, 100, 104.

<sup>80</sup> He writes: “Although early Heidegger doesn’t [*sic*] consider this view [the correspondence theory of truth] ultimately adequate as a complete theory of truth, he does hold that, properly understood, it is perfectly acceptable as a theory of propositional truth.” Okrent, *Heidegger’s Pragmatism*, 98–99. Okrent has good reasons to be convinced of this, as Heidegger writes that: “In proposing our ‘definition’ of ‘truth’ we have not *shaken off* the tradition, but we have *appropriated* it primordially.” Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 44(b): 262 [220].

<sup>81</sup> Okrent, *Heidegger’s Pragmatism*, 102.

<sup>82</sup> Okrent, *Heidegger’s Pragmatism*, 103, 106–107.

necessary condition for the evidence needed: “[I]t follows that no assertion can be true apart from the possibility of the practical activity of Dasein.”<sup>83</sup>

Finally, Blattner argues for a conception in which it is *not* required of truth (Being-uncovering) that it successfully reveals the object about which it asserts.<sup>84</sup> We shall see that the alleged upshot of this is that the identity problem is avoided. Once again, Dasein’s practical background – its Being-in-the-world – turns out essential. Especially the notion of “pointing out” (the object), which is what assertions *do*, is clarified by means of this practical background. In comparison to the correspondence theory of truth, then, the benefit of grounding assertoric truth in a more fundamental disclosure of the world by Dasein (primordial truth) – see [section \(1.3.4\)](#) – is that we do not have to *assume* that an assertion can point out an object. For the fact that assertions can point objects out at all, is due to Dasein’s Being-in-the-world, which constitutes this possibility.<sup>85</sup> Up to this point, Okrent’s interpretation agrees with Blattner’s. But there certainly is a difference – albeit a subtle one. That is, despite acknowledging this practical background, we saw that Okrent is still unable to pinpoint *how* an assertion can successfully reveal (uncover) the object it asserts about. Blattner’s view offers a solution to this problem – i.e. the identity problem. According to him, Heidegger’s notion consists of the idea that there is a correspondence between “an entity *as meant* and the same entity *as it is in itself* [original emphasis, SK].”<sup>86</sup> The idea is that (cf. the correspondence theory of truth and Okrent’s interpretation of Heidegger) there is no need to rely on a mysterious identity between two things which are ontologically unlike each other (statement and its object), because both of the items that correspond are on the object’s side. According to Blattner, Heidegger’s account does not involve that Being-uncovering of an assertion includes that the object reveals itself to us “in person.”<sup>87</sup> Namely, as we have seen, a consequence of understanding Heidegger’s stance this

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<sup>83</sup> Okrent, *Heidegger’s Pragmatism*, 106–107.

<sup>84</sup> Blattner, “The Primacy of Practice and Assertoric Truth,” 244.

<sup>85</sup> Blattner, “The Primacy of Practice and Assertoric Truth,” 243–245. Blattner finds aid for his interpretation in a passage of *Being and Time* where Heidegger writes: “The pointing-out which assertion does is performed on the basis of what has already been disclosed in understanding or discovered circumspectively. Assertion is not a free-floating kind of behaviour which, in its own right, might be capable of disclosing entities in general in a primary way: on the contrary it always maintains itself on the basis of Being-in-the-world. What we have shown earlier in relation to knowing the world, holds just as well as assertion. Any assertion requires a fore-having of whatever has been disclosed; and this is what it points out by way of giving something a definite character [my emphasis, SK].” Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 33: 199 [156–157].

<sup>86</sup> Blattner, “The Primacy of Practice and Assertoric Truth,” 245. His view is due to the way he translates – and consequently interprets – a passage of Heidegger, which has already passed our attention. Blattner’s translation goes as follows: “And what is shown through perception [that confirms an assertion]? Nothing other than *that* it is this entity itself that is meant in the assertion.” Blattner, “The Primacy of Practice and Assertoric Truth,” 244. The translation of *Being and Time*, which is used throughout this thesis, on the other hand, translates the passage as follows: “And what does one’s perceiving of it demonstrate? Nothing else than *that* this Thing *is* the very entity which one has in mind in one’s assertion [original emphasis, SK].” Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 44(a): 260–261 [218].

<sup>87</sup> Blattner, “The Primacy of Practice and Assertoric Truth,” 244.

way is that the identity problem maintains. Instead, Blattner argues that “the identity [which constitutes propositional truth] subsists between a thing and itself, a kind of self-identity, which is a far less mysterious concept.”<sup>88</sup>

It could be argued that, if Blattner’s interpretation truly offers a better alternative, this alone would be enough to make it valuable. However, the problem which faces Okrent and the correspondence theory, merely seems to have shifted (again). For Heidegger does not clarify what ontological status ought to be ascribed to “the entity as meant” as opposed to the “entity as it is”, whereas this is exactly what *should* be clarified. This poses a fatal objection for Heidegger’s account of assertion.<sup>89</sup> Therefore, it makes it difficult to see how Heidegger’s account can be seen to make progress when discussing the identity problem.

Heidegger’s uncovering-thesis is better capable to explain how assertions relate to the objects they assert about. Namely, the disclosedness of the world (through Dasein) makes it possible for assertions to point out anything at all. In contrast to the correspondence theory, Heidegger does not have to base his theory on mysterious linguistic powers of the assertion. Instead, Heidegger can provide an explanation for why assertions can point out objects. As we have seen, this is due to the fact that we always have a practical relation to the entities. This does not mean, however, that the identity problem is thereby solved – even though Blattner let Heidegger come close to offering such a solution.

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<sup>88</sup> Blattner, “The Primacy of Practice and Assertoric Truth,” 245. It is, of course, debatable to what extent it is desirable to settle for a “far less mysterious” conception over a mysterious one in the first place. I would say that what is *really* preferable, is a conception that is not mysterious at all.

<sup>89</sup> Blattner acknowledges this to be problematic. Blattner, “The Primacy of Practice and Assertoric Truth,” 245 (36<sup>th</sup> footnote).

## Chapter 3: Conclusion

Our investigation started with Heidegger's thoughts on the possibility of knowledge. We found that he orientates his inquiry towards a traditional epistemological problem, which shows us the difficulty of trying to explain how a subject can obtain knowledge of an object. We argued that Heidegger's strategy to tackle this problem essentially consists of an effort to radically reinterpret the overall *framework* in which it is made into problem at all. The present-at-hand approach, which is characteristic of how knowledge is understood in contemporary science, was shown to be essentially *derivative* of our fundamental structure of Being as Being-in-the-world. Along these lines it was shown how, according to Heidegger, the Cartesian skeptic is deprived of the ability to intelligibly ask her question. More importantly, however, is the idea that we first approach the objects surrounding us in a practical sense, which co-constitutes our ability to gain theoretical knowledge at all. In that sense, human beings, through their fundamental structure of Being as Being-in-the-world, were claimed to co-constitute knowledge.

Heidegger's thoughts surrounding the phenomenon of truth are initially developed in reaction to the traditional or correspondence theory of truth. Using this theory as his starting point to, an exploration into the ontological origin of truth began. In doing so, he developed an idea of the primordial essence of truth, which he considers ontologically different from propositional truth. Accordingly, in asking the question what an assertion *is*, Heidegger argues that what is meant in an assertion is actually the entity it asserts about itself, and not a representation *of* the entity. From here, he develops an understanding of truth consisting in the *Being-uncovered* of an entity as the same, or as *being* identical. This was shown to be ontologically grafted onto the being that has the possibility of such uncovering at all. Our Being-uncovering was claimed to be "primarily true". However, because this Being-uncovering must also have its ontological origin, our investigation to the essence of truth did not stop there. For there must be something that makes this Being-uncovering possible, and this must consequently be true in a more primordial sense. Ultimately, then, we have shown that Heidegger finds this in our disclosedness. As with the concept of knowledge, the essence of truth is, according to Heidegger, essentially derivative from Dasein's fundamental structure of Being.

In chapter (2), we reflected on these ideas that we saw Heidegger put forward, with the aim to evaluate their relevance. This was done by comparing Heidegger's ideas about knowledge with the JTB-thesis. In light of the belief condition, it was shown why – to some extent, at least – it is hard to see how Heidegger provides us with genuinely novel insights. His claim that the possibility of knowledge is essentially due to our existence, then, is inherently put forward by the belief condition. Next, we showed that the present-at-hand and ready-to-hand approach are similar to the knowing that and knowing how distinction, the latter of which is

commonly acknowledged within epistemological debates. Accordingly, we tried to clarify the idea that theoretical (present-at-hand; knowing that) knowledge is essentially contained by practical (ready-to-hand; knowing how) understanding, by means of explaining this idea in terms of knowing that and knowing how. This primacy thesis, which was argued to be essential to Heidegger's conception of knowledge, essentially consists of a *logical* relationship between the two kinds of knowledge. Although we are ultimately not able to *prove* this allegedly immanent 'practical background' and the primacy thesis, accepting these does create novel ways to inquire in epistemological debates. Afterwards, we returned to discussing propositional truth. Heidegger's appeal to Dasein's practical background is strongly reflected in his ideas about (propositional) truth too. Although Heidegger is not able to overcome the identity problem, he is able to give an explanation of how assertions can point out to what they assert about.

To conclude this thesis, we will focus our attention to the issue how the knowing that / knowing how discussion relates to Heidegger's critique of the (traditional) theory of truth as correspondence. Heidegger's main criticism is that the correspondence theory of truth fails to take the issue into account *why* a statement could be considered true in the first place. We can now see that, for him, this possibility is created through the disclosedness of the world for Dasein, which is manifested *through* Dasein's primary engagement with the world as ready-to-hand. Human beings are born (or: *thrown*) into a world which is already disclosed by (their fellow) Dasein, and which they themselves further disclose through approaching the world primarily as ready-to-hand. The fact that the world *is* disclosed, then, is due to Dasein's primarily practical (ready-to-hand) attitude towards this world and the understanding included. Accordingly, the fact that we can make true (or false) assertions is due to our relation to the world that has already been opened *by our efforts* – naturally. These ideas provide novel insights, which become apparent when applied to the context of scientific knowledge. That is, we can argue for a conception wherein even the most abstract (scientifically acquired) knowledge is essentially constrained by our practical engagement with the world. That means that scientific knowledge cannot be captured in a list of (true) propositions, because the knowledge-how which precedes cannot be represented in those propositions. In other words: scientific research cannot do without our practical engagement. In reflecting on the scientific contexts, this is indeed apparent. Scientists often work together, and in doing so have to rely upon communicative skills which they have acquired throughout their everyday lives. And while these skills – among other ones – cannot be captured in propositions, these forms of understanding have been and continue to be crucial in all kinds of scientific research. Consequently, we cannot rule out the ever-recurring importance of knowledge-how.

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