

The Primacy of Practice and the Pervasiveness of Discourse

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Hubert Dreyfus' famous appropriation of Heidegger's analysis of *Being-in-the-World* (1991) as well as Mark Okrent's original depiction of Heidegger as a pragmatist (1988) inspired generations of American philosophers, putting forward the priority of our practical engagement with the world over the theoretical attitude.¹ Instead of dealing one by one with these pragmatic readings, I will first try to elucidate their common and rather elliptical slogan about "the primacy of practice", while critically assessing its relevance both with regard to early Heidegger and to the things themselves. This will lead to identify and dispel some possible misunderstandings about the primacy of practice with respect to discourse and conceptual thinking. According to the majority of pragmatist readers, our conceptual and theoretical intentionality is founded upon a more basic, autonomous level of pre-conceptual, practical intentionality. But does such founding entail the sphere of practical understanding being *autonomous* vis-à-vis conceptual and theoretical attitude towards the world and its entities? Contrary to claims about the autonomy of practical understanding, as illustrated by Okrent's "layer-cake" model, I will contend that the intelligibility of Dasein's world cannot be explained solely by recourse to its everyday coping practices. Instead, in order to capture what renders the phenomena meaningful, we have to take into account the care-structure as an articulated and undivided whole. My analysis of the care-structure will focus particularly on the reciprocal dependence of understanding [*Verstehen*] and discourse [*Rede*] that Heidegger addresses, along with affectivity [*Befindlichkeit*], as existentially equiprimordial or co-originary [*existential gleichursprünglich*].

¹ Rorty (1991), Taylor (1995), Malpas and Wrathall (2000), Blattner (2007), Haugeland (2013) and Crowell (2013), to cite but a few.

Rejecting the “layer-cake” model of the ground-level of practical coping and the superstructure of discursive abilities does not amount to abandoning the thesis of the primacy of practice. My aim, rather, is to provide a more thorough explanation of the manner in which our conceptual thinking is embedded in shared practices, which necessarily include discursive interaction. If we can explain in detail how discourse achieves the appropriation of meaning which is prefigured in shared practices, then we are also able to overcome the dispute between the defenders of primacy of practice (Dreyfus and Okrent) and those who sustain the primacy of language (Guignon and McDowell). While taking inspiration from both Crowell and Brandom, I want to situate the principal contribution of discourse to the practical understanding in the possibility of articulating the meaning explicitly through engaging in the practice of giving and asking for reasons. This will allow, on one hand, to reevaluate the role of language from a more pragmatic perspective (than is common within Dreyfus’ or Okrent’s interpretations of Heidegger), and on the other, to show that the primacy of practice is not necessarily in competition with the primacy of language when it comes to delineating the sources of intelligibility of Dasein’s world.

Coping with the Available as the Primordial Source of Intelligibility

According to pragmatic readers of *Being and Time*, the primacy of practice is to be found in Heidegger’s analysis of everyday intelligibility, where things are revealed first and for the most part by the practical concerns of Dasein. Heidegger’s original account of understanding in the existential analytic of everydayness would amount to the reversal of the classical precedence of theory over practice. On this reading, understanding is to be no more associated with “quest for disinterested theoretical truth”, but should rather be seen “as a continuation of practice by other means” (Rorty 1991, 33). To put it bluntly, it should not be interpreted in the traditional sense of “knowing that”, but rather in the everyday sense of practical ability to handle

things, i.e. as “knowing how.” Such a reversal is then expressed in terms of priority, as we can see, for example, in Dreyfus’ commentary to Division I of *Being and Time*:

The situated use of equipment is in some sense *prior* to just looking at things and that what is revealed by use is ontologically more fundamental than the substances with determinate, context-free properties revealed by detached contemplation (Dreyfus 1991, 61).

But in which sense is the situated use or dealings with the world of equipment “prior” to observation of things as present entities? How to explain more precisely Heideggerian favourite couple of adjectives, when he says: “First and for the most part” [*zuerst und zumeist*], we understand our situation, ourselves and entities to deal with *practically*? The first, shallow meaning of this primacy is the chronological one: practical dealings is how we *first* understand the world (and ourselves). Furthermore, we move in the world and we know our way around things *usually* [*zumeist*] without thematising them, without making a distinct representation of them. For the most part of our lives, we are simply absorbed in the world, even though such a condition does not prevent us from having representations of things in their objective characters from time to time. These two chronological meanings of primacy of practice are not completely excluded from Dreyfus’ and Taylor’s readings of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty: “We start off just as coping infants, and only later are inducted into speech. And even as adults, much of our lives consists in this coping. This couldn’t be otherwise.” (Dreyfus and Taylor 2015, p. 52)

Even if such a claim might be statistically true, it is philosophically relevant only if we explain such a chronological predominance of practice over theory in the foundational sense, in which our *practical nonconceptual dealings with things* constitute a necessary background for understanding how it is possible for us to judge, state, or represent *how things are* from a disinterested perspective. Our cognitive capacities are embedded in the competent performance of practical tasks. Such performances have their own kind of sight, called “circumspection” [*Umsicht*] by Heidegger, which grasps things in light of the work to be done. Any intentionality

we might attribute to thought or propositional attitudes has its origins in the goal-orientated activities we perform in order to attain an optimal grasp of the world.

The theoretical or scientific attitude towards the world, when things appears to us as just entities endowed with predicates, is thus a derivative mode of practical dealings with things. Dreyfus and Taylor's interpretation quoted above continues with a claim that all conceptual disclosure of the world rests upon a more fundamental level of ordinary practical dealings with the world:

The mass of coping is an essential support to the episodes of conceptual focus in our lives, not just in the infrastructural sense that something has to be carrying our mind around from library to laboratory and back. More fundamentally, the background understanding we need to make the sense we do of the pieces of thinking we engage in resides in our ordinary coping (ibid.).

Everyday coping with its practical and familiar understanding is thus more fundamental than the conceptual focus on entities and the intellectual grasp of the world. We first understand things by using them in our concerned dealings and only when the situation requires a particular focus on properties of entities to be dealt with, might we adopt an attitude of an observer investigating things in their own structure or their factual relations with other entities. To use the pragmatic terms of Robert Brandom, *knowing that something is the case* is founded on *knowing how to do something* and we can attain conceptually explicit contents only because we engage in implicit non-conceptual practices (cf. Brandom 2002, p. 77).

The merit of these interpretations consists in correcting overly individualist conceptions of the sources of intelligibility, since they situate the origins of any meaning in shared, public practices. This allows for a reevaluation of *das Man* in a more neutral way, in terms of socially established cooperative human activities: instead of seeing what "one" does primarily as the reason of our falling into inauthenticity, Dreyfus considers the tendency to conform our speech, thinking and behaviour to average public practices as the inevitable origin of any Dasein's

sense-making (Dreyfus 1991, 155, 161). Such a perspective opens a whole new range of possibilities for practice-based investigations of human phenomena and Life-world structures (see Nicolini 2012), as well as for a better understanding of the various ways in which our theoretical accomplishments are embedded in the practical context of their genesis (Pickering 1992 and 1995; Rouse 2002). Notwithstanding such achievements, I will argue in the following chapters why it is wrong to situate the origins of all meaning unilaterally in shared coping practices.

Firstly, since everyday absorbed coping does not exhaust the various manners in which Dasein dwells in the world, it is worth noting that Heidegger's analysis of our practical engagement in the everyday world should be understood as the first methodological approximation of a more radical inquiry into the sense of being. The mundane sense of the word *Verstehen* as 'managing an affair' or 'being up to something,' as well as the average understanding conveyed by shared practices, surely provides the methodological basis for the existential concept of the meaning of being, but neither one nor the other are to be taken as Heidegger's last word on the sources of intelligibility. Insights from Division II should then not be treated as a mere appendix to the analysis of Dasein's mundane existence, since they shed new light on the partial conclusions about the sources of Dasein's understanding of itself and its world. It results from Division II that the manner in which the world is disclosed "first and foremost" is not necessarily the manner in which the world becomes intelligible in the most accurate way.² When I take responsibility for my facticity, when I take over being a ground for my being-in-the-world, I no longer articulate my situation in terms of conventional meaning or standards conveyed by shared coping practices; my resoluteness discloses the situation in the light of norms for which I henceforth feel responsible. What might seem a primordial source of intelligibility is then revealed to be derivative when the whole structure of Dasein understood

² In his contribution to this volume, Mark Wrathall points to existential attitudes in which everyday intelligibility – when considered from the perspective of authentic disclosure – turns out to be unintelligible. (xxx).

as care is taken into account. As I will show in the final chapter, the primordial disclosure of the world can be achieved only when Dasein – that entity whose being is “in each case mine” – responsibly articulates the reasons that justify its own particular understanding.

However, before confronting Dreyfus’ and Okrent’s claims with several challenges of Division II, I want to argue in the next section that the existential analytic developed in Division I contradicts the idea that skillful coping constitutes the “ground floor” of our being-in-the-world that supports our higher-level apperceptive and discursive activities. In fact, the effort to derive all intelligibility from our practical absorbed coping and tacit involvement in shared practices leads to a very problematic assumption of an autonomous level of pre-conceptual intentionality, which would serve as the bottom line of all explanations of intelligibility. The question is then whether our practical and skill-laden directedness towards the world is to be conceived independently of other existential structures that are determining the content of our experience. To start with, the pragmatist claim I want to question is the independency of the practical understanding with regard to our discursive and conceptual capacities.

Hidden Discursive Underpinnings of Skillful Coping

For many – though not for all – pragmatist readers of Heidegger,³ the primacy of the practice thesis includes the claim about the primacy of the pre-conceptual level in Dasein’s engagement with the world. The conceptual grasp of the world – consisting in articulating the world propositionally and expressing judgments about its specific features – would only be derivative, since it consists of communicating meanings, previously differentiated by practical absorbed coping. Insofar as conceptual meaning derives from the primary, preconceptual grasp of

³ Brandom’s insistence that only beings able to make assertions can engage in complex shared practices typical of Dasein’s world is an obvious exception (see Brandom 2002).

practical significance, the skillful coping should constitute the ultimate basis for any higher levels of intentionality, including our conceptual rationality. Which arguments can be stated in favour of such a picture?

To be sure, the projective character of practical understanding is what allows us to differentiate the meaningful elements in the referential context of significance and thus to “tell” one thing from another. I do not need to explicitly pick out entities with their properties in order to be able to understand them: While walking through a forest, I am far from classifying trees, bushes, paths, stones and clumps of moss in order to make my way across uneven terrain and, still, I articulate the referential context of my hike tacitly, while differentiating the relevant aspects of the forest and grasping pertinent affordances it offers to my walking body. From examples similar to this and often chosen from the realms of sport or handicraft, Dreyfus deduces that our original grasp of the world happens on a purely preconceptual basis, where absorbed coping achieves its own ordinary articulation of significance with no involvement of reflection or language. Intelligibility would then already be articulated [*gegliedert*] prior to discourse which would merely make manifest this more fundamental articulation, achieved on the basic level of absorbed coping and practical telling things apart (see Dreyfus 1991, 217). Conceptual thematisation and linguistic assertion, in which Dasein attributes a definite character to an entity as a mere present-at-hand, would, on this account, be just optional superstructures that occur only when our absorbed coping with familiar things becomes problematic.

Dreyfus attempts to ground his claim in a quite original, but finally unconvincing development of Heidegger’s phenomenological account of varying degrees of disruption that can occur in our everyday dealings with things (cf. Heidegger 1977, §16). Only when such coping is disrupted are we motivated to transform our attitude from practical to propositional: if *knowing-what* (as observing the features of objects as merely present) is to be possible, “there

must first be a deficiency in our having-to-do with the world concernfully" (Heidegger 1977, 61).⁴ Dreyfus describes the progressive disruption in our practices and the gradual changeover from absorbed coping with transparent equipment to theoretical confrontation with obstinate objects in the following steps: (1) During a malfunction, the equipment becomes worthy of being noticed; (2) during a temporary breakdown, our attitude changes from absorbed coping to deliberation; (3) ultimately, a total breakdown makes possible the transition from involved deliberation and its concerns to theoretical reflection and its object. The general aim of such an account is to explain the ongoing coping with its accidents and mishappenings as a prerequisite to the birth of theoretical reflection or any conceptual accomplishment at all.

This rather innovative development of Heidegger's sketchy description of "un-ready-to-hand" strikes me as a very unconvincing attempt to explain how thematic consciousness with its conceptual means progressively emerges out of absorbed coping. First, Dreyfus identifies too quickly the being of conspicuous or obtrusive entity with its being "merely present". A faulty or utterly broken tool is not just a sum of its physical or other simply occurrent properties. It is rather a missing telephone, a malfunctioning laptop or a broken chair. As such, these unhandy or useless tools are exasperating in a manner in which their physical properties are surely not.

Secondly and more importantly, Dreyfus' story does not constitute in itself a valid proof that our skillful coping should be considered autonomous with respect to our capacity to thematize the world and its entities. To insist that we are sometimes forced to focus on the equipment that frustrates our activity does not mean that such activity was non-conceptual in itself, only that we do not thematise every single tool implied in performing such activity. It does not bring enough evidence for the thesis according to which our conceptual articulation

⁴ Unless otherwise indicated, I rely on the Macquarie and Robinson translation of *Being and Time*, while indicating pages referring to the seventh German edition of *Sein und Zeit*, published by Verlag Max Niemeyer in 1953.

should be considered an intermittent condition founded upon “mindless” or “absorbed” coping with familiar things.

Finally, such a view brings forth some odd consequences that are endorsed by Dreyfus in a non-problematic manner:

Dasein could simply be absorbed in the world. A simplified culture in an earthly paradise is conceivable in which the members’ skills mesh with the world so well that one need never do anything deliberately or entertain explicit plans and goals (Dreyfus 1991, 85).

It is obvious that our culture and any culture we know is far from such paradise. But since Dreyfus refers to merely *conceivable* culture, let’s follow him in his implicit invitation to a kind of eidetic reduction. Are we able to imagine a culture which would not perform rituals in order to deal with the precariousness of human life and which would not institute sanctions and rules for dissolving conflicts? It seems that even in its most minimal sense, culture necessarily shapes the way Dasein (as *Mitsein*) deals with frictions, with the unprecedented and with its own finitude. Even more importantly, this essential function of culture is closely linked to the temporal structure of existence, i.e. with the fact that Dasein must always reckon both with unexpected and with not-yet-present possibilities. Since the unexpected cannot be seen as a merely contingent aspect of the world, nor our capacity to reckon with the virtual as an accidental feature of our existence, it makes no sense at all to conceive our effort to respond appropriately, deliberately or reflectively to the unexpected as an optional superstructure. However, the main target of my criticism is not the thought experiment itself, but rather the multilayer structure that it presupposes and in which the underlying structures are conceived as autonomous.

An explicit version of the same scheme of superposed levels can be found in Okrent’s portrait of Heidegger as a pragmatist. Brandom coined such a multilayer conception of abilities and compartments, piled and founded one upon another, the “layer cake model”. In his reply to

Brandom's criticism, Mark Okrent accepts the term as rightly summarising his own approach (see his chapter in the present volume, p. 15 xxx). At the base of such a cake, one would find pure, "mindless" or "absorbed" coping; on an intermediary level would be reflective planning and occasional thematising of entities in deliberation, which goal consists of getting things back on track; on the top of the cake, there would be the theoretical objectifying of entities and, only in such cases, Dasein uses language to attribute a definite character to an entity as a mere present-at-hand object.

In this sense, both cognition and language are derivative of practice, understood as practical coping with the world. What reasons are behind such a claim? Both Dreyfus and Okrent justify their picture by referring to passages in which Heidegger insists on the priority of understanding over assertion (most notably to §33 of *Being and Time*). According to Dreyfus, discourse and assertion – as the prominent forms of linguistic articulation – presuppose an antecedent articulation of intelligibility, accomplished in everyday coping; first we articulate the referential context meaningfully by dealing with available entities in the practical context of their use, then we pick out and point out significations in non-linguistic interpretation [*Auslegung*] and only intermittently do we express these articulations in linguistic practice by attaching words to them (Dreyfus 1991, 217). The rather complex Dreyfus' account of the multi-layer structure of understanding can be briefly divided into three principal levels. At the basis, the primary act of articulation of significance is achieved through skillful, flawless and unreflective coping with the world, which consists mostly of appropriate responsiveness to situations' requirements. On the intermediary level, interpretation appropriates what is understood on the previous level of absorbed coping. According to Dreyfus, even though interpretation makes explicit what is understood in coping, it still does not grasp things under a conceptually articulated aspect. Finally, linguistic articulation puts into words already pre-existing meanings and enables their public dissemination.

A similar idea that the linguistic articulation is derived from a more primary kind of meaning can be found in Okrent's account, according to which the meaningfulness of the world is articulated fundamentally by practical understanding: "Dasein is the being that not only knows how to understandingly use tools as they are to be used; it is the being that articulates the world constituted by that understanding." (Okrent, xxx). The primordial articulation of significance is thus non-linguistic: "there are many non-verbal activities that count as interpretations that articulate, 'take apart', the holistic web of proprieties" (Okrent, xxx). At this most basic level, Dasein is capable of interpretation, i.e. to apprehend something *as* something, without any need to express judgements, endorse linguistic and inferential commitments or formulate assertions.

While such a layer-structured conception of Dasein seems to be validated by several passages in which Heidegger tries to unearth the pre-predicative experience of the world, I contend that a) it leaves many questions without clearly justified answers, namely with regard to the specific contribution of *Rede* to the disclosure of a meaningful world; b) that it is contradictory with respect to Heidegger's overall project of conceiving Dasein as an articulated and yet unified whole, in which practical understanding, affectivity and discourse engage with one another in reciprocal interchange and c) that such a multilayer description is not true to phenomena insofar as it does not give an accurate account of the pervasive character of discourse, which is structuring even those situations where we are absorbed in what we try to accomplish.

(a) To start with, to insist on the autonomy of practical coping vis-à-vis discourse makes it rather difficult to specify the genuine contribution of language to making-sense of the world. To what, then, would the specific contribution to language amount? What happens when we make aspects of our practical understanding explicit through assertions? According to Heidegger, assertions allow us to point out something, to give it a definite character and to

communicate such determination (Heidegger 1977, 156). This would be the main contribution of the practice of making assertions to our understanding. In Dreyfus reinterpretation however, conceptual and linguistic articulation would amount mostly to attaching words to significations which were told apart or articulated by coping with practical tasks. Heidegger's claim according to which discourse allows for an explicit articulation of intelligibility is then restated in the following way:

Thus, when I pick up a hammer and hammer with it, I pick out or Articulate one of its significations, i.e., the fact that it is used to pound in nails; if I use it to pull nails, I Articulate another. This does not mean that the joints of a skill domain need have names. They usually do not. In complex domains one does not have words for the subtle actions one performs and the subtle significations one Articulates in performing them. A surgeon does not have words for all the ways he cuts, or a chess master for all the patterns he can tell apart and the types of moves he makes in response (Dreyfus 1991, 215).

The fact that we are able to tell apart more nuances of the situation in silent bodily coping with it than we are able to express linguistically provides the evidence that discourse only “dims down” much richer intelligibility disclosed through our practical and nondiscursive engagement with the everyday world. But such a claim, even though it seems to be defended by quoting several passages from *Being and Time*,⁵ is problematic for several reasons. First, even though such *dimming down* involves a loss of fine-grained richness achieved through absorbed understanding, it should not be overlooked that the explicit linguistic articulation also draws attention to previously overlooked aspects while making manifest determined features of things or events. As articulation of its own kind, it contributes to the meaningful parsing of the world that can be subjected to critical assessment by others. Secondly, attaching words to different

⁵ Most notably by passages in which Heidegger presents assertion as a derivative mode of interpretation: „In 'setting down the subject', we dim entities down to focus in 'that hammer there', so that by thus dimming them down we may let that which is manifest be seen in its own definite character as a character that can be determined.“ (Heidegger 1977, 155).

human performances and the features of a situation surely does not exhaust the variety of our discursive interactions with each other and the world. The whole argument is liable to what Quine rejects as the “myth of a museum in which the exhibits are meanings and the words are labels” (Quine 1969, 27). As will be better demonstrated in the following considerations, in discourse we do not just put prior full-blown intelligibility into words. Rather, while sharing picked out significations in dialogical situation with others, we develop the meaningfulness of the world in its rich and complex structure. The layer cake model leaves us with an inadequate picture of the relationship between practical understanding and language, since it underestimates the positive contribution of explicit articulation, leaves aside the variety of linguistic practices and overlooks the feedback effect of linguistic articulation on the referential totality of significations in which we are absorbed in our skillful coping. If discourse is the articulation of intelligibility in its own way (Heidegger 1977, 161), then it seems false to presuppose that full articulation of intelligibility has already been achieved in mindless coping.

(b) The claim that discourse merely makes manifest a prior articulation of significance also runs counter to Heidegger’s insistence that discourse is “equiprimordial” with affectivity and understanding. If we investigate more thoroughly the reciprocal dependence of *Verstehen* and *Rede* that Heidegger addresses, along with *Befindlichkeit*, as existentially equiprimordial [*existential gleichursprünglich*], it should become obvious as to why discourse cannot be conceived as a superstructure or a tool for expressing previously articulated meanings. It is noteworthy that, right after quoting the passage from *Sein und Zeit* in which the equiprimordiality of all three existential features is proclaimed, Dreyfus adds without much hesitation: “But telling [*Rede*] is not on a par with the other two aspect of Dasein’s openness. Rather, telling refers to the way the whole current situation is Articulated by coping so as to be linguistically expressible.” (Dreyfus 1991, 217). In an obvious and yet unacknowledged contradiction with Heidegger, Dreyfus simply omits that discourse is the actualisation and the

articulation of affectivity and understanding: “Discourse is the articulation in accordance with the significance of the attuned intelligibility of being-in-the-world.” (Heidegger 1977, 162 (trans. by Stambaugh)). To put it more explicitly, it is properly in discourse that the intelligibility belonging to attunement and practical understanding finds its proper articulation. The function of discourse is thus to articulate in terms of linguistic meaning our understanding and to make it manifest, i.e. making it possible to see it and to share it.

Furthermore, there is much evidence in *Being and Time* confirming that discourse is closely related to interpretation in its capacity to articulate one’s own project-oriented understanding, to express it explicitly and, by doing so, to make such understanding *one’s own*. In other words, practical understanding becomes shaped and fully realised in its discursive expression. In this sense, Heidegger can say that discourse – insofar as it is expressive articulation of intelligibility – “underlies both interpretation and assertion” (Heidegger 1977, 161), which amounts to considering discourse as a hermeneutic condition to interpretation. Such a reversal of priorities is in sheer contradiction to Dreyfus’ and Okrent’s interpretations, according to which discourse only gives expression to prior structural articulation of the world, which has been achieved in our everyday shared practices. Even though Heidegger, for methodological purposes, treated interpretation [*Auslegung*] independently of discourse, as pertaining to the realm of practical understanding, it does not follow that he intended to deny its essential embeddedness in the realm of discourse.

Discourse is thus no less a basic factor in disclosing the present “there” of our being-in-the world than affectivity and practical understanding conveyed by everyday practices. To accord discourse equally primordial status as was previously done for affectivity and understanding⁶ is to acknowledge that we disclose our world not only by means of moods and

⁶ Prior to undertake his analysis of discourse, Heidegger already established the reciprocal dependence of attunement and project-oriented understanding: “Attunement always has its understanding, even if only by suppressing it. Understanding is always attuned.” (SZ 142-143 – translation modified).

project-orientated understanding, but also by means of discursive and always already shared articulation of intelligibility. The three equally originary existential features of Dasein are in fact interwoven and can never be completely separated, since any Dasein tends to make itself explicit within a discourse about itself and the world. Such a complex intertwining between the three fundamental aspects of our being-in-the-world radically undermines Dreyfus' and Okrent's claim about the self-sufficient "ground level" of pragmatic understanding.

c) Finally, the primacy of practice should not be understood as a uniquely bottom-up explanation: not only is there a top-down feedback effect of *how do we speak* projected on the level of *how do we cope*, but the whole layer cake structure should be radically questioned. Concepts and language are not merely layers on top of a pre-existing cake, rather they radically transform its structure. To borrow Dreyfus' abovementioned example, the surgeon finds himself in the institutional *Umwelt*, which is meaningfully structured by linguistic practices and according to the purposes discursively decided by the State and other stakeholders such as insurance companies, patient organisations, medical schools etc. And all these discursively laden norms are shaping the significance of all actual gestures, cuts and moves that are performed non-discursively on the operation table. More importantly, this referential context plays a decisive role in telling apart what is appropriate and how different skills are "supposed" to be practiced and instruments to be used. The notion of "appropriateness" then is not just a matter of tacitly shared practices, but rather of social and cultural practices which are discursively sanctioning our ways of skillful coping. Since all our cultural and political institutions exercise their normative force upon us most notably through discursive practices, we might say that human existence is replete with linguistic meaning. To summarise, the practical signification disclosed in our project-oriented understanding cannot be considered at all as an autonomous substructure, upon which is grounded the superstructure of our existing within discourse and language.

It might be objected to my previous account of linguistic underpinnings of practical intelligibility of the world that it tends to confound discourse (*Rede*) with language (*Sprache*), whereas Heidegger meticulously strives to tell these two apart. While I acknowledge that Heidegger considers for sound reasons discourse as something more fundamental and more encompassing than language, I still think it is wrong to conceive *Rede* as an existential completely different from the linguistic capacity of talking (or not talking and remaining silent) and to emphasise the difference between *Rede* and *Sprache* in the manner that Dreyfus and Okrent do. In order to show why it would be wrong to draw a sharp distinction between *Sprache* and *Rede*, let us consider §32 where the inner structure of discourse is analysed in the following moments: 1) what the discourse is about 2) what is said-in-the-talk 3) communication and 4) making-known by expressing oneself (Heidegger 1977, 162). As Cristina Lafont rightly objects to defenders of non- or pre-linguistic conception of discourse, “it is hard to imagine how these could be characteristics of a ‘prelinguistic telling’.” (Lafont 2002, 238). Heidegger’s differentiating should not be understood as denial of linguistic character of discourse.

What then are Heidegger’s reasons to introduce a difference between discourse and language and to insist that language depends on discourse as its own fundament? His first point consists mostly of distinguishing *Rede* as the way in which we dwell in the world from *Sprache* considered as “the totality of words”. If *Rede* is to be meant as one of existential features of Dasein, then it cannot be something merely present, an occurrent entity. In the same way, affectivity is distinguished from moods conceived as occurrent mental states and investigated by psychology; and project-oriented understanding is treated as different from the totality of purposeful activities that might be identified by anthropology. These distinctions between existential features of Dasein and their occurrent manifestations on the ontic level help us to better understand Heidegger’s intent when he states in his 1925 lecture course on *The History of the concept of Time*: “there is a language only because there is discourse.” (Heidegger 1979,

365). Only because there is a fundamental ability to bring about a manifest articulation of intelligibility is there an ontic capacity to formulate assertions.

The second reason for distinguishing *Rede* from *Sprache* consists of highlighting broader forms of language and expression than is usual in the philosophy of language that often tends to reduce the basic features of communication to syntax and semantics. In contrast, discourse as intended by Heidegger encompasses not only words and their grammar, but also the whole range of ways in which we use language to communicate, including everything that we convey while sharing meaning, from tonality through rhythmic phrasing to gestures. That is why he insists that discourse is not necessarily composed of words insofar as it includes, along with speaking and hearing, the expressive phenomenon of remaining silent (Heidegger 1977, 161). This special, wider sense with which Heidegger endows discourse in *Being and Time* provides yet another motivation why we should not reduce discourse to being merely a derivative aspect of the purposive structure of some practical activity, since it is rather a much broader spectrum of expressive and communicative components that constitute a quite distinct and not necessarily purposive dimension of meaning in addition to the instrumental goal-directedness of coping practices. All these elucidations of Heidegger's motives to distinguish discourse from language aim to show that none of these distinctions lead to establish that discourse is essentially a non-linguistic structure of human existence. In the same way that understanding finds its genuine expression in its practical performances such as interpretations, discourse (as an equally primordial Dasein's feature) finds its true realisation through shared linguistic practices such as making assertions, but also through formulating questions, promises, declarations, warnings, demands or other performative utterances.

There is yet another important reason why it is wrong to consider discourse in a specific Heideggerian sense as a fundamentally non-linguistic or pre-linguistic phenomenon: as Brandom suggested in his attack against Dreyfus', Haugeland's and Okrent's "layer cake

model”, *Rede* (discourse) is not conceivable without *Gerede* (idle talk) and since *Gerede* is an intrinsically linguistic phenomenon, it follows that *Rede* is unconceivable without *Sprache* (language). Brandom’s argument invites us to consider *Gerede* not as a mere epiphenomena, such as small talk or blather, but rather as a mass of sedimented concepts and acquired judgments that inform and shape the way we perceive and understand the world prior to any personal interpretation we are to justify by our own means. Thus, when Heidegger states that “the intelligibility of something has always been articulated, even before there is any appropriative interpretation of it.” (Heidegger 1977, 1961), he points to the fact that any thought or genuine understanding obtained from our encounter with things can only be achieved against the background of what has already been said. In this sense, all of human life is linguistically mediated and language itself is thus a part of fundamental structures of being-in-the-world. What has already been expressed and what is further conveyed in communication is thus shaping and enabling our thought and understanding; it constitutes a core aspect of our lived experience:

In language, as a way things have been expressed or spoken out [*Ausgesprochenheit*], there is hidden a way in which the understanding of Dasein has been interpreted [...]. Proximally, and with certain limits, Dasein is constantly delivered over to this interpretedness, which controls and distributes the possibilities of average understanding and of the state-of-mind belonging to it. The way things have been expressed or spoken out is such that in the totality of contexts of signification into which it has been articulated, it preserves an understanding of the disclosed world and therewith, equiprimordially, an understanding of the Dasein-with of Others and of one's own Being-in (Heidegger 1977, 167-168).

That which has already been expressed takes control over our most general ways of understanding the world as well as shaping both our being-with-others and our own self-understanding. Now, existentialist readers might be tempted to emphasise the sinister aspect of *Gerede* in which resides the dominance of public interpretation, sparing us from the need to

uncover the things themselves through genuine, primordial understanding. Nevertheless, one might side with a more neutral interpretation of *Gerede* as a linguistic structure of authority, which is responsible for maintaining certain standards for justification that we necessarily have to take for granted if we are to express any meaning at all. Of course, such a neutral reinterpretation of idle-talk in terms of norms of appropriateness and justification might seem contrary to Heidegger's dismissive remarks about groundlessness in which *Gerede* is characterised as an obstacle to any genuine understanding.⁷ However, public standards might include – and in fact they do – norms of correctness that are not to be assimilated to some sinister “dictatorship of *das Man*”: as is the norm according to which the correctness or incorrectness of what we say depends on how it is with the things we are talking about, or the norm according to which making a claim makes us endorse commitment to justify its different inferential implications. We have therefore to conclude that all genuine understanding, discovering and appropriating is necessarily performed against the background of shared public standards that any Dasein has to endorse in order to make meaningful and disclosing statements about itself and the world.

All these considerations only further confirm the previous refusal to consider discourse apart from its linguistic realizations. Brandom is right to point out that “there is no *Rede* without *Gerede* (idle talk), and no *Gerede* without *Sprache*” (Brandom 2002, 335). And for the same reason, it is impossible to see the world of equipment as autonomous, as “something that could be in place *before, or otherwise in the absence* of particular linguistic practices” (Brandom 2002, 80), as Dreyfus and Okrent would have it. Pragmata, whose significance can only be unlocked by the practice of working humans, surely presuppose a world to which we are already attuned and which is linguistically structured.

⁷ See, e.g. Heidegger 1977, 168: “Idle talk is constituted by just such gossiping and passing the word along – a process by which its initial lack of grounds to stand on becomes aggravated to complete groundlessness.”

It might be objected that our basic coping with the world is not linguistically structured: when I am simply breathing or when I enjoy a variety of tastes for which I do not have names, I am obviously coping with different aspects of my surroundings non-linguistically. Two replies are possible to such objections: first, in such flawless coping, we do not care about different meanings of our situation, we just breathe, eat or drink. But as soon as we attach importance to wine or food tasting, as soon as we try to evaluate how to breathe appropriately, we do so in a situation that is inevitably articulated by linguistic discrimination. Yoga exercise or wine tasting are practices in which deep or shallow breathing or appreciating of flavours, aromas, colours and other subtle nuances become truly meaningful both to ourselves and within social interaction and as such, they are not independent of distinctions conveyed through discourse. Secondly, the supposition of a primordial, non-linguistic grasp of reality neglects that our meaningful access to things is mediated through a mesh of cultural and historical interpretations which are linguistically articulated. Even the simplest kinds of coping, such as cutting bread, are practices which have different meanings among ancient Greeks, the first Christians and contemporary consumers' society. When bread accidentally fell on the floor when I was little, my mother instinctively apologized and kissed it for she spontaneously *perceived* it as a gift of God. These examples aim to show that even Dreyfus' and Okrent's world of everyday practice – which opens up the meaning of things as affordances – presuppose its prior linguistic articulation.

On the basis of previous considerations emphasising the role of linguistic articulation in the world-disclosure, one might be tempted to consider language as more a primordial than practical understanding, since it is constitutive of meaning that has always already been articulated prior to our engagement with the world. Even though I will finally reject the thesis of primacy of language – for it is also oblivious to the complex intertwining between affective, practical and communicative grasp of reality – it is instructive to spell out the reasons for which

Heidegger's position might be assimilated to the view according to which the mastery of practical contexts of significance is constitutively grounded in some prior mastery of the articulate structure of language. From the discussion relative to *Gerede*, language results as essential for our familiarity with the world, since it is a medium in which is deposited the articulation of intelligibility of our tradition and from which we necessary take up again in our quest for meaning:

The understanding which has thus already been 'deposited' in the way things have been expressed, pertains just as much to any traditional discoveredness of entities which may have been reached, as it does to one's current understanding of Being and to whatever possibilities and horizons for fresh interpretation and conceptual articulation may be available. (Heidegger 1977, 168)

Passages like this convince interpreters like Gadamer or Guignon to regard language as absolutely central to Dasein's dwelling in the world and even as the ultimate source of all intelligibility that there is: "Language is not just one of man's possessions of the world; rather, on it depends the fact that man has a world at all." (Gadamer 1975, 443). In a similar vein, Guignon defends (and attributes to Heidegger) a "constitutive" rather than "instrumental" view of language, which considers it "not so much as a tool on hand for use", but rather "as a *medium* in which man dwells. On the constitutive view, language generates and first makes possible our full-blown sense of the world." (Guignon 1983, 118). There are many reasons to think that language has indeed such a ubiquitous character and that Dasein's engagement with the world and with others in everydayness is pervaded by language. Not only is most of what we do articulated, but linguistic skills are all-pervasive; they constrain our perception, they guide our seemingly spontaneous activities and they are responsible for refining the norms governing our orientation around things. Thus, our allegedly "pre-conceptual epistemic skills" are not independent of linguistic skills involved in our socialisation. It is by virtue of having a language that we can experience a structurally articulated world, a world in which things make sense not

only by being different from one another, but also by being interrelated in complex inferential relations. Interpretations circulated and handed down in natural language as a matter of fact have a profound effect on what Dasein is typically capable of understanding and feeling about anything.

It would be, however, wrong to consider language as the ultimate ground of a newly composed layer cake structure, which would represent an alternative to Okrent's or Dreyfus' pragmatist accounts of our being-in-the-world. To defenders of linguistic constitutivism such as Guignon, it might be objected that they underestimate the complex intertwining between the three existential features of Dasein no more, but no less than pragmatists who emphasize unilaterally the primacy of coping practices. Whether our preference goes to practical projection of possibilities in non-conceptual coping or to discursive articulation of the world, it is simply wrong and contrary to the intricate nexus of *Verstehen*, *Rede* and *Befindlichkeit* to single out only one of these existential structures as a more fundamental or even autonomous source of all intelligibility.

Neither language nor skillful coping can be claimed to constitute the ultimate source of meaningful world-disclosure, because each of those constitutes only one of the fundamental existential structures. The origins of intelligibility are thus to be searched for in the whole care-structure, composed by various intertwining between affective, practical and discursive features of Dasein's involvement in the world.

The Primacy of Practice Reconsidered

In this final section, I want to argue that the dispute between pragmatists emphasising the primacy of everyday coping and defenders of linguistic constitutivism highlighting the primacy of discursive articulation of world-disclosure can be overcome if we clarify the way in

which both coping and discursive practices are themselves ontologically rooted in our being-in-the-world, understood as care. Crowell's original re-interpretation of Heidegger can be helpful in this task insofar as it permits the re-formulation of the dispute about the origins of intelligibility in terms of a quest for origins of normativity. Since both our everyday practical dealings with the world and linguistic practices get their meaning only against the authoritative background of shared norms governing their appropriateness, we should ask from where all these explicit and implicit norms take their binding force. Contrary to relativist pragmatists (Rorty, Dreyfus) who insist on the conventional and ultimately ungrounded authority of shared practices⁸ – in their effort to displace the subject from its central and supposedly Cartesian position – Crowell's position permits finding a more fundamental ground, both for the everyday intelligibility provided by our involvement in public coping practices and for the linguistic articulation of world-disclosure shared and conveyed by *Gerede*. Crowell situates the source of all normativity (and hence intelligibility as well) in Dasein's responsible taking over of its own thrownness: "first-person authority is what transforms factic 'grounds' (determinants of my being) into potentially justifying 'reasons' (*Gründe*)."⁸ (Crowell 2013, 170-171). This means that the sources of normativity (and hence of intelligibility) cannot be searched for in some factual, occurrent state of matters, but rather in Dasein's nonindifference to its being and its responsible endorsement of its facticity.

The merits of such an account of transcendental conditions of meaning and normativity is to accommodate a quite robust sense in which finite and situated subjectivity, re-interpreted in terms of care, contributes to the meaningfulness of phenomena. However, emphasising the central role of 1st person commitment to "take over being-a-ground" does not amount to rehabilitating transcendental consciousness as the source for all constitution of meaning.

⁸ cf. Dreyfus' Wittgensteinian claim that "the practices on the basis of which entities are understood cannot themselves be justified or grounded. Once a practice has been explained by appealing to what one does, no more basic justification is possible" (Dreyfus 2005, xiii).

Crowell's emphasis on the task of endorsing responsibility for one's thrownness acknowledges the facticity of our already thrown situation into the pre-constituted and norm-governed space of meaning, but it also shows that bare facts could not count as norms unless there is a being who is an issue for itself and who is able to transform several strata of what there is (*de facto*) into possible reasons permitting the assessment of what things should be like (*de iure*): "To take over being-a-ground, then – that is, to possibilise what grounds me – is to transform the claims of nature or society (what "one" simply does) into first-person terms, into my reasons for doing what I do." (Crowell 2013, 209). To overcome the gap between norms and facts, Crowell appeals to the call of consciousness as the ontological condition whereby one's (factic) grounds become one's own (normative) reasons. The call of consciousness which entails the commitment of giving reasons *to oneself* and *to others* thus constitutes the genuine ground for practices in which the world-disclosure becomes articulate.

The point I want to stress while developing these original insights of Crowell is that there is no necessary dispute or inconsistency between 1st person and 3rd person accounts of intelligibility and its grounds. On the one hand, language rules and concepts are possible only if there is a personal commitment to acknowledge oneself as responsible for one's normative stance. But on the other, this implies a communicative exchange taking place within our being-with-others, so we can simultaneously hold that language rules and the use of concepts are possible only if there are shared public practices in which an individual subject acknowledges their own statuses and gives reasons for their attitudes, as well as attributes statuses and attitudes to other persons. While this second, public aspect of one's commitment is highlighted and analysed in detail by normative pragmatists like Brandom, Crowell's account emphasises the first aspect in order to acknowledge intelligibility and normativity in their less visible and yet constitutive grounding. The crucial point here is that both these accounts can be seen as complementary insofar as they recognize the practice of making claims and giving reasons as

crucial for the very possibility of making other moves in various language games that we play within the space of reasons. This common denominator also constitutes the distinctive character of these accounts in comparison to Wittgenstein: while the author of *Philosophical investigations* insists that language does not have a “downtown”, both Brandom and Crowell convincingly argue that the practices of giving and asking for reasons should be considered as the normative core of our discursive social practices, insofar as they involve a genuine commitment from their participants and are thereby critical for the very possibility of language and rationality.

I want to conclude by delineating several points of intersection – but also of partial disagreement – between these two versions of normative pragmatism that seem to me to be the most promising ways to overcome certain shortcomings of pragmatic perspectives which were analysed in previous chapters. Even though these final remarks are formulated as modest objections to Crowell’s account, their purpose is not to contradict it, but rather to contribute to its further development. Firstly, it seems to me that while Crowell’s explanation of the sources of normativity through Dasein’s practice of giving and asking for reasons rightly emphasise the central role of the 1st person’s commitment, such an emphasis tends to unnecessarily downplay the essential contribution of Brandom’s version of pragmatism. While recognising a certain proximity of his own notion of normatively structured “phenomenological immanence” and Brandom’s inferentialist account of the “space of reasons”, Crowell dismisses Brandom’s position as a kind of quasi-behaviourism that “abandons the first-person stance and denies the significance of consciousness for the theory of intentional content” (Crowell 2013, 101). However, if Brandom denies the relevance of consciousness for the constitution of meaning, he does so for sound reasons, already outlined by Hegel and valid even from a phenomenological point of view: no consciousness can attain certainty by its own means and if we think of ourselves as self-conscious (and normative) beings, it is only insofar as we recognise others and

are reciprocally recognised by them as beings capable of endorsing commitments and accepting responsibility for them. The 1st person is thus not completely rejected, by rather situated within a larger “I/Thou” conception of mutual recognition in which the first-person stance gets its genuine meaning. To be sure, this intersubjective dimension is not omitted by Crowell who reformulates our commitment to practical reasoning as a readiness to engage in “the dialogical practice of offering reasons to others for what I do and demanding the same from them.” (Crowell 2013, 303). A more balanced acknowledgment of Brandom’s insights might, however, prove useful in order to provide a more developed account of the complex entanglement of the perspectives of the first, second and third person. First of all, even though we might sometimes try to give an account of ourselves to ourselves, the result of such self-examination does not lead to commitments if taken in isolation. The genesis of real responsibility implies that I commit myself to explaining my actions and thoughts to another, that I answer for myself before the other. Commitments taken in isolation from any possible control of their fulfillment would be no more than empty gestures one might make in front of a mirror. Secondly, since norms should arise within the practice of giving and asking for reasons (as Crowell himself acknowledges), participants have to bind themselves to standards that go beyond their individual commitment and this is possible only if I interact with the other whom I recognize in practice as bound by the same commitments. Communication directed towards a mutual understanding presupposes not only recognising the validity of different perspectives, but necessarily entails certain common rules of discursive coordination. For example, to utter statements means undertaking commitments in a chain of inferences and to give arguments (such as referring to factual relations) not only for our assertions taken at their face-value, but also for their consequences. But such commitments extend even further, since giving reasons to the other thus implies being committed to consequences which follow from the acceptance of a better argument provided by the second person. In a more ecumenical perspective adopted

in his chapter to the present volume, Crowell himself acknowledges such inferential rules as being part of one's own commitment: "I must be open to the possibility that [others] might have better reasons than I do" (Crowell, xxx). Universality to which we aspire is then achieved by taking into account the third person as a virtual interlocutor to whom we might be compelled to answer for our conceptual applications as well and whose virtual objections might already be taken into account when we speak in dialogical situations including just you and me. I am virtually accountable to the unlimited horizons of others, as Crowell demonstrates in the "Being answerable" chapter of his book and repeats in his paper of the present volume.

This brings me to the second point in which I simply suspect Crowell of giving too much credit to Heidegger's call of consciousness as unmistakable: "For itself – that is, from the first-person point of view – Dasein is "radically" deprived "of the possibility of misunderstanding itself" because it is not reflected back from things but rather directly confronts the mineness of existence as such." (Crowell 2013, 183). What I question here is not the appropriateness of Crowell's interpretation with regard to Heidegger's thought, but rather the unacceptable consequences which follows from its endorsement. The specific sense of Heidegger's "call of consciousness" amounts to considering myself not in terms of any practical identity, but to acknowledge my factic being-there and being guilty for not yet *taking over being a ground*. How can it then result in my commitment to making explicit my normative stance in the game of giving and asking for reasons? If we consider the role of justifying reasons in a genuine dialogical practice, we can see that the exceptional situation described by Heidegger and developed by Crowell renders superfluous any reason-giving that might result from such a call of consciousness. If doubt is unjustified and if my wanting to be responsible for who I am amounts to acknowledgment that I can never warrant who I am – as both Heidegger and Crowell ascertain us – then asking for justification or falsification is losing any sense or purpose. Crowell would probably reply that the unmistakable character of the call of consciousness

concerns only the simple, but crucial fact that only *me* can provide an answer to such a call and take responsibility of reasons which are worth taking into account. But then it remains unclear as to how such resolution could constitute any *ground* at all. For to be accountable is meaningful only if there are alternatives to be pondered and the possibility of being mistaken. Hence, my *taking over being-a-ground* – insofar as it is presented as an unmistakable reply to the call of consciousness – makes no difference within the practice of language and might be declared void from a less existentialist and more Wittgensteinian perspective. In fact, how could we even distinguish practical, linguistic or theoretical compartments accomplished in conformity to norms from those which are done responsibly and in light of these norms, if the results might be the same? If we want to ground norms of intelligibility in taking-over-being-a-ground, there must necessarily be the possibility of assessing such grounding and justification as correct or incorrect. My objection to both Crowell and Heidegger is hence the following: if there is no sense or possibility of assessing Dasein's reply to the call of its own consciousness as incorrect, since its validity is supposedly achieved through Dasein's own confrontation with his being-guilty, then how can we differentiate such a stance (and the resolute stance which follows from it) from any other particular form of doxatic commitment?

My final point aims to emphasize – contrary to Crowell and more closely to Brandom – that there must be norms of correctness that are not derivative of any attitude, including the existential attitude of taking over being-a-ground. If we are to overcome the abovementioned difficulties, we need a more nuanced account of the status of discursive norms which define the game of giving and asking for reasons. While the call of consciousness and resoluteness are rightly identified as the ultimate sources of Dasein's commitments to justification, the rules of such justifications themselves (namely inferential rules including demanding to take responsibility for consequences of our claims and commitments) are not the outcome of such an existential choice. If we are to answer Nenon's requirement (in this volume) of providing

reasons for why socially instituted norms are the good ones, we have to look for norms of correctness that transcend attitudes. Among those, discursive rules of how to refer our assertions and claims to factual relations surely play a crucial role. Such rules do not result from one's responsible taking-over-being-a-ground, since they are necessarily provided by a particular social environment and historically inherited context of understanding. At the same time and for the same reason, their universality is not grounded in some transcendental and invariant structure of our consciousness: there is no single way of being rational, as we learn from the history of sciences. Crowell is then not mistaken when he argues that all such historical and social embeddedness of norms is not independent of my commitment to follow them responsibly insofar as their binding force does not ultimately have any other source than each Dasein's projecting itself in the future in the light of these norms. But even though the ultimate source of normativity is to be searched for in the appropriation of norms by the actual Dasein in each case as its own responsible accomplishment, we should not neglect essential limits to such appropriation. While recognizing the fundamental ungroundedness of standardised ways of judging and acting, I can question, suspend or "bracket" any of the shared and socially sanctioned norms, according to which I assess or justify my judgements and actions, I can even strive to revise or modify the accepted standards for the language game of giving and asking for reasons, but I can never undertake such a commitment in existential isolation, in bracketing all the framework norms for justification, as Heidegger's insistence on silent recollection suggests. In other words, the framework norms and rules according to which we play the game of giving and asking for reasons are not attitude-dependent. From this perspective, Crowell's ultimate account of the sources of normativity in Dasein's call of consciousness still seems to imply, notwithstanding all his insistence on social and shared character of meaning, a slight dose of voluntarism and arbitrariness. Even if Crowell himself takes distance from such decisionism (see p. xxx in this volume), understanding normative commitments as decisions

taken in the attitude of existential solitude is something that should raise suspicion. In the same time and for the same reasons, Crowell's account should finally be considered as more justified than Heidegger's account of resoluteness. While Heidegger's insistence on resoluteness betrays a tendency to withdraw from *Mitsein's* linguistic exchange (unjustly identified with idle-talk) which finally excludes *Dasein* from a genuine normative commitment in intersubjective space of reasons, Crowell's innovative appropriation of Heidegger's guilt opens a new and genuinely intersubjective perspective on the sources of meaning. When being-guilty is understood as being called to answer for norms and the binding force they have over one's actions and when such a turnover implies being held to account and giving reasons for one's claims in front of others, we are without doubt on the right track to unearth the normative underpinnings of world-disclosure.

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