

HEIDEGGER AND DAVIDSON (AND HAUGELAND)

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I think that John Haugeland's paper is a really good one. What makes it so good is that it articulates quite clearly why it is that some of us think that Heidegger and Donald Davidson share a great deal in common, and why it is that reading them together is mutually enlightening. In my comments I will first attempt to reinforce the point by explicitly focusing on the points of commonality between Heidegger and Davidson which implicitly stand behind John's work in this paper. Then, I will use this occasion, and some of Haugeland's specific remarks, to reflect on just what it is (aside from style and temperament) which separates early Heidegger and Davidson, and on just what we would need to know to decide which of them is right.

For several years a small group of philosophers, including Haugeland and myself, have been suggesting that it is profitable to compare and contrast Heidegger and Donald Davidson. I do not think, however, that any of us have been as successful at articulating just why this should be so as John has been here. The key question concerning the early Heidegger, and the primary question Heidegger means to raise in *Being and Time*, is "What is it to be Dasein?" Among the central facts concerning Dasein which need to be taken into account by any answer to this question are that Dasein is its disclosedness, that disclosedness is a necessary condition for both all encounters with entities and all propositional truth, and that Dasein is always "for the sake of a possibility of its own being." This last fact about Dasein, and its disclosedness, is discovered in the course of Heidegger's discussion of the way in which we encounter and understand equipment, which, as Haugeland says, is primarily "in its appropriate and successful use." And that Dasein is always for the sake of some possibility of its own suggests a long tradition of thinking of human beings as having ends for the sake of which we act, and which provide reasons for what we do. That is, human beings, as human beings, are rational in the sense that we act with reason. If this is so, then whatever it is to be Dasein, Dasein must be in such a way as to allow

for the possibility that it acts for the sake of ends in such a way as to be rational. That is, the answer to the question "What is it to be Dasein?" must be such as to answer the closely related question "What must Dasein be to be for the sake of some possibility of itself, and thus count as having reasons?" And the answer to *this* question must be such as to indicate why it is that Heidegger thinks that Dasein is its disclosedness and that as such it is necessary for encounters with entities and for all propositional truth.

Now, throughout his career Davidson has been interested in asking a closely related question to this last formulation of the Heideggerean question concerning Dasein's being. For one of Davidson's leading questions (it is not the only one) is "What conditions must be met if we are correctly to ascribe reasons for acting to some being?" As it turns out, we can only ascribe rationality to some being if we can also understand that being as "making sense" of the things in its world. I think that Haugeland captures the character of Davidson's question when he says that interpreting a being as making sense of things involves *our* making sense of that being as making sense. So Davidson's question is really, as he says, the transcendental question, "What are the necessary conditions for saying correctly of some being that it makes sense of its world?" This question guides the project which Davidson calls "radical interpretation." Radical interpretation takes the place of Quine's project of radical translation, which is guided by the question, "What conditions must be met if we are correctly to ascribe meanings to the 'utterances' of some being?" Radical interpretation replaces radical translation because Davidson correctly recognizes, as Heidegger did before him, that it is a necessary condition on the possibility of ascribing language to some entity that that entity acts for reasons, for the sake of ends.

As Haugeland here points out, the relation between Heidegger's question and Davidson's question is that they are the *same* question, posed in two different "modes": Heidegger's question is in the material mode while Davidson's is in the formal. Where Heidegger would ask "What is it to be a tool?" or, "What is it to be a physical object?", Davidson would ask, "When is it correct to say that some thing is a tool?" or "When is it correct to say that some thing is a physical object?" There are two crucial differences between these formulations, only one of which is immediately evident. The evident difference is that Heidegger's question seems to be about the being of *x*, while Davidson's question seems to be about the language we use to talk about entities of type *x*.

Haugeland does not seem much interested in this difference, and neither, in this context, am I. Second, because it is formulated with an eye towards the requirements of symbolic logic, Davidson's question, but not Heidegger's, wears on its face that it is ambiguous between two different questions: 1) "What characteristics must some entity have if it is to count as a tool?" and 2) "What standards must be met if there is to be an entity which is a *candidate* to have characteristics which are characteristic of tools?" For Davidson, to say that tools exist is to say that there is some thing such that it has some determinations which mark it as correctly counting as a tool. The first question asks: "What determinations mark a thing as a tool?" The second question asks: "What criteria or standards must be met in order to count as an individual entity which might have specific tool determining characteristics?", or, in the tools of a particular philosophical trade, "What standards determine the domain of our bound variables?" As Haugeland points out, Heidegger himself is well aware that his question comprises these two sides, and distinguishes between the "how" of being (the sorts of determinations an entity must have to count as belonging to a given ontological type) and the "way" of being (the requirements which a being meets insofar as it can count as an individual of that ontological type at all).

What makes Haugeland's paper such a good one is that for the bulk of his paper his strategy is to use Davidson's form of the "question of Dasein's being" to illuminate Heidegger's *answer* to that question. I think that Haugeland is effective in using this strategy, and indeed succeeds in showing how in many cases Heidegger's specifications of both the way and the how of Dasein's being are more illuminating than Davidson's own. I do not intend to rehearse the results of that inquiry in these comments. Rather, in the remainder of my remarks, I intend to use certain comments John makes in the course of his paper as starting points for reflections on the issue of how, exactly, Davidson and Heidegger differ, and on the issue of how we can determine which is right on those questions on which they differ. I should say before I start this that in general I think that Heidegger rather than Davidson is closer to the truth, but that it is anything but easy to show this.

As Haugeland remarks in a footnote, one of the reasons why Davidson is interested in distinguishing between the question concerning the resources for describing an individual of some ontological type (the "how" of being) and the domain of entities of that type (the "way" of being), has to do with

an argument line he has run since the 1964 article "Actions, Reasons, and Causes." It has been argued, probably most prominently in the *Verstehen* tradition, that: (1) What it is to be a reason (belief, desire, intention, or whatever intentionally characterized event or state) is so different in kind from what it is to be any physically characterized state or event, that determinations of the first type cannot be translated into or "reduced" in any manner into determinations of the second type; (2) Something is a physical event or state iff it is a causal event or state; therefore, (3) reasons are not causes. In fact, in his weaker moments, Heidegger himself was known to argue in this way. Now, as a student of Quine's, Davidson accepts (1), which is just a version of the Brentano thesis which is common to Quine, Husserl, and Heidegger. He also accepts some version of (2). Nevertheless, he correctly rejects the conclusion. He does so because he correctly notes that our language commits us to the existence of individual *events*, which as individuals admit of alternative descriptions. And, just as, to use Husserl's example, it does not follow from the fact that what it is to be the victor at Jena is irremediably different from what it is to be the vanquished at Waterloo that they both are not Napoleon, so the fact that what it is to be a reason is irremediably different from what it is to be a causal event of any type, does not imply that some event, call it Henry, is not both.

Now, Davidson thinks that there is only one set of events in the world, although they admit of alternative descriptions, and that there is only one set of objects in the world, although they also admit of alternative descriptions. All events are physical, no matter what else they are, and all entities are extant, no matter what else they are. As it turns out, the second claim depends on the first. But this marks the major difference between Heidegger and Davidson. For, as Haugeland so eloquently puts it, Dasein, while it is an entity, something which is, is "no sort of material thing or property of things; nor is it an abstract entity, like a universal or a set; nor indeed, is [it] plausibly understood as an event, a process, a pattern, a state, or any other traditional category, ideal or real . . ." That is, rational beings are token identical with physical beings for Davidson, but Dasein are not token identical with extant entities for Heidegger. Similarly, those "elements" which "compose" Dasein, possibilities, moods, etc. are not token identical with any physical events, as are the beliefs and desires which populate Davidson's rational agents, because, for Heidegger, they are neither actual nor events.

As Haugeland puts it, "possibilities are not things or states of affairs [or events] which might or might not become actual."

How might we, and Heidegger, argue that Heidegger, rather than Davidson, is right on these issues? One thing is clear: it does no good to point out that Dasein has a different how of being from physical entities, or that "possibilities" etc. have a different how of being from physical events. Davidson accepts both of these points and nevertheless correctly refuses to infer Heidegger's denial of token identity from these premises. Rather, if Heidegger is right it is because Dasein and physical objects have different ways of being, where this means that different individuals count as individuals depending on whether one is speaking of Dasein or physical objects. But how can one show *this*?

This question leads me to my second reflection. Perhaps we could see why Heidegger is right on these points and Davidson is wrong if we could see what is wrong with Davidson's reasons for believing what he does. As Haugeland points out, "the speech and other behavior (not to mention perceptual states) of those being interpreted can be understood in general only in relation to the circumstances in which it occurs." That is, it is necessary that any interpretation of a being as acting for reasons must be an interpretation of the way in which that being interacts with and responds to the circumstances in which it finds itself. And Haugeland gives us several examples: "nothing could make sense as watching a ball game without a ball game to watch, as hammering a nail without a hammer and nail, as voting for president without an election . . ." Now, it is worthwhile to point out that these examples are of disparate sorts. In particular, the first at least suggests that the relation in question between the being which is making sense of its environment and its environment is a causal one, or at least involves such a causal relation. I can watch a ball game only if I perceive it, and whatever else this may involve, that I perceive it might itself be thought of as involving a causal relation between whatever is going on out there and my perceptual mechanisms. This possible causal connection at best runs in the opposite direction in the hammering example, however, and is much less clear altogether in the last example. The reason this variety is important has to do with Davidson's argument in favor of his ontological monism.

Davidson claims that at bottom *all* of the evidence which we use to ground and generate our holistic interpretations of rational beings is supplied to us by our noting *causal* relations between states of affairs in the world and attitudes

of assent directed towards utterances. This evidence allows us to give preliminary statements of truth conditions for those utterances which in turn allows us to construct a preliminary truth theory for the language of the being we are interpreting which in turn allows us to give preliminary interpretations of the reasons which stand behind its verbal and nonverbal actions and of its beliefs and desires, which in turn allows us to start adjusting our interpretation so as to assign error. But, given this story, the events which both anchor our interpretations and count as our initial intentional states, assentings to utterances and the beliefs which are assigned on their basis, *must be* causally related to ordinary physical events as well, otherwise we could not begin to interpret any being as rational. So, at least some of the events and states which are "Daseinish" must also be physical, insofar as they causally interact with physical states. And, as Davidson constructs a companion argument concerning the aspects of Dasein which account for what one does, based on the need for an account of the "because" in rational explanations, which concludes that whatever rationally explains Daseinish behavior also causes it, he concludes that every Daseinish state or event is also causally related to physical states, i.e., is a physical event.

Now, for Heidegger, the primary way in which Dasein interacts with its environment is teleological; it acts suitably and appropriately in light of what it is. The suggestion, then, would be that any assignment of "states" or "events" to Dasein must be such as to preserve the teleological character of what Dasein is and does. This requirement Heidegger shares with Davidson. But if Heidegger is to avoid the consequences of the above argument, that is, that Dasein's characteristics are token identical with physical events, then he must indicate some alternative, non-causal, teleological interaction between a being and its environment which can be both recognized and used to anchor holistic interpretations of Dasein's overall character. I believe that there are resources in Heidegger to construct such an alternative account and that such a Heideggerean account of the interaction between Dasein and its environment would be far more plausible than the Davidsonian causal account. And it is to the construction of such an account of the teleological interaction between Dasein and its environment that contemporary Heideggerean work should be addressed.

I have tried to resist the temptation to give you one final reflection on these issues; but I have failed. I must tell you where John and I finally part company. Haugeland thinks

that the only way in which we can do justice to all of Heidegger's insights concerning Dasein, and in particular to the notion that Dasein is no sort of material thing, is to interpret it as "a way of life." The clue that stands behind this interpretation of Dasein is the requirement that Dasein involves being normatively embedded in an institutional framework. But as Haugeland himself recognizes, it is an individual agent who is so embedded. I myself think that it is the notion of an agent and of agency which provides the clue for the interpretation of Dasein as non-token identical with physical objects, and of possibilities as non-token identical with actual events. To follow out this clue one must understand what it is to be an agent, and to understand *that* one must understand what it is for something to be for the sake of something. And that is a *very* long way around.