

## Heidegger, Arthur Fine, and the Natural Ontological Attitude

J. JEREMY WISNEWSKI

Hartwick College, Oneonta, NY 13820, USA  
wisnewsj@hartwick.edu

ORIGINAL SCIENTIFIC ARTICLE / RECEIVED: 05–11–12 ACCEPTED: 24–09–13

---

**ABSTRACT:** In this paper I argue that Arthur Fine and Martin Heidegger present responses to the dispute between realism and antirealism that are remarkably close in character. Both claim that this dispute arises from a failure to take seriously our everyday experience of things in the world. I argue that it is useful to note the similarity between Fine and Heidegger for two distinct reasons: 1) their view provides a viable alternative to the current realist/antirealist dispute—an alternative that has not been given its due, and 2) it allows us to build a bridge between two seemingly distinct traditions.

**KEY WORDS:** Antirealism, Fine, Heidegger, realism.

---

“There remains a subject whose professed aim is to ‘explicate’ science, which means we are not supposed to change science, but to make it clearer. The call for clarity is raised without any attention to the problems of the scientist... [The] machinery [of explication] soon gets entangled with itself (paradoxes of confirmation, counterfactuals, grue), so that the main problem is now its own survival and not the embalming of science... That this struggle for survival is interesting to watch I am the last one to deny. What I do deny is that physics or biology or psychology or even philosophy can profit from participating in it” (207)

Paul Feyerabend, “Let’s Make More Movies”

### I. Introduction

The dispute between realists and antirealists in the philosophy of science has been a heated one on both sides of the English Channel. Analytic and Continental philosophers alike have been engaged in attempting to sort out the ramifications and implications of scientific practice. Camps have been formed, sides demarcated, ink spilled. Despite Arthur Fine’s proc-

lamation, in the 1980s, that “Realism is dead,” it seems still to thrive in various philosophical pockets: its defenders still write, its critics still read. Likewise, the antirealist challenge to realism has not conceded an inch.

To any on-looker, the dispute might well seem intractable. Realists insist that the remarkable success of science secures—or, minimally, ought to secure—its veracity. Antirealists insist that the history of science is proof enough that this cannot be so. Indeed, the very terms of the dispute suggest that a reconciliation of the two positions is impossible: realism is the view that the vocabulary of science corresponds, at least in outline, to the actual structure of the world as it exists independently of human cognition. That is, the realist thinks that scientific theories pick out *real* entities<sup>1</sup>, where ‘real’ is understood to mean ‘independently existing.’ The antirealist, on the other hand, insists that our scientific vocabularies are simply one more way to describe the world—that they have no privileged access to the structure of things: in the end, science offers yet another optional vocabulary that cuts up the world in a certain way, and for certain purposes.

Thus stated, the dispute does indeed seem intractable. This intractability is frustrating to virtually everyone involved—particularly when we recognize that there are extremely bright people on both sides of this theoretical divide—each insisting that their version of things is the one we ought to adopt.

To respond to such an intractability, there are in general three options: first, one can examine all arguments and determine which set of arguments (if any) is the more persuasive, opting for the side of the dispute with the better arguments. While this sounds nice in theory, it is much harder to do in practice than is typically thought—particularly when the debate is populated by clever, or even brilliant, philosophers. As a second option, one can claim that the positions in question are not intractable because they are, at bottom, the *same* position. This is the strategy often employed in the freewill/determinism debate: the allegedly intractable dispute is shown to be no dispute at all. This has the happy consequence that everyone is right—even if not entirely clear about their theoretical commitments. The third option has precisely the opposite result: one can claim that everyone is *wrong*—that both sides make a crucial mistake, and hence that both sides ought to be abandoned.

---

<sup>1</sup> It is now common to distinguish theory realism from entity realism. Theory realism claims that the general law-like features of a theory correspond (at least approximately) to the structure of reality—even if some of the details are incorrect. Entity realism, on the other hand, claims that the *entities* postulated in scientific practice correspond to actual, metaphysical entities. For the purposes of my discussion, this distinction is not of much importance. The claims about realism that I am making apply to both sorts of realism.

While this third option is not likely to win me many allies, it is this one I will employ. I will do so using the work of both Arthur Fine and the early Heidegger. Both of these philosophers think that realism and antirealism stem from an attempt to characterize ontology in a way that is independent of human experience (Fine speaks of our ‘natural ontological attitude,’ Heidegger claims that ontology is only possible through phenomenology). The way to get beyond this dispute is to limit our theoretical activities (Fine says we should not go beyond the core position of this attitude, Heidegger claims that human existence is the starting point for understanding the being of entities encountered in the world). My aim in the following pages is to spell out in detail what these views share, as well as the relevance they have for our thinking about realism and antirealism. Specifically, I will claim that Fine’s position is in essence a Heideggerian view of ontology. The Natural Ontological Attitude (or NOA) is nothing more than a recognition of the reality of things as they appear to human beings, concernfully absorbed in the world. To theorize about ontology in a way that goes beyond our phenomenology is to do philosophy irresponsibly. It is doing philosophy irresponsibly, I will contend, that generates a realist/antirealist dispute. This is the thesis that both Fine and Heidegger share.

The importance of this discussion is twofold. First, it enables us to appreciate the insights of *both* realism and antirealism without thereby falling prey to the mistakes inherent in these philosophical positions. Second, the approach I am taking allows us to see some significant overlap in two traditions that are often seen as standing at complete odds with one another.

## II. Fine’s (and our) Natural Ontological Attitude

In the mid-1980’s, Arthur Fine published a series of articles problematizing the debate between realists and anti-realists (Fine 1984, 1986a, 1986b). The solution to the problem was, bluntly speaking, to abandon the problem. Fine claimed (and continues to claim) that we should set aside our disputes about how best to interpret the status of the sciences from a point of view external to its daily practice, and to take science on its own terms—accepting its results in much the same way as we accept that there are tables and chairs in everyday life.

To put this point otherwise, Fine argues that we should abandon the positions in the philosophy of science known respectively as ‘realism’ and ‘antirealism.’ As theoretical postulates concerning the status of our scientific theories, Fine contends, these positions are misleading at best. In effect, to advocate either position is to add theoretically ungrounded

assertion to what we all already accept. By refusing to theorize about our theories, and by moreover sticking to what Fine calls a ‘core position’ of truisms, we can move beyond realism and antirealism. Fine’s natural ontological attitude (NOA) is just such a refusal. As Fine puts it:

NOA helps us to see that realism differs from various antirealisms in this way: realism adds an outer direction to NOA, that is, the external world and the correspondence relation of approximate truth; antirealisms (typically) add an inner direction, that is, human-oriented reductions of truth, or concepts, or explanations. (NOA,1203)

To advocate NOA is to advocate the core position—and no more. It is to advocate the truism that scientific investigation picks out real things in the world. Fine insists that we do not go beyond NOA—that we give up trying to theoretically characterize our acceptance of a basic ontology. Such attempts at theorizing lead us to misrepresent the phenomena in question.

Realism and antirealism alike see science as susceptible to being set in context, provided with a goal, and being made sense of. And what manner of object, after all, could show such susceptibilities other than something that could not or did not do these very things for itself? What binds realism and antirealism together is this. They see science as a set of practices in need of an interpretation, and they see themselves as providing just the right interpretation. (NAE, 61)

Of course, it is open to one to reject Fine’s claims here and insist that we can be realists (or antirealists) because we have good arguments in favor of this position (or the other). Fine obviously recognizes this. Part of his argumentative strategy, then, is to show us that the arguments we typically employ in favor of realism and antirealism cannot work—and that they, moreover, will fail to work in principle.

Fine’s arguments against realism, I think, are his most persuasive (and probably the most intuitive as well). Consider, by way of illustration, Fine’s response to the claim that the approximate truth of science is the only thing that could explain its staggering success. Fine’s response to this argument is twofold. First, Fine notes that the so-called ‘staggering success’ of science is questionable at best. If we were to examine the total experiments conducted just yesterday, we would find staggering failure. If the realist insists that, overall, science has been successful, we can point to the fact that every theory (up to now, we might grant) has *not* been successful. Thus, we have good inductive evidence that our current theories are false.

A typical response to this pessimistic induction is to note that the success of science about which we are here talking is the ability to accomplish tasks with our scientific theories. Here, there is much that is amazing:

airplanes, atom bombs, computers, the internal combustion engine, and so forth. But if it is the instrumental success of science that is meant to justify realism, we face a large explanatory gap. Let me elucidate.

Fine claims that, no matter how successful science is, it is still *superfluous* to insist that science actually corresponds to the structure of the world. To explain the success of science, we only need to postulate that science is *instrumentally* correct, not that the elements of our theories (or the entities we postulate) actually correspond to things ‘out there’ in the external world. As Fine puts it, “if it is the instrumental success of science that we think wants explaining, then it seems that we require nothing more than the instrumental reliability of science to carry the explanation off. Indeed, anything more than that would be doing no explanatory work” (UA, 153).

Of course, none of this is to advocate any form of antirealism. As should by now be clear, Fine rejects this position just as vehemently. The implication of Fine’s (many) arguments, he claims, is to get us to see that we need not theorize about the sciences at all. As he puts it:

The attitude that marks NOA is just this: try to take science on its own terms, and try not to read things into science. If one adopts this attitude, then the global interpretations, the ‘isms’ of scientific philosophies, appear as idle overlays to science: not necessary, not warranted and, in the end, probably not even intelligible. (62)

Moreover, “the quickest way to get a feel for NOA is to understand it as undoing the idea of interpretation, and the correlative idea of invariance (or essence)” (62). Thus, NOA is a way of stepping around the dispute between realists and antirealists—a way of getting us to see that we need not disagree here. Our disagreements stem from an incessant need to characterize our characterizations—to offer second-order theories of our scientific practices. Our compulsion to determine the significance of science by interpreting it tells us more about our own insecurities than it will ever tell us about science. As Fine suggests, in a delightfully Wittgensteinian key, the realism/antirealism dispute does not demand resolution: it demands therapy.<sup>2</sup>

In the following section, I want to show that Heidegger’s position regarding the realist/antirealist dispute is much the same—despite some recent claims that Heidegger is himself a realist. This will serve both to (1)

---

<sup>2</sup> See (1984: 61): “I think we learn that such questions [about the fundamental significance of science] really do not require an answer, but rather they call for an empathetic analysis to get at the cognitive (and temperamental) sources of the question, and then a program of therapy to help change all that.”

make more perspicuous the position I am advocating and (2) draw attention to the significant similarities between Heidegger and Fine.

### III. Heidegger and the case for realism

In several recent publications, philosophers have attempted to make the case that Heidegger is, despite his own protestations otherwise, a realist.<sup>3</sup> The problem with these attempts, of course, is that the term ‘realist’ has no univocal meaning. It is precisely this problem which leads some to criticize Fine’s NOA as simply realism restated.<sup>4</sup> In this section, I will attempt to sort out some recent claims about Heideggerian realism. I will do so with an eye on articulating what Fine and Heidegger share when it comes to accepting the world as we find it.

In Taylor Carman’s recent book, *Heidegger’s Analytic*, Carman claims that Heidegger is an ‘ontic realist.’ Ontic realism is the view that “occurrent entities exist and have a determinate spatiotemporal structure independently of us and our understanding of them” (157).<sup>5</sup> As Carman claims, “Heidegger is a realist...in the sense that he takes occurrent entities to exist and to have a determinate causal structure independently of the conditions of our interpreting or making sense of them” (159).

This view is meant to be importantly different from the account of realism that Heidegger openly rejects in his discussion of the ontological problem of Reality in *Being and Time*. The view Heidegger rejects under the heading of realism, Carman contends, is the view that maintains that skepticism can be proven false, or, indeed, “any reductive naturalistic conception of intelligibility in the absence of a phenomenological account of hermeneutic conditions” (164). If realism means, then, that the intelligibility of the world can be derived simply by examining the causal relations of occurrent objects, then realism must be false. As Carman (correctly) argues, the intelligibility of things is a transcendental question, not a question about causes at all.

But this is not a rejection of the claim that occurrent objects exist independently of us—even if we must insist that an adequate explication of their intelligibility to us will require an explication of Dasein’s thrown Being-in-the-world. As Carman puts this point: “what Heidegger rejects, then, is the kind of metaphysical realism that [...attempts...] to derive the

<sup>3</sup> Carman (2005), Tanzer (2002), Rudd (2003), Dreyfus and Spinoza (1999), etc.

<sup>4</sup> Musgrave (1989).

<sup>5</sup> The term ‘occurrent’ is Carman’s translation of choice for *vorhanden*. I have left this in all citations from Carman, though I will continue to speak of the present-at-hand when referring to occurrent entities.

very intelligibility of entities as entities from their mere ontic structure” (165).

As far as realistic doctrines go, ontic realism (so far) does not seem to involve much. Ontic realism asserts that occurrent entities exist independently of human practices, despite the fact that the intelligibility of these entities is dependent on Dasein’s Being-in-the-world. This view has the advantage of making sense of Heidegger’s (frustrating) claim that “Being (not entities) is dependent on the understanding of Being” (255, H: 212). If Heidegger postulates that entities exist *regardless* of Dasein’s existence, then it seems he is indeed committed to something like ontic realism.

But it isn’t clear that the surface reading of this passage is the best one. Indeed, the surface reading is frustrating precisely because it is inconsistent with the methodological stance of *Sein und Zeit*: namely, that ontology is only possible through phenomenology. If phenomenology is construed as the making manifest of things through the understanding of thrown Dasein, the claim that entities are not dependent on this understanding is obscure at best. If ontology *requires* phenomenology, Heidegger cannot postulate the existence of something *of which Dasein is aware* as utterly independent of Dasein’s understanding.

Thus, an alternative reading of the passage is required. One possibility here (compatible with Heidegger’s method) is to read the above remark as claiming that the *notion* of an occurrent entity is *the notion* of one that exists independently of us. To put it in Merleau-Ponty’s expression, we might claim that an occurrent object is one that is encountered as ‘in-itself-for-us’ (375). This is arguably what Heidegger has in mind when he claims that “once entities have been uncovered, they show themselves precisely as beings that already were” (269, H: 227). This does not mean that entities *did* already exist; it means, rather, that we understand them as having an existence independent of us. To put this in a slightly different idiom: part of the intelligibility of present-at-hand objects lies in thinking of them as having an independent existence. This is *not* equivalent to claiming they *do* have such an existence. Part of the meaning of the being of present-at-hand entities is that they defy our projects, resist our concepts, and assert their independence from our understanding. But this must be construed as the mode of their disclosure—the way in which a range of things manifests itself—rather than as a feature of these entities *an sich*. To claim more than this, it seems, is simply to deny Heidegger’s central methodological claim—namely, that ontology (an account of what is) is only possible through phenomenology (our understanding of things). To put it otherwise: the causal structure *just is* one more structure of intelligibility.

Nevertheless, Carman is right to distinguish hermeneutic from causal conditions. He is also right to point out that from the fact that there are

certain conditions under which objects are intelligible to us (hermeneutic claim), it does not follow that without us there would be no objects (causal claim). This would be simply to state the antirealist view—a view which Heidegger also denies. This important point, however, is not the equivalent of an *assertion* that entities do in fact exist (and have a spatiotemporal structure) apart from our understanding of them.<sup>6</sup> As I understand him, Heidegger would reject this claim as quickly as he would reject its negation: it makes no sense to talk about things apart from Dasein's understanding of them, as Dasein is that being through which the being of things is revealed.

It is for this reason that I must also reject Carman's distinction of the ready-to-hand and the present-at-hand as a distinction between the agent-dependent and the agent-independent.<sup>7</sup> To call something occurrent/present-at-hand means that we encounter it as resisting our current endeavors—as a discrete object with particular properties that do not happen to be conducive to our current goals.<sup>8</sup> The mode of the thing's disclosure is such that we view it as separate from us—as an independent thing in the world. But the fact that we view it in this way certainly does not make it so: encountering a thing as present-at-hand is just as dependent on an agent as encountering that thing as ready-to-hand. It is in virtue of this, I take it, that we must characterize these two modes of beings as equi-primordial.

So, I do not think it is fruitful to insist that Heidegger is an 'ontic realist,' at least when this expression is taken in the way that Carman stipulates. Likewise, however, it is equally a mistake to think that Heidegger falls on the other side of this theoretical divide. Much as Heidegger fails to be a realist, so too does he fail to be an antirealist. Nevertheless, it is tempting to think of him in precisely these terms, as his account of the present-at-hand as simply one way in which objects *are* for concernfully absorbed Dasein has heavy antirealist leanings. To see why we should not fall into antirealism, allow me to use some of Anthony Rudd's recent work.<sup>9</sup>

Rudd argues that 1) Heidegger is in fact compatible with a 'global,' metaphysical skepticism, and that 2) Heidegger presents us with a way to move beyond this skepticism without undermining its primary insights. Global metaphysical skepticism, Rudd stipulates, is not skepticism about

---

<sup>6</sup> One wants to ask what account of time and space Carman has in mind here—do occurrent objects exist in vulgar, everyday time? Are we to construe space as a Cartesian grid, the very one that Heidegger so harshly criticizes in *Being and Time*?

<sup>7</sup> See Carman (2005: 190).

<sup>8</sup> This is *not* to say that this is the only way to encounter the present-at-hand.

<sup>9</sup> Rudd (2003).



our everyday activities. The global, metaphysical skeptic can agree that there are facts—that things are a certain way. This sort of skepticism “[does] not work (at least, not in any direct way) to undermine everyday beliefs or even knowledge claims” (7). The primary point to be drawn from the arguments of the global, metaphysical skeptic is not that the metaphysical claims we make about the world are false. Rather, it is to show that we cannot *determine* what truth-value such judgments have. Global, metaphysical skepticism is thus a sort of pragmatic realism: we take as real those things that get us through the day. The skeptic “accepts the existence of all the ordinary objects we think of as existing, and need have no objection to the idea that these objects can be investigated in more detail by science” (36–37).

But when it comes to offering a meta-level claim about the *status* of everyday facts, the global metaphysical skeptic abstains from judgment. On Rudd’s view, this sort of skepticism is entirely defensible. No argument can move one from skepticism about the “fundamental ontological analysis” (16) of everyday facts to a robust metaphysical realism. The skeptic is an ontological agnostic.

Both Heidegger and Wittgenstein (Rudd claims) are compatible with this picture of skepticism, though they do offer us a means of going beyond this skepticism. This should not be surprising, as Rudd’s global metaphysical skepticism is essentially skepticism about *philosophy*—about whether or not a philosophical theory (or argument) could capture the nature of things. Cast in this way, it is not only right but also *obvious* that Heidegger is amenable to this sort of ontological agnosticism: he is hostile to traditional theorizing in philosophy. This is sufficient, I think, for preventing the collapse of Heideggerian thinking into traditional anti-realism: we recognize that Heidegger is skeptical about traditional, global accounts of phenomena; he is not skeptical about the everyday objects encountered in our living interaction with the world.

#### IV. The Common Ground: A Distaste for Second-Order Theory

One problem with calling Heidegger a realist, I take it, is that philosophers often mean varying things with the term. Carman describes Heidegger as an ‘ontic realist.’ Dreyfus and Spinoza defend a ‘robust realism’ about scientific practices by way of Heidegger. Tanzer likewise calls Heidegger a realist, but indicates that this must be understood in terms of the way in which the present-at-hand is already ‘contained’ within the ready-to-hand. Despite divergences in both arguments and conclusions, however, there is at least a common core to these ascriptions of realism. It is this common core, I think, that Heidegger wants to reject.

Realism, at its most banal, is the assertion that there are objects the existence and nature of which do not depend on any human understanding of them. Dreyfus and Spinoza say precisely this: realism, as they characterize it, rests upon what they call the ‘independence claim’: namely, “that order and its components exist independently of our minds or ways of coping” (49). Tanzer, likewise, argues that “if objects are what they are prior to Dasein’s existence, it will follow that they are what they are without Dasein, as the realist maintains, and so will possess a fundamental present-at-hand aspect” (44). Both of these accounts of realism accord with Carman’s claim, as we have seen, that “Heidegger is a realist...in the sense that he takes occurrent entities to exist and to have a determinate causal structure independently of the conditions of our interpreting or making sense of them” (159).

Each of these accounts, though varying in detail and results, maintains, minimally, that realism is a way of characterizing the nature of the objects that we experience, and that this characterization of these objects *goes beyond our modes of experiencing them*. Tanzer (and others), for example, make much of Heidegger’s claim that “once entities have been uncovered, they show themselves precisely as beings that already were” (269, H: 227). As we have seen, however, this claim need not be read as a claim about the way objects exist apart from our experience of them. Indeed, to read the remark this way seems to ignore Heidegger’s insistence that ontology is only possible through phenomenology. As I suggested above in discussing Carman’s version of Heideggerian realism, one can profitably read Heidegger’s remark as a claim about the way objects present themselves to us—namely, as presenting themselves *within our experience* as objects having an existence apart from us (what Merleau-Ponty helpfully calls the ‘in-itself-for-us’ (375)). It requires an additional step to then conclude that objects *do in fact* have such an independent existence. It is this step, I think, that is the hallmark of both realism and anti-realism: they both seek to make second-order claims about the way the world presents itself phenomenologically—claims that are themselves *not phenomenological*. Heidegger’s claim that objects present themselves as having an independent existence is a claim about *our experience*. To insist, based on this, that our experience does capture something about an independent reality (realism), or to claim that it does not (antirealism), is to move beyond phenomenology and the ordinary ways in which things present themselves. It is to move beyond that which shows itself to *conclusions about* that which shows itself. This desire for second-order characterizations of our phenomenology is precisely what Heidegger rejects.

The desire to provide such second-order claims about objects—to characterize our first-order experience—stems, on Heidegger’s view, from

a naïve trust that we can defeat skepticism and prove that the world is ‘out there.’<sup>10</sup> As Heidegger claims:

Along with Dasein as Being-in-the-world, entities within-the-world have in each case already been disclosed. This existential-ontological assertion seems to accord with the thesis of *realism* that the external world is really present-at-hand. In so far as this existential assertion does not deny that entities within-the-world are present-at-hand, it agrees—doxographically, as it were—with the thesis of realism in its results. But it differs in principle from every kind of realism; for realism holds that the reality of the ‘world’ not only needs to be proved but also is capable of proof. In the existential assertion both of these positions are directly negated. (252; H: 207)

The two things to note here, of course, are that Heidegger rejects both 1) the view that the reality of the external world needs to be proved, and 2) the view that the reality of this world can be proved. The problem with a view (such as realism) that supports these two claims is that it begins on ontologically inadequate grounds. When we recognize our thrown being-in-the-world, we are capable of rejecting the posturing of *both* realism and antirealism. In both cases, the view presupposed is that our encountering of things in the phenomenal field is somehow inadequate on its own—it requires a meta-analysis in order to clarify *what* it is that is being encountered. But this type of meta-analysis is hostile to the very project of phenomenology—a project which is marked by the battle cry of ‘to the things themselves’! A meta-analysis serves only to obfuscate our direct contact with things as they reveal themselves to us. Indeed, as Heidegger remarks in numerous places, we are such that the Being of things is disclosed to us. We require no external account of this disclosure for it to occur. Consider:

From the very beginning, Being-in-the-world is disposed to ‘take things’ in some way [Auffassen], to suppose, to be certain, to have faith—a way of behaving which itself is always a founded mode of Being-in-the-world. (250, H: 206)

Now, none of this is to say that characterizing phenomena is *useless*. If this were so Heidegger would have some explaining to do. What is here being denied is that we can go beyond the phenomena in order to characterize the *significance* of the phenomena—a view that Heidegger rejects time and again. It is only when we attempt to investigate things apart from Dasein that questions of realism and antirealism emerge. Or, as Heidegger amusingly puts it: “The question of whether there is a world

<sup>10</sup> It is naïve because the very question of skepticism starts from a faulty picture of Dasein.

at all and whether its Being can be proved, makes no sense if it is raised by *Dasein* as Being-in-the-world; and who else would raise it?" (247, H: 202).

By engaging in the existential analytic we are able to discern different modes of Being—different ways in which the world presents itself to *Dasein*. We recognize things both as present-at-hand entities as well as existing within an equipmental totality. Thus far, no question about realism or antirealism has arisen. It is only when we ask ‘But how are things when *Dasein* is not encountering them?’ that we run into familiar problems. What Heidegger wants us to see is that this question itself is pointless, for we will never experience things as they are independently of us—even though we *do* experience things as having always already been present. What we must explain, Heidegger contends, is not how the world is apart from us, but *why we insist on thinking of such a world at all*.

Our task is not to prove that an ‘external world’ is present-at-hand or to show how it is present-at-hand, but to point out why *Dasein*, as Being-in-the-world, has the tendency to bury the external world in nullity ‘epistemologically’ before going on to prove it. (250; H: 206)

It is in precisely this regard that we can see significant similarity between Fine’s NOA and Heidegger’s diagnosis of the realism/antirealism debate. Fine also rejects the view that a proof of the external world is possible. As he puts it:

There is no possibility for justifying the kind of externality that realism requires, yet it may well be that, in fact, we cannot help yearning for just such a comforting grip on reality. (1202)

What we see in the case of both Heidegger and Fine is a recognition that the way we normally encounter things does not require an external meta-analysis.

But, it might be objected, doesn’t Fine’s NOA commit us to something like a present-at-hand ontology—one which ignores the other modes of Being things have? Wouldn’t Heidegger object to simply *accepting* the present-at-hand?

The answer to this question is an unequivocal no. The present-at-hand is one fundamental way in which we encounter things. It is one way in which the Being of things reveals itself to us. It is *not* a mistake to acknowledge this manner of Being; the mistake is to regard it as fundamental. Regarding the present-at-hand as fundamental, however, is *not* what scientists do—it is what *philosophers* of science do when they attempt to characterize science from a point external to its everyday practice. The

question posed is this: “do the present-at-hand entities described in scientific practice exist in the world, independently of us?” To make *any* answer to this question, whether positive or negative, parasitic on ‘realism’ (as either for it or against it) is to presuppose the primordially of the present-at-hand, and hence to ignore the other ways in which the world can be revealed. The problem here is the presupposition that answering one question about the present-at-hand can effectively end the realism/antirealism debate.

To correct this, we must investigate science *as* a practice—something that human being do, not as something that is reducible to a procedure for exposing the bare contours of the world. The aim of the practice of science is to characterize the present-at-hand, to be sure, but it is a practice nevertheless. Like other practices, we can understand it in terms of the goals it hopes to achieve, the competence required to engage in it, and the way it fits into other aspects of our lived experience. One thing we can note about (some) scientific practices is that they enable us to engage in descriptions of things from a third-person perspective—but this certainly does not entail that our descriptions map onto the way things are independently of our practices. To assert this would be simply to state realism, and this is precisely what Heidegger and Fine both want to avoid. But neither does recognizing science as a practice entail that our descriptions *do not* correspond to the world. The problem here is with our obsessive-compulsive *need to decide* whether or not the present-at-hand are ‘real’ in some unspecified (and perhaps unintelligible) sense. The way to resolve this problem is to dissolve it—to recognize that our meta-descriptions of the way the world is disclosed in scientific practices will not itself matter to those practices.

The practice of science, like other practices, reveals things to us in a particular way. The mistake the realist makes is to suppose that this manner of revelation is somehow more fundamental than the other ways in which, as Heidegger would say, the Being of things manifests itself. We should appreciate *that* scientific practices reveal things (this is what we find in NOA), but we should not do so in a manner that excludes the recognition that things can be disclosed in multiple ways (or, as Sartre would put it, that phenomena are transcendent—that they go beyond any set of perceptions of them). Science is one manner in which the world is revealed—useful for many things, and more useful than other ways of encountering the world in certain respects—but it should not be regarded as the one and only way to encounter things—or, more carefully, as the one and only way things *are*.

It is this view, I think, which is both at the heart of Division I of *Being and Time* as well as at the core of Fine’s NOA: our attitude in approach-

ing the practice of science ought to be one that acknowledges that science reveals certain things. But we should not then try to go *beyond* this recognition and characterize the practice as a whole as that which enables us (in Richard Rorty's phrase) to speak 'Nature's Own Language.' We run into trouble only when we theorize about what we do, despite the fact that such theorizing is not necessary.<sup>11</sup>

Of course, the now-standard objection to this view is to claim refraining from characterizing the results of science prevents us from making progress within science: if we simply accept what scientists postulate as existing, without critical scrutiny, we will never be in a position to *revise* our theoretical commitments in light of new evidence, new theory, or whatever.

This objection, I think, makes two crucial mistakes: first, it is, if the reader will permit me the term, narcissistic. Second, it presumes that all critique must be *external* critique. The objection is narcissistic because it accords too much importance to the philosopher's reflection on a practice. I do not want to be misunderstood here: philosophical reflections *are* important, but they are not important because they determine the meaning of practices that enable philosophy to exist in the first place. The mistake is to think that the philosophical questions that arise out of a practice and in relation to it will then have a determinative say in what a practice in fact is. Though our characterization of our practices can affect these practices, it is a mistake to think that the practices themselves are somehow insufficient.<sup>12</sup> The further thought that it is the job of the philosopher to *complete* a practice (such as science) is symptomatic of an inflated sense of self-importance.

But the error here is not simply a psychological one. There is also a logical problem. Science does not need external critique in thinking about its results. Part of the practice (or practices) of science is to subject data to virtually endless analysis. Indeed, it is partly because this is the *nature* of scientific activity that we have been led to offer the meta-analyses that we have. But a recognition of the procedures of scientific practice is no cause for theoretical exuberance. In fact, it is a cause to recognize that there is no

---

<sup>11</sup> Compare: "Our mistake is to look for an explanation where we ought to look at what happens as a 'proto-phenomenon.' That is, where we ought to have said: *this language game is played*" (Wittgenstein 1953: 167).

<sup>12</sup> This was Russell's mistake in thinking about the foundations of mathematics: he thought the reduction of mathematics to set theory was the only way to justify mathematics. But the practice speaks for itself. It raises questions, certainly, but it does not need a philosophical foundation. To put this point slightly differently: if our practices needed a philosophical foundation, they would not have survived as practices.

need to theorize about the status of the results of science at all. We should acknowledge that science uncovers things in one particular way, and pass over the rest in silence.

One final objection to the position I have been defending is necessary. For someone who advocates theoretical silence about science, I have been doing a lot of theorizing—and loudly. While there is probably no excuse for my behavior, I will nevertheless offer this one: in an academic landscape plagued with debates about realism and antirealism, and moreover one that often regards the respective traditions of Fine and Heidegger as utterly at odds with one another, it is useful to show that there might be a way around our current disagreements—one that builds a proverbial bridge across the English Channel. This exercise is important, I think, not only because Fine and Heidegger are up to the same thing (if what I have been arguing is correct), but also because they provide a way of easing extant tension in a heated debate between those who are desperate to use science in every avenue of human affairs, and those who think we will lose much in doing so. This, I trust, is reason enough to speak—and it is perhaps even reason enough to theorize.<sup>13</sup>

### References

- Carman, T. 2005. *Heidegger's Analytic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
- Dreyfus, H. and C. Spinoza. 1999. "Coping with Things-in-Themselves", *Inquiry* 42, 49–78.
- Fine, A. 1986a. "The Natural Ontological Attitude", in *The Shaky Game: Einstein, Realism, and the Quantum Theory* (Chicago: Chicago University Press).
- . 1986b. "Unnatural Attitudes", *Mind* 95, 149–179.
- . 1984. "And Not Antirealism Either", *Nous* 18, 51–65.
- Heidegger, M. 1962. *Being and Time*, translated by J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson (San Francisco: Harper Collins).
- Musgrave, A. 1989. "NOA's Ark: Fine for Realism", *Philosophical Quarterly* 39, 383–398.

---

<sup>13</sup> I would like to thank Gordon Hull and John Rose for some helpful remarks on earlier versions of this paper. I would also like to thank those who attended the Pacific APA meeting of the Society for Realist/Antirealist Discussion for useful feedback on an earlier version of this paper. Finally, I would like to thank the philosophy faculty at Beloit College, who also provided some useful criticism of the view articulated here.

- Rudd, A. 2003. *Expressing the World* (Chicago and LaSalle: Open Court Press).
- Tanzer, M. B. 2002. *Heidegger: Decisionism and Quietism* (Amherst: Humanity Books).
- Wittgenstein, L. 1953. *Philosophical Investigations*, translated by G.E.M. Anscombe (New York: The Macmillan Company).