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Heidegger's Unzuhandenheit as a Fourth Mode of Being

Zachary Dotray

I. Introduction

In his magnum opus *Being and Time*, Martin Heidegger lays out two unique beings, or entities, and their corresponding modalities of being. Heidegger begins with two primary classes of entities: Dasein and 'innerworldly beings.' Within Heidegger's ontology, 'innerworldly beings' can be further parsed into two kinds of entities: substances and equipment. Substances, or 'things', are based upon traditional philosophy's¹ notion of substance ontology, in which a thing objectively present has qualities that do not depend upon its situation. Heidegger calls the mode of being of these beings 'objective presence,' or present-at-hand [*Vorhandenheit*]. The second being Heidegger formulates is equipment [*Zeug*], which has the mode of being of 'handiness,' or readiness-to-hand [*Zuhandenheit*]. And finally, the third being, Dasein, which (generally) corresponds to human entities, has the mode of being of *existence*. Heidegger holds that while the *entities* of the first two types of being do not depend on Dasein, their *mode* of being itself does. In other words, while the equipment itself does not depend on Dasein, the readiness-to-hand, or the mode of being *of* the equipment, does. It is important to note that while the modalities present-at-hand and readiness-to-

¹ Heidegger specifically cites Aristotle and Kant as individuals who represent the paradigm for traditional philosophy. In Heidegger's opinion, the metaphysics exemplified by the school of traditional philosophy relies, at the most basic level, upon a subject/object distinction.

hand are separate from one another, this is due to the dependence of the modalities of being upon Dasein's existence within the world. They apply to the same class of entities, namely 'innerworldly beings,' as these are independent of Dasein. As such, there can arise cases in which it is difficult to discern the modality of being belonging to some 'innerworldly beings,' and this is precisely what we will be exploring in this essay.

In exposing the phenomena of the worldliness of the world, Heidegger focuses primarily on the being of equipment as ready-to-hand. However, in §15 and 16², Heidegger very briefly delves into what he calls a specific kind of readiness-to-hand – that is, *un-readiness-to-hand* [*Unzuhandenheit*]. In this paper, I hope to accomplish two goals: first, to expel my own confusion as to the way of being of un-readiness-to-hand by analyzing what I take to be its structure; second, to put forth the suggestion that un-readiness-to-hand should be considered as a fourth mode of being, although *still* a way of being of *Zeug* (equipment), which, similar to the mode of being of a substance, is an 'innerworldly being.'³

II. *Zuhandenheit*: Readiness-to-Hand

In setting the course for this paper, I believe it will prove useful to first briefly analyze Heidegger's structure of readiness-to-hand, where upon we can build the way of being of *un-readiness-to-hand*. As opposed to objective presence, the being of readiness-to-hand is encountered in

² Entitled, respectively, *The Being of the Entities Encountered in the Environment*, and *How the Worldly Character of the Environment Announces itself in Entities Within-the-World*.

³ I will call *un-readiness-to-hand* a 'way' of being, and reserve the term 'mode' for the other three, established being of beings.

Dasein's "everyday being-in-the-world, which we also call our 'dealings' [Umgang] in the world *with* entities within-the-world" (66/7).⁴ This everyday association in the world, and Dasein's dealings with equipment, cannot be characterized by some sort of perceptual cognition of the qualities of substances objectively present, but rather is "a handling, using, and taking care of things" (68). This association takes its most primordial form when Dasein literally *uses* the equipment. Heidegger explicates two essential, though certainly not independent, aspects of equipment in the mode of being 'ready-to-hand.' First, equipment have in their way of being an '*in-order-to*.' For example, a hammer has the '*in-order-to*' of hammering. Heidegger writes:

In dealings such as this, where something is put to use, our concern subordinated itself to the "in-order-to" which is constitutive for the equipment we are employing at the time; the less we just stare at the hammer-Thing, and the more we seize hold of it and use it, the more primordial does our relationship to it become, and the more unveiledly is it encountered as that which it is – as equipment. (69)

It is important to note the stress that Heidegger places on the actual *using* of the hammer, which brings its being to the most primordial and genuine ready-to-hand. In a sense, as Heidegger writes, the hammer is restored to its true ready-to-hand through its *withdrawing* as a hammer *per se*.

⁴ Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time*. Trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. New York: Harper and Row, 1962. Print. (I will use the German pagination of *Being and Time* for references.)

In other words, when Dasein is absorbed in the world and dealing non-cognitively with equipment, the hammer *withdraws*, or becomes transparent as a ‘hammer,’ and becomes a primordial equipment ‘*in-order-to*’ pound nails.⁵

The structure of this ‘*in-order-to*’ brings Heidegger to the second essential aspect of the mode of being of readiness-to-hand: belonging to the referential totality of equipment.⁶ Put another way, the totality of all equipment must be given in advance of any one particular thing, and all equipment contains within its being a ‘to hand’ reference to the totality of all other equipment. To keep with the example of hammering, a ‘hammer’ as an equipment can only make sense within the totality of equipment such as nails, wood, frames, houses, and so on. Without such reference, a hammer would simply be taken as some thing objectively present – an object with qualities. For some ‘thing’ to *be* a ‘hammer,’ it must have ‘*in-order-to(s)*’ which reference the whole of equipment.

Taken strictly, there ‘is’ no such thing as *an* equipment. To the being of any equipment there always belongs a totality of equipment,

⁵ Heidegger writes: “The ready-to-hand is not grasped theoretically at all, nor is it itself the sort of things that circumspection takes proximally as a circumspective theme. The peculiarity of what is proximally ready-to-hand is that, in its readiness-to-hand, it must, as it were, withdraw in order to be ready-to-hand quite authentically. That with which our everyday dealing proximally dwell is not the tools themselves. On the contrary, that with which we concern ourselves primarily is the work” (69).

⁶ In order to understand this point, however, we must realize that ‘reference’ does not mean anything linguistic.

in which it can be this equipment that it is.⁷
(68)

These two aspects taken together – the primary ‘*in-order-to*’ of equipment and the belonging to a referential totality – allows Heidegger to make a further claim regarding Dasein’s role within the referential totality. The referential whole of ‘*in-order-to*’ eventually finds its final ‘*in-order-to*’ within Dasein’s ‘*for-the-sake-of-which*,’ in which Dasein takes a stand on its being. This final ‘*for-the-sake-of-which*’ is the stage where no further involvement exists within in the referents. In other words, while the equipment of hammer has the primary ‘*in-order-to*’ of pounding nails (which can be drawn out into further ‘*in-order-to(s)*,’ such as building a wall and building a house), this must eventually lead to the final referent for which Dasein employs the ‘hammer’ as equipment, which is to say, to take a stand on its being.⁸ For example, in the case of the hammer, this may be to take some stand as ‘being a carpenter’ or ‘being a shelterer.’ Now, it is important to note that this is certainly not a conscious decision on the part of Dasein – one does not employ equipment for the explicit *purpose* of taking a reasoned stand on one’s being. Instead, this stand comes inseparably alongside the use of equipment,

⁷ Again, Heidegger writes: “Equipment – in accordance with its equipmentality – always is *in terms of* its belonging to other equipment” (68).

⁸ Heidegger writes: “But the ‘for-the-sake-of’ always pertains to the being of Dasein, for which, in its being, that very being is essentially an *issue*. We have thus indicated the interconnection by which the structure of an involvement leads to Dasein’s very being as the sole authentic ‘for-the-sake-of-which’” (84).

as it is only *through* this use that Dasein comes to understand its being.

In sum, we can say that equipment must have more than an ‘*in-order-to*,’ to *be* what they ‘are’ they must also have a referential part in the whole of equipment. Equipment is *truly and most primordially* equipment *when it is being used*, and this is how Dasein relates in its being of existence to equipment. At the most absorbed (and basic) level, when Dasein is simply dealing with an equipment, it becomes less and less noticeable, and functions as *withdrawing*. We may say confidently, then, that ‘an equipment’ ceases to be what it is when it becomes isolated and no longer has a reference to, or is part of, the whole. And, as equipment can be said to exist within the referential totality most primordially when it is in use and withdrawing (that is, in the mode of being ready-to-hand), we are left to ponder the being of equipment when not in use and withdrawing. Therefore, we may ask the question: what mode of being does a hammer have when it is simply lying there and *not withdrawing*?

III. Encountering Unzuhandenheit

Heidegger begins his discussion of *un-ready-to-hand* by articulating three instances in which Dasein meets the beings of equipment as “unusable”: conspicuousness [*Auffälligkeit*], obtrusiveness [*Aufdringlichkeit*], and obstinacy [*Aufsässigkeit*]. At the point in which Heidegger addresses the way of being of un-readiness-to-hand, which he believes to be a deficient mode of readiness-to-hand, he seems to imply that all ways of encountering equipment as un-ready-to-hand must involve some sort of “breakdown.” However, much later in Division II of *Being and Time*, when discussing the temporality of circumspection, Heidegger states that there are ways of encountering equipment as un-ready-to-hand which do *not* involve a breakdown. I will

begin by addressing the cases in which a breakdown is involved, where upon we can build the cases in which a breakdown is not required.

Heidegger holds that it is when Dasein comes across equipment in the way of being *un-ready-to-hand* that the referential whole of the '*in-order-to(s)*' is revealed. In other words, within Dasein's non-cognitive dealings in the world, the equipmental whole exists and is understood, but not made intelligible. On the other hand, when this dealing in the world is interrupted, Dasein is made to realize the necessary determination that the whole has upon the particular equipment. For example, it is only when the hammer 'breaks' that Dasein realizes that there exists an explicit equipment used for pounding nails. Until the breakdown, the hammer, as equipment *withdrawing*, is simply given as a general equipment '*in-order-to*' pound nails. I believe we can make sense of this with the semantic difference of Dasein's viewing the 'hammer' as a 'nail-pounder,' when circumspectively dealing within the world, as opposed to an explicit 'hammer-tool for pounding nails' after the interruption, when the equipment is given in the mode of *un-ready-to-hand*. In Dasein's encountering the *un-ready-to-hand*, Heidegger holds that Dasein is met with an equipmental entity that has neither the mode of being of readiness-to-hand, nor pure presence-at-hand, as a substance would. Instead, he holds that Dasein encounters presence-at-hand alongside readiness-to-hand. He writes:

Un-readiness-to-hand...implies that what cannot be used just lies there; it shows itself as an equipmental Thing which looks so and so, and which, in its readiness-to-hand as looking that way, has constantly been present-at-hand too. Pure presence-at-hand announces itself in

such equipment, but only to withdraw to the readiness-to-hand of something with which one concerns oneself... This presence-at-hand of something that cannot be used is still not devoid of all readiness-to-hand whatsoever; equipment which is present-at-hand *in this way* is still not just a Thing which occurs somewhere. (73)

Throughout these sections in which Heidegger discusses the relationship between readiness-to-hand and presence-at-hand, I take him to be positing a bivalent relationship. First, to some degree we can see that the being of present-at-hand underlies the ready-to-hand. This relationship seemingly has the quality of some form of ‘*weak causality*.’ In other words, if the present-at-hand, or the substance with certain de-situated qualities did not exist, neither would the ready-to-hand equipment. This relationship comes to the fore as Heidegger discusses the necessary ‘suitability’ of equipment. Not all substances can be hammers, only those with the substantial qualities of medium-length, a hard head, and so on. In another way, however, we must view the relationship between the ready-to-hand and the present-at-hand as one in which the ready-to-hand must underlie the present-at-hand. This relationship seemingly holds the quality of *intelligibility*. This must be the case, as no sort of substantial qualities can make a ‘hammer-Thing’ a ‘hammer.’ In other words, no matter how suitable some set of qualities given to a substance are for the making of a hammer, a ‘hammer’ is only one insofar as it exists within the referential totality. As such, the present-at-hand being of substance, such as a hammer, is only intelligible through Dasein’s dealing with hammers *qua*

equipment. Therefore, we may conclude that the modes of being of present-at-hand and ready-to-hand mutually found each other.

The first, and seemingly most obscene way in which un-readiness-to-hand is encountered is through *obtrusiveness*. In this “breakdown,” Dasein finds itself within a situation where the necessary equipment cannot be found, or is not ‘to hand’ [zur Hand] (73). This occurs when, for example, set to the task of pounding nails, Dasein cannot find a hammer. This causes all ready-to-hand objects within the work-world that *are* given to become present-at-hand, as Dasein cannot deal with anything until a hammer is also given. In my opinion, this case of encounter appears the most forceful, as everything appears present-at-hand with Dasein standing helplessly before the work-world. This encounter is obviously a form of a “breakdown” in which ‘innerworldly beings’ become present-at-hand, for seemingly nothing further can be done without the hammer being available.

The second form of encounter comes in the instance of a more temporary “breakdown,” *obstinacy*, where an entity as *un-ready-to-hand* “‘stands in the way’ of our concern” (73). This encounter may come in the form of a hammer’s head falling off. This form of *un-ready-to-hand* reintroduces a mode of ready-to-hand, as Dasein is set to task in repairing the particular equipment in-order-to resume other dealings. These two modes of un-ready-to-hand have a unique way of being present-at-hand alongside the ready-to-hand, as both involve equipment de-situated. In other words, the qualities of ‘missing’ or ‘broken’ exist across a range of situations, and without particular reliance upon a context. A ‘broken’ hammer has the objective presence of ‘brokenness,’ such that although the ‘hammer’ still exists within the

equipmental totality, it is also present-at-hand with certain qualities. These “breakdown” encounters with the un-ready-to-hand, in my opinion, follow Heidegger’s outline for the introduction of worldliness through the un-ready-to-hand. This ‘worldiness’ appears as the totality of equipment encountered, and is therefore given explicitly when this totality shows itself through un-ready-to-hand equipment lending reference to the whole. I want to argue, however, that the encounter with the un-ready-to-hand yet to be discussed – *conspicuousness* – lends itself to a reading that shows the necessity of considering the un-ready-to-hand as a fourth mode of being.

According to Heidegger, *conspicuousness* can be encountered in numerous ways. In §16, Heidegger primarily focuses on the malfunction of equipment, which, for example, may concern a hammer being ‘too heavy.’ Much later in *Being and Time*, he states that it may also involve something as innocent as “inspecting.” He writes, concerning Dasein’s switch from “practical” circumspection (ready-to-hand dealing) to “theoretical” investigation, which involves the tying of the ready-to-hand to the *un-ready-to-hand* by conspicuousness:

The tarrying which is discontinued when one manipulates, can take on the character of a more precise kind of circumspection, such as ‘inspecting’, checking up on what has been attained, or looking over the ‘operations’ which are now ‘at a standstill’. Holding back from use of equipment is so far from sheer ‘theory’ that the kind of circumspection with tarrying and ‘considers’, remains wholly in the grip of the ready-to-hand equipment with which one is concerned. (358)

This precise ‘inspecting,’ yet remaining stuck in the tools, is encountering the *un-ready-to-hand*. Heidegger places this encounter along the path of moving from pure practical dealing to theoretical investigation. In this, we may understand the difference between de-situated and de-worlded. As Dasein encounters equipment as ready-to-hand, it does so in a completely situation-based context given through the referential totality of equipment. As Dasein begins to abstract, the mode of *un-ready-to-hand* is encountered through ‘inspection,’ and in this mode, equipment is seen as de-situated, which seems to mean having ‘properties,’ though ‘properties’ dependent upon context. Therefore, in a sense, the equipment is still quite ‘situated,’ though, as it is not primordially *being* ready-to-hand, it has been taken out of its primary situation of withdrawing. Finally, once Dasein is operating on the level of ‘theorizing,’ it begins to deal with innerworldly beings that are completely free of any referent within the equipmental whole.⁹

I take it, based on the quote given above, as well as Heidegger’s discussion of breakdown within the encounter of *un-ready-to-hand*, that there are two major ways in which equipment can become *conspicuous*. The first, which Heidegger primarily discusses, involves some sort of

⁹ I take an example of this to be the different ways of regarding speed: in ready-to-hand dealing, equipment is moving relative to other equipment, as some particular equipment moves at the speed it would take to do some job. (A jackhammer moves with the necessary speed *in-order-to* break concrete.) Once de-situated, particular equipment has the property of moving fast. This fastness must still be relative to something, for example, ‘too fast’ for me to operate it, but it is seen apart from its *in-order-to*. Finally, when a ‘theoretical’ investigation is taking place, equipment moves at a certain velocity – without reference to any other equipment.

“break,” where a hammer is “too heavy” to do some job, and therefore work, or absorbed dealing, must stop. *However, this is not necessarily the case.* There is another way in which the hammer is recognized as having properties relevant for hammering, for example, heavy, but where Dasein is not intending the hammer for *use* at this moment, and is instead ‘inspecting’. The *un-ready-to-hand* thus encountered through ‘inspection,’ unlike ready-to-hand, does not operate in the mode of Dasein’s dealing with equipment *withdrawing*. Yet, it is also unlike things objectively present, as Dasein still remains within tools when inspecting them. In other words, when Dasein realizes, for example, that the hammer is “heavy,” this heavy-ness cannot be taken as a quality for objective presence, for it is “heavy” for *me*, in this situation, relative to this other hammer, and so on. The hammer, although “heavy,” still remains within the referential totality of equipment, and has not been de-worlded as objective presence must be. And yet, as the hammer is simply lying there, and is not withdrawing, it also is not *being* as genuine, primordial ready-to-hand. Instead, as an “equipment,” it is both somewhat being ready-to-hand, and somewhat displaying its objective presence (74). It has the unique way of a *being of un-ready-to-hand*, or maybe more appropriately, what one could call *potential ready-to-hand*. It is recognized as a hammer, with some property relevant for hammering, and therefore relative to other equipment in the referential totality, yet has not *broken down* to expose this referential totality, and further has not been ‘theoretically’ investigated to the point of becoming de-worlded.

I argue that Heidegger makes a mistake in classifying this way of being as a deficient mode of being, subsuming it under ready-to-hand. As the hammer is lying there, although

it certainly has an ‘*in-order-to*’ in terms of the referential whole, it does not have the explicit ‘*in-order-to*’ of a transparent, withdrawing, equipment. I may, in fact, observe it *there*, though not as an objective presence, but as an *un-*, or maybe more appropriately, *non-ready-to-hand*.

IV. The Being of Unzuhandenheit

As Heidegger often recognizes and notes, when participating in the study of fundamental ontology, we must look to the phenomena first. So, we must ask ourselves, what is the phenomenon of the hammer, recognized as a hammer, lying there? Modes of being, as that on the basis of which [woraufhin] *entities* are intelligible, must be that which in the background is already present, pre-phenomenologically, in order that we understand the entities of this *non*-equipment. In other words, analogous to the requirement of the mode of being of ready-to-hand being already understood before Dasein can understand a ‘hammer,’ so must the *non-ready-to-hand* be pre-phenomenologically grasped before one can know a particular equipment in such a mode. I contend that when we understand a being as lying there, inappropriate, though fully functional, for a situation, we understand it in terms of both the referential totality, and its *non-serviceability*. For something to be equipment *qua* equipment, Heidegger writes, we must understand this “‘serviceability-for’...[which] is an ontological, categorical determination” (78). As such, the hammer deemed “heavy” *is understood* as a potentially ready-to-hand equipment. Yet, as it has been deemed by Dasein not applicable for explicit *use*, and is instead simply being ‘inspected’ relative to other equipment, it is understood in its *non-usefulness*. By *non-useful*, and *non-serviceable*, I mean neither useful or serviceable, nor *not-*

useful or *not*-serviceable. Instead, I use the prefix *non-* to connote a recognized irrelevance to current use-value outside of 'inspection' itself. To put it differently, when I understand the being of a hammer lying there, yet have no reason to use it, I understand it *both* in regards to the referential totality of equipment, and its *potential ready-to-hand*. As I also understand it as *not withdrawing* or transparent, I understand its being as *un-ready-to-hand* equipment. And, based on this phenomenon, I argue that through the encounter with an object in its place within the referential whole, yet also in its situational *non*-usefulness, I understand it in its genuine, everyday being. Thus, we must view this un-ready-to-hand not as a subcategory of ready-to-hand, but as a fourth mode of being, where equipment may have either the being of ready-to-hand *or* of *un-ready-to-hand*.