

BOOK REVIEW

John Haugeland's

Dasein Disclosed: John Haugeland's Heidegger

Hans Pedersen

John Haugeland. *Dasein Disclosed: John Haugeland's Heidegger*.
Edited by Joseph Rouse. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013.
336 pages.

Let me begin by saying a bit about the structure of this volume, which is somewhat unusual. The largest section of the book is an unfinished manuscript that was intended to be a close, detailed interpretation of *Being and Time* and an attempt to work out what the promised, but never delivered, Division III of *Being and Time* would look like. This manuscript, unfortunately, is very much unfinished – it covers most of Division I of *Being and Time*, but goes no further. This unfinished manuscript is bracketed by articles comprising the sum total of Haugeland's work on Heidegger, some previously published, others unpublished versions of presented papers, some outlines of talks, and some not directly related to Heidegger, but which clearly draw on Heidegger to address broader philosophical issues in the philosophy of language or the philosophy of science. The editor of the volume, Joseph Rouse,

Gatherings: The Heidegger Circle Annual 4 (2014): 86–95.

does an excellent job highlighting some of the main themes that appear throughout Haugeland's work in the Editor's Introduction, which gives the reader a framework with which to make sense of the disparate writings included. Rouse also helpfully includes footnotes throughout the volume to point out changes in Haugeland's views from one writing to another to make it easier for the reader to track the development of his thought.

I cannot do justice to all of the issues covered in this book in a short review, and a number of Haugeland's main points are familiar to Heidegger scholars by virtue of their appearing in his own well-known published articles or by being common to much Hubert Dreyfus-inspired work on Heidegger. So, instead of trying for a broad summary of the work, I want to focus on several aspects of Haugeland's reading of Heidegger that I find to be especially distinctive and interesting. The first concerns Haugeland's interpretation of Heidegger's understanding of the being of entities. Haugeland places a good deal of weight on the language involving projection and possibilities in Heidegger's description of understanding as a fundamental existential structure. In Haugeland's words, "Heidegger is perfectly clear about the essential point: understanding...always projects entities onto their possibilities" (196).¹ He goes on to make the connection to the being of entities by claiming, "disclosing the being of entities involves grasping them in terms of a distinction between what is possible and impossible for them" (196) or, put slightly differently, the "being of entities is effectively determined by the relevant modal constraints" (185). Haugeland gives examples of how this could work for various types of entities. Chess pieces are understood in terms of the moves that are possible for them and the moves that are impossible for them (61). To be a rook is to be able to move in straight lines and to not be able to move diagonally. This works for tools as well. To be a hammer is to be something with which it is possible to pound a nail into wood. It is also a running theme for Haugeland to connect this modal understanding of being to scientific practice. The being of, for example, an electron can also be understood in modal

terms as a subatomic particle for which a certain charge is necessary and for which certain movements are possible. This marks one of the most important ways in which Haugeland seeks to bring Heidegger's ontological project closer to that of modern science.

Haugeland's interpretation of the being of entities serves as the foundation for his distinctive interpretation of Division II of *Being and Time*. In his proposal for a Guggenheim fellowship to provide the funding for his work on the unfinished manuscript contained in *Dasein Disclosed*, Haugeland claims that one of the most important aspects of his reading of Heidegger is that he is able to reconcile the seemingly discordant aims of Heidegger's project of fundamental ontology and the more existentialist ideas found in Division II (e.g. anxiety, death, resoluteness) (44). Haugeland maintains that Heidegger's main objective throughout his work is the question of the meaning of being, even when it might not seem like it. Therefore, all of the existentialist themes found in Division II must be read in terms of this fundamental question. In order to show how this might work, Haugeland tends to use the term 'responsibility' as a designation for authentic existence. The preference for 'responsibility' seems to come from the term's potential dual meaning. Haugeland is able to work with the idea that responsibility can be thought of as responsiveness to something, in this case, responsiveness to entities and their being. Of course, responsibility can also be understood as the personal quality of taking ownership of one's actions. This duality allows Haugeland to connect responsibility to both the question of being and the existentialist themes from Division II.

Haugeland differentiates between two different types and levels of responsibility: ontical/routine and existential/resolute/authentic responsibility. Ontical responsibility is concerned with "getting entities right" (200). This is where the connection can be made back to Haugeland's modal conception of the being of entities. "Getting entities right" requires a "*responsiveness* to ostensible impossibilities in the current situation," and furthermore, the "response must be a *refusal to accept* any current apparent impossibility" (200). Haugeland gives the examples of hearing that your child is now at school and at home, thinking

something is a hammer but having it shatter against a nail, and thinking something is carrying electric current but is not generating a magnetic field (200). In all of these cases, one finds something wrong with entities encountered in the sense that one encounters an impossibility associated with the entities. This recognition should generate, at least in a responsible person, an attempt to figure out what is really going on in each of these cases and a refusal to accept that something impossible is happening. We can see why ontical responsibility on Haugeland's view involves both an ontological understanding of the entities one encounters and a personal commitment to react to one's situation in the appropriate way. To be a person is, in part, for it to be impossible to be in two places at once; to be a hammer is, in part, for it to be impossible to shatter against a nail; to be electric current is for it to be impossible not to generate a magnetic field. A responsible person understands these ontologically definitive modal laws and feels a personal need to resolve the seeming impossibility that has been encountered by, for example, checking at home for one's child, making sure that the hammer had not been dipped in liquid nitrogen, or checking the equipment used to measure the magnetic field.

Ontical and existential responsibility share the characteristic of being a refusal to accept encountered impossibility. The difference is that, as discussed above, this refusal for ontical responsibility takes place at the ontic level (e.g. checking measuring instruments), which requires an understanding of the being of the entities encountered, but not a questioning of this being. To put it a bit too simply, existential responsibility responds to encountered impossibility by questioning the understanding of being that has led to the seeming impossibility after attempts to resolve the impossibility at the ontic level have failed. For example, someone exhibiting existential responsibility, when encountering an electric current which does not produce a magnetic field and after checking the measuring equipment and finding nothing wrong, would begin to question whether her understanding of the being of an electric current needs to be revised.

Haugeland then demonstrates how this general notion of existential responsibility can be used to make sense of the key “existentialist” concepts from Division II. Readiness for anxiety is interpreted as a readiness to admit that the normal, public understanding of the being of entities does not make sense (207–8). Similarly, being-toward-death is interpreted as a recognition that all understandings of being can potentially become unworkable and might have to be given up. Haugeland states that authentic responsibility is for Dasein to “take responsibility in this way for the possibility that the understanding of being that it is may not be viable – to take responsibility for it as *essentially vulnerable*” (239). Existential responsibility is seen as authentic, owned existence, because it is our ownmost possibility to raise the question of being. In Haugeland’s words: “*Owned* Dasein, as taking over responsibility for its ontological heritage, no longer takes it for granted. It reawakens the question of being – as its *ownmost* and sometimes *most urgent* question” (215). Furthermore, “it is taking responsibility for the possibilities onto which entities are projected and therewith Dasein’s ability-to-be as an understanding of being” (238). In existential responsibility, we recognize and own up to our role in letting beings be what they are by projecting them onto possibilities. This form of responsibility also requires resoluteness and repeated commitment to resolve apparent encountered impossibilities by resolving misperceptions or errors that make entities seem to contradict our understanding of their being or by holding oneself free for the possibility of taking back one’s operative understanding of being (216–17).

Interestingly, Haugeland takes his reading of the account of authenticity in Division II as a refutation of relativism, but a refutation of relativism that still allows for truth to have a historical character. According to Haugeland, the “challenge of relativism is that the possibilities onto which entities are projected and in terms of which truth and falsehood about them can be distinguished seem historically contingent and ultimately arbitrary” (239). His reading of existential responsibility is able to meet this challenge by maintaining that some understandings of being just are not viable. In other words, contra

relativism, it is not the case that any understanding of being can be projected onto entities encountered in the world. The non-viability of certain understandings of being is demonstrated by the refusal of entities to fit with these understandings. In the language Haugeland uses throughout, we are beholden to the entities themselves and must recognize that we might have to give up an understanding of being that does not fit with them. This removes the arbitrariness from the relativist's conception of things, while still allowing the Heideggerian (and as Haugeland frequently mentions, the Kuhnian) claim that the way in which we understand beings does unfold historically and shifts over time.

It is somewhat unclear how to fairly develop critical remarks on Haugeland's thought. One might be tempted to fault Haugeland for only considering a very narrow slice of Heidegger's work (*Being and Time* is mentioned and cited profusely, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology* occasionally, but no other work of Heidegger's is given serious consideration), particularly when some of Heidegger's now-published lecture courses from the same era – 1920s to early 1930s – shed considerable light on the issues with which Haugeland is most concerned. Similarly, one might be tempted to criticize Haugeland's relative lack of engagement with recent scholarly work on Heidegger. However, I think both of these lines of criticism would be unfair and misguided. Haugeland's work in some ways mirrors Heidegger's own approach to the history of philosophy – deep, detailed engagement with a few key works of a major thinker, aimed not at achieving a maximally coherent interpretation of the thinker in question after a broad survey of the whole oeuvre or situating one's reading within the constellation of current scholarly views, but rather a profound thinking-through of selected issues that proceeds out of the conceptual space opened up by the thinker under study.

With that in mind, I think it is best to critically assess Haugeland's work not necessarily in terms of whether or not he “gets Heidegger right,” but instead to consider whether Haugeland's engagement with the question of being and associated analysis of human existence works

on its own merits. To that end, I would like to consider more closely Haugeland's modal conception of the being of entities. This view has the virtue of providing an understanding of being that can be seen as undergirding both the ready-to-hand and present-at-hand modes of being discussed by Heidegger in *Being and Time* without seemingly undoing Heidegger's work of undermining the privileged position of the disengaged, theoretical understanding of being. Through the examples Haugeland uses, he makes it clear that the being of a hammer as ready-to-hand is just as much determined by its possible use for a task as the being of an electron is determined by scientific, mathematical laws defining its necessary charge and possible motion. Establishing this common modal basis for understanding the being of the ready-to-hand and present-at-hand seems to be very much in line with Haugeland's (and Heidegger's) interest in finding a unifying, underlying sense of what it means to be.

I do, however, have some worries about this modal understanding of being. The first worry is concerned with the place of this understanding of being within the more general scope of Haugeland's project. Haugeland, in the proposal that effectively serves as a preface for his unfinished manuscript, follows *Being and Time*-era Heidegger in maintaining that the answer to the question of the meaning of being will be found ultimately in an analysis of temporality. Like Heidegger, Haugeland did not follow through on his intended aim to work out the ultimate answer to the question of being in terms of temporality (though, of course, an unfortunate and untimely death is responsible for Haugeland's lack of follow through, as opposed to Heidegger's gradual turning away from this path of inquiry). As he remarks at the end of the notes for a talk on temporality delivered in 2002, his interpretation of Heidegger thus far "has answered only the question of the sense of Dasein's being – not the sense of being *tout court*" (240). Haugeland shows how the being of entities can be understood in the modal terms of possibility and necessity and how Dasein makes possible various understandings of being in modal terms. The connection to temporality seems to be that the fact of our mortality means that we have a finite,

vulnerable existence that makes it possible to understand beings in terms of possibility and impossibility. We understand ourselves as projecting forward into possibilities, and ultimately projecting forward into the possibility of the impossibility of being (i.e. death). On the basis of this understanding of our own being, we can understand entities encountered in the world in terms of what is possible or impossible for them. However, it is unclear how much the sense of finitude Haugeland discusses is strictly temporal finitude. Human existence is obviously temporally finite, but it is also finite in many other ways that do not always seem to be reducible to temporal finitude. As we know, Heidegger gave up focusing on time and temporality in his investigation of the question of being because he came to see these concepts as too narrow and beholden to the metaphysical and scientific traditions. It seems to me that Haugeland too would be better off dropping the attempt to show how this all must boil down to temporality, but this, of course, is hard to say conclusively, as the section of manuscript meant to flesh out this trajectory was never completed.

The second worry is perhaps more substantive. Haugeland's modal conception of being and his conception of responsibility rely heavily on the idea of impossibility and the refusal to accept impossibility. At least at times, Haugeland's conception of impossibility seems tied to the logical principle of non-contradiction (e.g. in the above example of hearing that one's child is simultaneously at home and at school). Of course, there is a long-standing philosophical tradition of treating the principle of non-contradiction as absolutely fundamental, its truth assumed to provide the basis for the possibility of any logical analysis whatsoever. However, there is also a rather strong philosophical undercurrent of questioning or rejecting this principle in the history of philosophy. Heraclitus, Kierkegaard, and current philosophers working on dialethic conceptions of logic immediately come to mind. Most relevantly, Heidegger himself states his case for dismissing or at least limiting the scope of the principle of non-contradiction in various lecture courses.⁵ There are times when a seemingly contradictory statement does seem to best capture the phenomena being discussed.

We might even find an example, used by Haugeland, in Heidegger's description of death as the possibility of the impossibility of being. It seems that there is a *prima facie* contradiction here in asserting that death is both P and not P, but at least among Heidegger scholars, it is generally accepted that Heidegger's formulation is trenchant and captures something important about what it is to be human. Is this the sort of impossibility that we must refuse to accept? This question does not conclusively demonstrate that Haugeland is wrong to place so much weight on the notions of possibility and impossibility when it comes to developing an understanding of being, but it does, in my opinion, make it seem like he should have done more to justify and explain the ontological centrality of these modal concepts and the existential responsibility to resolve any encountered impossibility.

The minor questions I pose here for Haugeland's views do not detract from my enthusiasm for the volume as a whole. It contains the development of a detailed, distinctive, and engaging interpretation and appropriation of some of the central issues of Heidegger's thought and provides an excellent example of a thinker who takes up the question of being with the aid of the framework provided by Heidegger, but who is unafraid to go beyond Heidegger when the subject matter calls for it.

ENDNOTES

- 1 All parenthetical references refer to the book under review.
- 2 The number of different types of responsibility identified by Haugeland and the names he gives to each one shift throughout the various writings included in *Dasein Disclosed*, as this was clearly an idea that he was still in the process of developing. In the article, "Truth and Finitude: Heidegger's Transcendental Existentialism," published in 2000, Haugeland lists three different types of responsibility: ontical, ontological, and existential. However, in the notes for a 2002 talk, "Temporality," he only mentions two types: routine and resolute, which seem to roughly

map onto ontical and existential. Finally, in his article, “Authentic Intentionality,” published in 2002, he discusses authentic responsibility, which seems to roughly match up with resolute and existential responsibility. In my discussion here, I have chosen to leave out consideration of ontological responsibility, as it appears to have dropped out of Haugeland’s thought on the subject, and to treat ‘ontical’ and ‘routine’ as equivalent terms, as well ‘existential,’ ‘resolute,’ and ‘authentic’ as equivalent.

3 See, for example, GA 29/30: 26–29/17–20.