

Tool, Thing and Object

The well-known discourse on the tool and its handiness (*Handlichkeit*) appears in the framework Analysis of Environmentality and Worldhood in General (*Umweltlichkeit und Weltlichkeit überhaupt*) in the first part of *Being and Time*. What precedes this analysis, and at the same time necessarily leads to it, is the formulation of the question of Being. Heidegger reads the three, *Dasein*, the world and the tool-being, in a relationship through an existential analysis.

Heidegger's emphasis on the existential status of the tool leads to a series of challenging insights into its role and significance in *Being and Time*, leading to questions about the technology and about Being itself. There have been many different attempts to explain the place of tools and techniques in *Being and Time*. In this paper, I have chosen to re-evaluate Heidegger's theory of tools through critical comments from Graham Harman, a representative of Speculative Realism. I argue that Harman is partly correct in his charges that the perspective of grasping Being through tool, i.e., ready-to-hand in *Being and Time*, is inadequate. For in the context of *Being and Time*, Heidegger's tool theory can be considered a kind of correlationism that not only does not fully grasp the existence of Being, but if one starts from this practical relationship with beings, one can even rationalize the radical conclusion of the late conception of modern technology, i.e., *Gestell*.

However, the Speculative Realism advocated by Harman, i.e., the view of all tools and beings as Objects, is no more convincing than what he criticizes. In contrast, Heidegger's correlationism may be a way of recognizing the finitude of our knowledge.

Specifically, I begin with an analysis of Harman's charge, which comes from two main sources:

1. How Heidegger approaches beings: Heidegger does not try to account for being directly, but through the relation of being to other beings. Harman considers this as the perspective of correlationism. He stresses both the relational and the independent reality of things, since treating an entity only in relation to something else cannot fully allow us to grasp the entity's reality.
2. How Heidegger is grounded in praxis rather than theoria: Heidegger divides the relations between *Dasein* and things into two groups, *Zuhanden* and *Vorhanden*, and argues that things should first be understood in a practical context. Harman argues that whether one understands being from the perspective of *Zuhanden*(praxis) or *Vorhanden*(theoria), there is still a hidden surplus in the objects that is never mastered by awareness nor use.

From these two charges, Harman concludes that we should recognize the existence of Object independently, rather than putting the Object into a relation.

Next I will consider the charges made by Harman. When trying to interpret Heidegger's

concept of praxis, Harman tries to grasp the tool-being independently, transforming a being from the concept of tool into a mere Object, and trying to separate it from the tool-being or any or all connected understandings of the world. I argue that such correlational understanding is indeed central to Heidegger's thought in *Being and Time*, but unless we view this idea in the context of Heidegger's critique of traditional philosophy, the context of an attempt to recover Dasein's understanding of Being through a critique of traditional metaphysics, we are bound to misunderstand it. This misunderstanding causes Graham Harman's critique to miss Heidegger's most central aim, namely, the understanding of Being. What Heidegger emphasizes is that as Dasein we do not only understand through relations, either by using tool-beings or by analyzing them in a theoretical way, i.e., in the ontic dimension, but that as the most particular being we are able to understand Being in the ontological dimension. Here, Harman's charge not only fails to correctly point out Heidegger's mistake, but pushes him further into Heidegger's antithesis of abandoning the understanding of Being in order to understand beings.

Of course, not all of Harman's charges miss the mark. I think that Harman's dismissal of the method as a *prop of Zuhanden* does point to a deficiency in *Being and Time*. I argue that because in *Being and Time* Heidegger limits beings to *res*, and going back to the ancient Greek concept of *pragmata* to explain the words of beings, beings are limited as tool-being and bound by the instrumentality of Dasein's subjectivity. Therefore, as a result, such praxis binding turns the *physis*, beings as a whole, being revealed for the sake of instrumentality by human. This concept is not far from the position of "Gestell", the object of Heidegger's own criticism in his later work.