

# Properties of Being in Heidegger's *Being and Time*

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## Abstract

While it is well known that the early Heidegger distinguishes between different 'kinds of being' and identifies various 'structures' that compose them, there has been little discussion about what these kinds and structures of being *are*. This paper defends the 'Property Thesis', the position that kinds of being (and their structures) are *properties* of the entities that have them. I give two arguments for this thesis. The first is grounded in the fact that Heidegger refers to kinds and structures of being as 'characteristics' and 'determinations', which are just two different words for 'properties', in the broadest senses of these terms. The second argument is based on the fact that kinds and structures of being play three roles that properties are supposed to play: they account for similarities between things, they are what predicates express, and they are what abstract nouns refer to.

**Keywords:** Heidegger; being; properties; ontology; metaphysics, analytic philosophy

## 1. Introduction

The explicit goal of Heidegger's *Being and Time* is to 'work out' the question of the meaning of *being* (*Sein*), or what it means for something to *be* or to *exist* (*SZ*, p. 1).<sup>1</sup> Part of his answer to this question is that different kinds of entities *are* or *exist* in different ways.<sup>2</sup> In his terms, different kinds of entities have different *kinds of being* (*Seinsarten*).<sup>3</sup> Most importantly, human beings – the kind of entity Heidegger refers to as 'Dasein' – have their own kind of being, which is sharply distinguished from the kinds of being possessed by other kinds of entities (e.g., artifacts, animals, and abstracta). The bulk of *Being and Time* consists of phenomenological descriptions of the various 'structures' (*Seinsstrukturen*) that compose this particular kind of being.

Much scholarship on *Being and Time* focuses on explicating these descriptions, which tend to be rather opaque. By contrast, relatively little energy has been spent explaining what these 'structures' *are*, let alone the 'kinds of being' to which they belong. This paper takes up these neglected issues. I defend the straightforward but controversial position that kinds of being (and their

structures) are *properties* of the entities that have them. I call this the ‘Property Thesis’.

The body of this paper has three main parts. In the first and second (§§2–3), I offer two arguments for the Property Thesis. The first argument is based on the fact that Heidegger refers to kinds and structures of being as ‘characteristics’ and ‘determinations’, which are synonymous with ‘properties’, in the broadest senses of these terms. The second argument is based on the fact that kinds and structures of being play three roles that properties are supposed to play: they account for similarities between things, they are what predicates express, and they are what abstract nouns refer to. Given the controversial nature of the Property Thesis, I spend the third main part of this paper (§4) rebutting a variety of objections to it. The paper ends with a brief conclusion (§5) in which I highlight one practical advantage of the Property Thesis: if true, it provides a new opportunity for dialogue between Heideggerians and analytic philosophers.

## 2. First Argument

According to the early Heidegger, different kinds of entities have different kinds of being. These kinds of being include care (*Sorge*), readiness-to-hand (*Zuhandenheit*), and presence-at-hand (*Vorhandenheit*). While there is some debate over which kinds of entities have these different kinds of being, a typical view is that care is possessed by human beings (*Dasein*), readiness-to-hand by artifacts (e.g., tools, *das Zeug*), and presence-at-hand by material things.<sup>4</sup> There is also evidence in *Being and Time* and the contemporaneous lectures that Heidegger countenances other kinds of being in addition to these three, including life (*Leben*), the kind of being possessed by living things (*SZ*, pp. 46, 50, 241); subsistence (*Bestehen*), the kind of being possessed by abstracta (e.g., numbers) (*SZ*, pp. 153, 333; *GP*, p. 37); and a *generic* kind of being (call it ‘beingness’), which is possessed by everything, regardless of whichever *specific* kind (or kinds) of being it also has (*GP*, pp. 24, 37).<sup>5</sup> It is important to note that the Property Thesis is restricted to *specific* kinds of being (e.g., care, readiness-to-hand, and presence-at-hand) and their structures. I take no stand on whether or not the generic kind of being (beingness) should also be understood in this way.

### 2.1 Structures of Being

As noted above, different kinds of being have different structures.<sup>6</sup> These structures come in two varieties: existentials (*Existenzialien*), the structures of *Dasein*’s being (care); and categories (*Kategorien*), the structures of every other (specific) kind of being (e.g., readiness-to-hand, presence-at-hand, life, etc.) (*SZ*, pp. 44–5). Since most of *Being and Time* concerns *Dasein*’s being,

its structures are fairly easy to identify. They include, among others, being-in-the-world (*In-der-Welt-sein*), being-in (*In-sein*), state-of-mind (*Befindlichkeit*), understanding (*Verstehen*), discourse (*Rede*), existence (*Existenz*), facticity (*Faktizität*), thrownness (*Geworfenheit*), and falling (*Verfallen*). Of these, existence, facticity, and falling are the most fundamental (SZ, p. 191). The structures of other kinds of being are harder to identify, but there are some clear examples: in-order-to (*Um-zu*), assignment (*Verweisung*), and involvement (*Bewandtnis*) are structures of readiness-to-hand (SZ, pp. 68, 84, 353); and substantiality (*Substantialität*), materiality (*Materialität*), and extendedness (*Ausgedehntheit*) are structures of presence-at-hand (SZ, p. 68).

What *are* structures of being? Heidegger often refers them as 'characteristics of being' (*Seinscharaktere*) and 'determinations of being' (*Seinsbestimmungen*).<sup>7</sup> This suggests that they are *characteristics* or *determinations*. Since the words 'characteristic' and 'determination' are synonymous with 'property' (as well as 'aspect', 'attribute', 'feature', 'quality', and 'trait'), in the broadest senses of these terms, one can also say that structures of being are *properties*.<sup>8</sup> In saying this, however, I do not mean to imply anything substantive about the nature of these properties, e.g., whether they are better understood as particulars (tropes) or as universals. Nor should one assume that structures of being are properties of the very same sort as those paradigmatic of present-at-hand material things, such as *redness* and *roundness*, i.e., the kind of properties Heidegger refers to as '*Eigenschaften*'. Structures of being might differ importantly from these properties while being properties nonetheless.<sup>9</sup>

If structures of being are properties, as Heidegger suggests they are, then surely they are properties *of* something or other, i.e., they are instantiated.<sup>10</sup> What instantiates them? There are two plausible possibilities: (a) the kind of being to which those structures belong, or (b) the entities which have the kind of being to which those structures belong.

While the expression 'characteristics of being' suggests the first of these, (a), this cannot be right. Consider 'substantiality', a structure of presence-at-hand, the kind of being possessed by material things. If structures of being are properties of the kind of being to which they belong, then substantiality is a property of presence-at-hand, from which it follows that presence-at-hand is a substance. This is false. It is not presence-at-hand but rather some of the entities which have presence-at-hand as their kind of being that are substances. Similar things can be said of other structures of being: if 'understanding', a structure Dasein's being, is a property, then surely it is a property of Dasein and not of Dasein's being, for it is Dasein and not Dasein's being that understands, in Heidegger's sense of this term. Thus, structures of being are properties, not of the kinds of being to which they belong, but of the entities which have those kinds of being.<sup>11</sup>

2.2 *Dasein's Being*

With some idea of what structures of being are, let us turn our attention to kinds of being. What are they? In this section I focus exclusively on Dasein's being (care). I will consider other kinds of being (e.g., readiness-to-hand and presence-at-hand) in the following section.

What *is* Dasein's being? If the structures of Dasein's being are properties of Dasein, then perhaps we can figure this out if we understand how Dasein's being is related to its structures. Heidegger repeatedly refers to Dasein's being as a whole (*Ganze*) of which its structures are parts (*Stücke*). For example, care is described as a whole of which existence, facticity, and falling are parts (*SZ*, pp. 191–6, 316, 350).<sup>12</sup> The relation that holds between Dasein's being and its structures seems to be a whole-part relation. Since the structures of Dasein's being are properties of Dasein, it follows that Dasein's being is a whole of which some of Dasein's properties are parts.

What sort of whole is this? What sorts of wholes are there such that the parts of those wholes are (only) properties? There are two relevant possibilities: (i) properties are parts of whatever entities instantiate those properties, and (ii) properties are parts of other properties.

Philosophers who hold (i) are known as 'bundle theorists'.<sup>13</sup> According to these philosophers, in addition to whatever *physical* structure a thing may have, it also has *metaphysical* structure. In addition to having material parts, a thing also has metaphysical parts. These parts are its properties. For example, according to a bundle theorist, the properties *redness* and *roundness* are (metaphysical) parts of a red ball.<sup>14</sup>

Whether bundle theory is a plausible metaphysical position is an interesting if well-worn issue. We need not enter into this debate, however, in order to see that it will not help us understand how Dasein's being is composed of its structures. If existentials are parts of Dasein's being as bundle theorists think that properties are (metaphysical) parts of whatever instantiates them, then Dasein's being instantiates its existentials. We have seen that this is not the case: it is not kinds of being but rather entities which have kinds of being that instantiate structures of being.

This leaves (ii): Dasein's being is a property of which other properties are parts. Call any such property a 'complex property'. An example is *being round and red*, the parts of which are *roundness* and *redness*. Properties of this sort are called 'conjunctive properties' and their parts 'conjuncts'. Perhaps Dasein's being is a conjunctive property of which its structures are conjuncts.<sup>15</sup>

One problem with this proposal is that it seems to run afoul of Heidegger's repeated claims that Dasein's being cannot be 'pieced together' or 'built up' from its structures. As he puts it one place: 'it is beyond question that the totality of the structural whole [of Dasein's being] is not to be reached by building it up out of elements' (*SZ*, p. 181); and again: 'The fundamental ontological characteristics of [Dasein] ... are not pieces [*Stücke*] belonging to

something composite, one of which might sometimes be missing' (SZ, p. 191; cf. SZ, p. 328). If conjunctive properties are 'pieced together' or 'built up' from their conjuncts, then Dasein's being cannot be a conjunctive property of which its structures are conjuncts.

There are two replies to this objection, one simple and one complex. The simple reply is that in these sentences Heidegger is saying, not that Dasein's being has no parts, which contradicts the many places where he says that it *does* have parts, but that these parts cannot, in some sense, exist apart from each other.<sup>16</sup> The second of the above quotations is especially suggestive of this reading, for Heidegger says that the structures of Dasein's being 'are not pieces [*Stücke*] belonging to something composite, *one of which might sometimes be missing*' (SZ, p. 191, my emphasis). And if 'building [something] up out of elements' implies that these elements can, in some sense, exist prior to and so independently of what is built up out of them, then the first quotation can be understood along similar lines.

This reading is supported by the work of Einar Øverenget (1998, Ch. 1), who observes that Heidegger's references to the structures of Dasein's being as 'parts' often use the word '*Momente*' whereas his denials that Dasein's being can be 'pieced together' are usually put in terms of '*Stücke*'. Øverenget argues that this terminological difference derives from Husserl's distinction between 'dependent parts', which he calls *Momente* (moments), and 'independent parts', which he calls *Stücke* (pieces).<sup>17</sup> For Husserl, a dependent part cannot exist apart from the whole of which it is a part whereas an independent part can. If Øverenget is right, then Heidegger's denials that Dasein's being can be 'pieced together' or 'built up' from its structures can be understood as meaning, not that the latter are *parts* of the former, but that they are *independent* parts of it.<sup>18</sup>

The more complicated reply to this objection is that Dasein's being is not a conjunctive property at all but rather a special kind of complex property closely akin to a conjunctive one. It is 'special' in the sense that it is 'irreducible'. Let me explain.

Consider *knowledge*. The traditional definition of 'knowledge' is 'justified true belief'. Since Gettier's important and influential 1963 publication, a consensus has emerged that these three conditions, though individually necessary, are not jointly sufficient for knowledge. The jury is still out on whether or not 'knowledge' can be defined, but let us suppose, for the sake of argument, that (1) knowledge requires justified true belief but (2) there is no fourth, non-trivial condition such that adding it to justified true belief yields knowledge. In other words, although justification, truth, and belief are necessary for knowledge, there is no fourth, non-trivial necessary condition such that its conjunction with justification, truth, and belief is sufficient for knowledge.

If (1) and (2) are true, then one might argue that the property *being known* has other properties as parts (i.e., *being justified*, *being true*, and *being believed*), but it is not identical to the mere conjunction of those parts.

Moreover, there is no other property such that its conjunction with *being justified*, *being true*, and *being believed* is identical to *being known*. In other words, although *being known* is a property which has other properties as parts, it is not a conjunctive property of which those parts are conjuncts.

Let us call properties of this kind, if such there be, 'irreducible complex properties'. They are 'complex' because they 'involve' other properties in the same way that conjunctive properties 'involve' their conjuncts: the latter are parts of the former. They are 'irreducible' because the properties they involve are not jointly sufficient for composing them. An irreducible complex property is not identical to the mere conjunction of its parts. One reason to think that there are such properties is the fact that there are properties like *being known* for which we can identify individually necessary but not jointly sufficient conditions. The existence of irreducible complex properties would explain this phenomenon.

The second reply to this objection, then, is that Dasein's being is not a conjunctive property but rather an irreducible complex property. Like a conjunctive property, it has parts that are properties, and it is always co-instantiated along with its parts. Unlike a conjunctive property, however, it is irreducible to its parts. It is something 'over and above' them. If care is an irreducible complex property, then we can make sense of Heidegger's claim that Dasein's being has parts but cannot be 'pieced together' or 'built up' from these parts.

Which of these two replies we accept makes no difference to what I have to say in the sequel. To keep things simple, and because I am not entirely convinced that the notion of irreducible complex properties is coherent, I will assume the first and refer to Dasein's being as a conjunctive property, the conjuncts of which are its existentials. However, the reader should bear in mind that nothing I have said eliminates the possibility that Dasein's being is an irreducible complex property of the sort described above.

### 2.3 Other Kinds of Being

On my view, then, Dasein's being is a conjunctive property, the conjuncts of which are its existentials. What about the other kinds of being Heidegger countenances? What are they?

While it is clear that the structures (categories) of these kinds of being are properties of the entities which have these kinds of being (see §1.1), nowhere in *Being and Time* does Heidegger claim that these kinds of being are wholes of which their structures are parts. Accordingly, we cannot construct an argument analogous to the one offered in the last section to show that these kinds of being are properties. Nevertheless, the fact that Dasein's kind of being is a property suggests that these other kinds of being are too. Why should the latter differ from the former in this important respect?

At any rate, the case that kinds of being other than Dasein's are properties does not rest on analogy alone. There is also the following textual evidence that Heidegger understands these kinds of being (in particular presence-at-hand and readiness-to-hand) as properties.

First, Heidegger describes presence-at-hand and readiness-to-hand each as a 'characteristic' (*Charakter*) (*SZ*, pp. 73–4). If 'characteristic' and 'property' are synonyms, then it follows that presence-at-hand and readiness-to-hand are properties. Second, Heidegger states that presence-at-hand and readiness-to-hand 'characterize' (*charakterisieren*) entities (*SZ*, p. 230). As it is characteristics that characterize, just as it is runners that run and swimmers that swim, it follows that presence-at-hand and readiness-to-hand are characteristics. And since 'property' is just another word for 'characteristic', it also follows that they are properties. Third, Heidegger refers to readiness-to-hand as a 'determination' (*Bestimmung*) (*SZ*, p. 71). Since 'determination', like 'characteristic', is synonymous with 'property', it follows that readiness-to-hand is a property. And fourth, Heidegger writes that presence-at-hand and readiness-to-hand 'determine' (*bestimmen*) entities (*SZ*, p. 183).<sup>19</sup> Just as it is characteristics that characterize, it is determinations that determine. Since determinations are properties, it follows that presence-at-hand and readiness-to-hand are properties.

Keeping in mind the synonymy of 'characteristic', 'determination', and 'property', in the broadest senses of these terms, and the truisms that it is characteristics that characterize and determinations that determine, there is some textual evidence that Heidegger understands presence-at-hand and readiness-to-hand as properties. If Dasein's being and these two other kinds of being are all properties, then it stands to reason that all (specific) kinds of being are properties.

### 3. Second Argument

My first argument for the Property Thesis is based on the fact that Heidegger refers to kinds and structures of being as 'characteristics' and 'determinations', which are just two different words for 'properties'. My second argument is based on the fact that kinds and structures of being play three roles that properties are supposed to play: they account for similarities between entities, they are what predicates express, and they are what abstract nouns refer to. Since properties are just whatever 'things' play these roles, it stands to reason that kinds and structures of being are properties.

We are not expressly aware of properties in our everyday dealings with the world. We see trees, buildings, and other people; we touch books, cups, and keyboards; we hear birds, cars, and crickets. None of these are properties. It takes a certain level of abstraction to distinguish between this leaf and its greenness and between this book and its rectangularity, and even more to distinguish between this leaf's greenness and greenness in general and between

this book's rectangularity and rectangularity in general. In fact, properties are so out of the ordinary that many philosophers are tempted to do without them altogether. Why not suppose that the world of books and birds is all there is? While there are many reasons for believing in properties, three are relevant for our purposes.<sup>20</sup>

First, there is the problem of the 'one over the many'. Things are different from each other, but they are also similar. These two apples are not the same thing, but they are both red, round, and (of course) apples. Since Plato, many philosophers have held that such similarities between things must be rooted in something literally held in common between them – their properties. For every way in which two things are similar, there is some property which explains this similarity.

Second, there is the linguistic fact that our language contains two primary elements: subjects and predicates. The reference of subjects is fairly straightforward: they refer to whatever they name. In the sentence 'this frog is green', the subject ('this frog') refers to this frog. Don't predicates need something similar? Even if they don't *name* anything, as subjects do, then at least they *express* something. The 'things' they express we call 'properties'. In the sentence 'this frog is green', for example, the predicate 'is green' expresses the property *greenness*.

Third, the subjects of sentences do not always name run-of-the-mill stuff. In the sentence 'wisdom is a virtue', for example, to what does 'wisdom' refer? The traditional answer is a property. Properties are the 'things' named by subjects when those subjects are abstract nouns, like 'wisdom', 'virtue', 'greenness', and 'rectangularity'.

To sum up: properties are supposed to account for similarities between things, they are supposed to be what predicates express, and they are supposed to be what abstract nouns refer to. I am not suggesting that these are decisive reasons to countenance properties. Nominalism is not *that* easy to refute. They are, however, three well-known considerations that have led a great many philosophers to be realists about properties.

Now, consider kinds of being and their structures.

First, kinds of being correspond to similarities between things. One similarity between human beings, according to Heidegger, is care; all human beings are alike in this way. Likewise, one similarity between items of equipment is readiness-to-hand, and one similarity between material things is presence-at-hand. The structures of these kinds of being are also ways in which things are similar: existence, facticity, and falling are three ways in which human beings are alike; involvement is a way in which items of equipment are alike; and substantiality and materiality are ways in which material substances are alike.

Second, these similarities are expressed by predicates: human beings care, exist, and fall; items of equipment are ready-to-hand and involved; material

substances are present-at-hand, material, and substantial. These predicates express kinds and structures of being.

Third, kinds and structures of being are referred to by abstract nouns: 'care', 'existence', 'facticity', 'falling', 'readiness-to-hand', 'presence-at-hand', 'substantiality', 'materiality', 'life', 'subsistence', etc. Heidegger uses these nouns both in the subject position (e.g., care is the being of Dasein) and in the predicate position (e.g., items of equipment have readiness-to-hand). Either way, these abstract nouns refer to kinds and structures of being.

Kinds and structures of being play three roles that properties are supposed to play: they account for similarities between things, they are what predicates express, and they are what abstract nouns refer to. Heidegger treats kinds and structures of being exactly as we would expect him to if he understands them as properties, and this suggests that he *does* understand them as properties.

#### 4. Objections and Replies

The thesis that kinds and structures of being are properties is controversial, to say the least. In the context of discussing Heidegger's philosophy of being, Taylor Carman (2003, p. 200; cf. p. 124) writes that 'being is not a property of entities'; Stephen Mulhall (1996, p. 9; cf. p. 10) writes that 'Being is not a being, neither is it a type or property of beings'; and Herman Philipse (1998, p. 41) writes that 'Being is not *a* being, nor a property or characteristic of beings'. Hubert Dreyfus (1991, p. xi) claims that, according to Heidegger, the 'being' of entities is their 'intelligibility' and later says that 'Intelligibility is not a property of things' (1991, p. 257).<sup>21</sup> Kris McDaniel (2009, p. 302) argues that it seems 'inappropriate' to represent in first-order logic the various kinds (ways) of being Heidegger countenances by means of predicate letters, for 'this procedure assimilates attributing a way of being of a thing to predicating a property of that thing', and '[w]ays of being are not merely special properties that some entities have and that other entities lack'. Frederick Olafson (1987, pp. 135–6) writes that 'Heidegger makes it clear not only that being is not itself an entity, but also that it is not a property or an attribute of entities'. In Heidegger scholarship the consensus is that the Property Thesis is false. In this section I examine what I take to be the strongest reasons for thinking this and argue that none of them is persuasive.

##### 4.1 *Properties are Entities*

According to Heidegger, the 'being of entities 'is' not itself an entity' (*SZ*, p. 6).<sup>22</sup> Call this the 'Thesis of Ontological Difference'. If the Thesis of Ontological Difference is true, then being is *not* a property, for all properties are entities. The fact that denials of the Property Thesis go so often hand in hand with assertions of the Thesis of Ontological Difference suggests that this

is one of the main reasons why so many Heidegger scholars believe that, according to Heidegger, being is not a property.

The force of this objection depends what Heidegger means by 'entity'. 'Entity' is our translation of '*das Seiende*', which is translated more literally as 'what is' or 'that which is'. There is clearly a close connection between being an entity (*das Seiende*) and having being (*das Sein*). The question is, does saying that 'something' is an entity mean that it has a *specific* kind of being, or that it has *any* kind of being whatsoever, specific or generic? This depends on whether, according to Heidegger, anything can 'be' in the generic sense but have no specific kind of being. If there are any such 'things', then presumably kinds and structures of being are among them. And in that case, Heidegger can say that kinds and structures of being are properties but not entities without committing himself to an absurdity, for such 'things' would still 'be' in the generic sense.<sup>23</sup>

One might object that there is little (if any) evidence that Heidegger countenances 'things' that 'are' in the generic sense but not in any specific sense. But even so, since there is little (if any) evidence that he does *not* countenance them, this remains an open possibility. At any rate, even if Heidegger does not countenance such 'things', there is another way out of this objection: if Heidegger says that *being* is not an entity, in the sense that it has no kind of being whatsoever, specific or generic, then he can also say that *some properties* are not entities. Suppose, for example, that someone offers the following argument that all properties are entities: the sentence 'all properties are entities', when translated into the canonical notation of quantification, is ' $\forall x$  (if  $x$  is a property  $\rightarrow \exists y$  ( $x=y$ ))', which is a logical truth; therefore, anyone who denies that all properties are entities denies a logical truth.<sup>24</sup> But if the sentence 'all properties are entities' is correctly translated as ' $\forall x$  (if  $x$  is a property  $\rightarrow \exists y$  ( $x=y$ ))', then it stands to reason that the sentence 'being of any specific kind is an entity' is correctly translated as ' $\forall x$  (if  $x$  is being of some specific kind  $\rightarrow \exists y$  ( $x=y$ ))', which is also a logical truth. Since Heidegger denies that being (of any specific kind) is an entity, he will deny that this is a correct canonical translation of the sentence 'being of any specific kind is an entity'; and if he denies that, then he can deny that ' $\forall x$  (if  $x$  is a property  $\rightarrow \exists y$  ( $x=y$ ))' is a correct canonical translation of 'all properties are entities'.<sup>25</sup>

In short, any reason one can give for thinking that all properties are entities can be turned into a reason for thinking that being is an entity. Since Heidegger will reject the latter, he can reject the former.<sup>26</sup> Someone might point out that if kinds of being are properties but not entities, and some properties are entities (e.g., *redness* and *roundness*), then it follows that some properties are entities and some are not. In that case, what justifies us in calling 'things' of both types 'properties'? We already know the answer: 'things' are 'properties' in virtue of playing certain roles: they account for similarities between things, they are what predicates express, and they are what abstract

nouns refer to. If  $x$  and  $y$  play these roles, then  $x$  and  $y$  are properties, even if  $x$  is an entity but  $y$  is not.

#### 4.2 *Being is Not a Property*

There are a few places where Heidegger apparently denies that being is a property. In *Being and Time* he writes, 'Being and the structure of being lie beyond every entity and every possible existing determination [*seiende Bestimmtheit*] which an entity may possess' (SZ, p. 38, translation modified); and in the 'Postscript to "What is Metaphysics?"' he writes, 'Being...is not an existing quality [*seiende Beschaffenheit*] found in [entities]' (NWM, p. 306). If 'determination' and 'quality' are synonymous with 'property', in the broadest senses of these terms, then Heidegger himself seems to deny that being is a property.

Things are not what they seem. A careful examination of these sentences reveals an important ambiguity: Heidegger writes that being is not an *existing* (*seiende*) determination or quality of entities.<sup>27</sup> This is consistent with it being a *property* of entities, so long as it is a *non-existing* (*nicht-seiende*) property of them. We have just seen that Heidegger can countenance properties that are not entities (*nicht Seiende*), so surely he can countenance properties that are non-existing (*nicht-seiende*).<sup>28</sup> In fact, these two sentences are not just consistent with the view that, according to Heidegger, being is a non-existing property; they support it. If Heidegger believes that being is not a property *tout court*, then why does he use the adjective 'existing' (*seiende*) to qualify 'determination' and 'quality'? This qualification makes no sense unless Heidegger believes that being is a *non-existing* (*nicht-seiende*) property of entities.<sup>29</sup>

#### 4.3 *Structures of Being are Not Properties*

In *Being and Time* there are also some places where Heidegger seems to deny that structures of being (in particular, the structures of Dasein's being) are properties. For example:

[T]hose characteristics [*Charaktere*] which can be exhibited in [Dasein] are not present-at-hand 'properties' [*vorhandene 'Eigenschaften'*] of some present-at-hand entity which 'looks' so and so; they are in each case possible ways for it to be [*zu sein*], and no more than that. (SZ, p. 42, translation modified)

The German word translated here as 'properties', '*Eigenschaften*', has the connotation of being properties of a certain kind, namely concretized, sensible properties of material entities, like *redness* and *roundness*. Thus, Heidegger can be understood as denying, not that the structures of Dasein's being are

*properties*, but that they are properties *of a certain kind*. This interpretation is supported by the fact that he puts ‘*Eigenschaften*’ in scare quotes, which indicates that he has a specific sense of ‘property’ in mind, and also by the fact that he refers to the entity having these properties as one that “‘looks” so and so’, which suggests that the properties he has in mind are sensible ones. In fact, if ‘*Eigenschaften*’ is taken to refer, not to properties of some particular kind, but to properties in general, then Heidegger straightforwardly contradicts himself, for he says that certain characteristics are not properties, and ‘characteristic’ and ‘property’ are synonyms.<sup>30</sup> In adding that these characteristics are ‘possible ways for [Dasein] to be [zu sein], and no more than that’, Heidegger can be understood as saying that these characteristics make up the being of this entity. As he goes on to say, ‘All the being-as-it-is [So-sein] which this entity possesses is primarily being [Sein]’ (SZ, p. 42). Once again, it does not follow that these characteristics are not properties; what follows is that they are not properties of a certain kind, namely properties that do not make up the being of Dasein.

The other places where Heidegger apparently denies that the structures of Dasein’s being are properties contain similar ambiguities: they can be understood as denying, not that the structures of Dasein’s being are properties, but that they are properties of some particular kind (e.g., contingent, existing, present-at-hand, sensible, etc.).<sup>31</sup>

#### 4.4 *Only Present-at-Hand Entities Have Properties*

According to Heidegger, Dasein is not a present-at-hand entity (SZ, pp. 42–3). If only present-at-hand entities have properties, then Dasein’s being cannot be a property of Dasein, for Dasein has no properties. And if Dasein’s being is not a property, then it stands to reason that no kind of being is a property.

Nowhere does Heidegger say expressly that only present-at-hand entities have properties. Why, then, should anyone attribute this view to him? First, one might argue that only present-at-hand entities are substances, and only substances have properties. Second, one might argue that this view follows from Heidegger’s critique of ‘theory’. Let us consider each of these reasons in turn.

##### 4.4.1 *Only Substances Have Properties*

The thesis that, according to Heidegger, only present-at-hand entities are substances is supported by the fact that Heidegger identifies ‘substantiality’ as a structure of presence-at-hand together with the plausible assumption that structures of being are unique to the entities which have the kind of being to which those structures belong. Since Heidegger is clear that Dasein is not present-at-hand, it follows that Dasein is not a substance. This is supported further by Heidegger’s claims that the ‘self’ cannot be understood as a substance (SZ,

p. 332) and that entities with Dasein's kind of being cannot be conceived in terms of substantiality (SZ, p. 212).

Why think that substances alone have properties? One reason is based on the intimate connection there has been between the concepts 'substance' and 'property' throughout the history of Western philosophy. One of Aristotle's definitions of 'substance' is 'that which survives changes',<sup>32</sup> and a natural way of understanding 'change' is in terms of properties: something changes just in case it has a property at some time and lacks that property at another time. Locke understands 'substance' as a substratum (bare particular) in which the properties of a thing inhere.<sup>33</sup> And Hume thinks of substances as nothing more than bundles of certain sensible qualities (ideas),<sup>34</sup> which many philosophers would now understand as particularized properties (tropes). According to each of these three conceptions, a substance is a thing with properties.

But while each of these explains substances in terms of properties, there is nothing in any of them to make us believe that the converse is also true, i.e., that properties are explained in terms of substances. Moreover, there is at least one historically important definition of 'substance' that does not mention properties at all, namely Descartes' view that a substance is a thing that depends on nothing else in order to exist.<sup>35</sup> So, even if Heidegger understands 'substance' in one of these traditional senses, it does not follow that only substances have properties. We cannot conclude that only present-at-hand entities have properties on the grounds that only present-at-hand entities are substances.

#### 4.4.2 Heidegger's Critique of Theory

A different reason to think that only present-at-hand entities have properties is based on Heidegger's critique of 'theory', in particular, his account of how theorizing is not the only, or even the most fundamental, way of relating to entities other than ourselves.

According to Heidegger, 'proximally and for the most part', Dasein relates to entities other than itself as ready-to-hand. Most of the time humans are *practically* engaged in the world, using tools and other ready-to-hand entities to perform various tasks to achieve various ends. While this is the *primary* way in which human beings relate to entities other than themselves, it is not the *only* way: they can also relate to such entities *theoretically*. What Heidegger means by 'theory' and its cognates is an open issue but one characteristically theoretical activity that is that of *asserting*, i.e., forming conscious judgments about things. One of Heidegger's examples is judging that a hammer is too heavy when some task involving it gets interrupted on account of the hammer's being too heavy (SZ, p. 157). When this happens, the entity we were *using* (relating to practically) becomes something about which we *think* (relate to theoretically). Heidegger claims that the entity about which we think, after the shift from the practical to the theoretical mode, is no longer

ready-to-hand but merely present-at-hand. According to Heidegger, it is only now, once we are relating to the hammer as purely present-at-hand, that we are 'given any access to *properties* [*Eigenschaften*] or the like' (SZ, p. 158).

How is this supposed to show that only present-at-hand entities have properties? We must interpret Heidegger as saying that an entity has properties only when we are relating to it in the theoretical mode. Whenever some entity is *not* being related to in this way, it has no properties. If we assume that the entities we relate to theoretically are all and only present-at-hand, then it follows that only present-at-hand entities have properties.

There are three problems with this line of reasoning. First, it is implausible that an entity has properties only when someone is thinking about it. We should attribute this view to Heidegger only if there is good evidence that he believes it. Second, there is no evidence that he believes this. In the line quoted above, Heidegger says that 'we [are] given ... access to *properties* [*Eigenschaften*] or the like' only when we form a conscious judgment about something (e.g., 'the hammer is too heavy'). If by 'access to' Heidegger means something like 'awareness of', then his claim is simply that we are aware of a thing's properties only when we relate to that thing theoretically. This makes perfect sense, for, as noted earlier, we do not come across properties in our everyday, practical dealings with the world. But it does not follow from this that an entity *has* properties only when someone is thinking about it; an entity may, of course, have properties even if no one is thinking about it. Third, the claim that 'only present-at-hand entities have properties' follows from the claim that 'an entity has properties only when someone is thinking about it' only if it is true that 'we can think only about present-at-hand entities'. This last claim is false, for we can and do think about entities that are not present-at-hand. We can and do think about Dasein, for example, and Dasein is not present-at-hand.

#### 4.5 *Being is a Property of Properties*

Someone might object that, even if I have shown that, according to Heidegger, being is a *property*, I have not shown that it is a property of *individuals* (e.g., Daseins, hammers, rocks, etc.). Perhaps being is a property of *properties*, as some philosophers, following Frege, seem to understand it.<sup>36</sup>

One problem with this objection is that it is just false that, on the Fregean view, being is a property of properties.<sup>37</sup> Suppose, for the moment, that there is just one kind of being. On the Fregean view, or at least one common way of understanding it, the sentence 'cats have being' should be understood as 'the property *being a cat* is instantiated'. If this is correct, then being is not a property of individuals (e.g., cats). But neither is it a property of properties: the property *being instantiated* is not the same property as *being*, for something can *be* without *being instantiated*. Of course, philosophers who hold the

Fregean view of being sometimes say things like 'being is a property of properties', but what they really mean to say is 'talk about being should be understood as talk about properties of properties'.

Suppose, however, that someone insists that the Fregean analysis of being, properly understood, is correct, from which it follows that being is not a property. Would this count as an objection to my interpretation of Heidegger, according to which Heidegger holds that kinds of being are properties? By no means. This would count as an objection to Heidegger's account of being, if my interpretation is correct, but not to my interpretation of it. An objection to Substance Dualism, for example, does not count as an objection to an interpretation of Descartes according to which he is a Substance Dualist.

But suppose now that someone proposes that Heidegger himself holds the Fregean view of being. Someone might argue that all of Heidegger's claims leading us to believe that he understands being as a property can be reinterpreted as claims about certain properties being instantiated. Which properties? Presumably structures of being. To say that 'Dasein has care', on this view, is to say that 'the structures of care (existentials) are co-instantiated by Dasein'. As a point in its favor, this view makes sense of Heidegger's repeated claims that being is not an entity, for on this view it is *not* an entity – not even a property.

There are two problems with attributing the Fregean view of being to Heidegger. First, it makes no sense of Heidegger's claims that kinds of being are 'wholes' of which their structures are 'parts'. Second, even if this interpretation were consistent with what Heidegger says about being in *Being and Time*, which it isn't, this would show only that he *can* believe that kinds of being are not properties, not that he *does* believe this. For the latter we would need some evidence, and there isn't any.<sup>38</sup>

#### 4.6 Heidegger's Critique of Metaphysics

One might object that if the Property Thesis is true then *Being and Time* is a work in *metaphysics*, for the project of giving an account of the defining features (properties) of different kinds of entities is a distinctively metaphysical one. But Heidegger is not doing metaphysics in *Being and Time*, for he is trying to 'overcome' metaphysics in that work.

The success of this objection depends on what is meant by the 'metaphysics' Heidegger is trying to overcome in *Being and Time*. One place where Heidegger claims he is trying to overcome metaphysics in *Being and Time* is 'The Way Back into the Ground of Metaphysics'.<sup>39</sup> What does Heidegger mean there by 'metaphysics' and why must it be overcome? 'Metaphysics thinks entities as entities' (*EWM*, p. 365); 'Because metaphysics interrogates entities as entities, it remains concerned with entities and does not turn itself to being as being' (*EWM*, p. 366); 'Metaphysics, insofar as it always represents only

entities as entities, does not recall being itself' (*EWM*, p. 367). In sum, metaphysics concerns itself only with *entities*, not with *being*. Its lack of concern with the latter is why it must be overcome.

Does the Property Thesis imply that Heidegger is concerned only with entities and not with being in *Being and Time*? By no means. Heidegger's main concern in *Being and Time* is with identifying and describing various kinds and structures of being. If the Property Thesis is true, then these kinds and structures are *properties*, but they need not be *entities* (see §4.1). If we keep in mind that the Property Thesis is compatible with the view that kinds and structures of being are not entities, then it is clear that this thesis is consistent with the view that Heidegger is concerned primarily with being, not with entities, in *Being and Time*.<sup>40</sup>

One might object that there is nevertheless a very close relationship between properties and entities: properties are always properties *of* entities. So, even if kinds and structures of being are not entities, they are so closely connected to entities that the Property Thesis implies that Heidegger *is* doing metaphysics in *Being and Time* after all. But, in fact, there is no closer connection between properties and entities than there is between being and entities. Heidegger himself says that 'being is always the being of an entity' (*SZ*, p. 9), and much of *Being and Time* focuses on one particular kind of entity – Dasein. No one can think seriously that *Being and Time* is totally unconcerned with entities. What keeps it from being a work in 'metaphysics', in Heidegger's sense of the word, is that it is also, and primarily, concerned with being.

#### 4.7 What Heidegger Believes

Finally, someone might object that the arguments I have given in this paper show, not that Heidegger himself believes that being is a property, but only that he should believe this. For example, even if it is true that kinds and structures of being play the same roles that properties are supposed to play, from which it reasonably follows that kinds and structures of being are properties, it does not follow that Heidegger is aware of this. If anything, the fact that he never comes right out and tells us that being is a property suggests that he does not really believe this.

First, while it is true that Heidegger never tells us expressly that being is a property, he says a number of things which imply that this is how he thinks about it. For example, he refers to presence-at-hand and readiness-to-hand as 'characteristics' and 'determinations'. Second, the fact that the Property Thesis follows from other things Heidegger says (e.g., structures of being are characteristics; Dasein's being is a whole of which its structures are parts; etc.) gives us some evidence that he really believes this. If we see these inferences, then it stands to reason that he does as well. Third, even if it turns out that Heidegger does not himself hold the Property Thesis, the arguments in this paper are not

unimportant. The enormous interest in Heidegger is due, not to the man, but to his ideas. If Heidegger's account of being in *Being and Time* is best understood in terms of properties, then this is significant in its own right, regardless of what Heidegger himself really believes.

## 5. Conclusion

In closing, let me just mention one pragmatic reason for thinking (or at least hoping) that the Property Thesis is true: it removes an impediment standing in the way of analytic philosophers taking Heidegger's philosophy more seriously. Many analytic philosophers balk at talk of 'being', and even more at different 'kinds' and 'structures' of it. If what Heidegger refers to as 'kinds' and 'structures' of being are properties, then this obstacle can be removed, for analytic philosophers who struggle to understand 'being' are perfectly comfortable with talk about 'properties'.<sup>41</sup> If the Property Thesis is true, then Heidegger's account of being is a novel account of which properties different kinds of entities – especially human beings – have.<sup>42</sup> Once analytic philosophers are clear on which properties Heidegger is talking about, there can be constructive engagement between them and Heideggerians over whether or not entities really have these properties. If for no other reason, this makes the Property Thesis worth taking seriously.

Of course one might point out that the very same analytic philosophers who are comfortable with talk about 'properties' but not talk about 'being' will be none too happy with Heidegger's claim that these properties are not entities.<sup>43</sup> But in fact we have seen already that Heidegger's denial that these properties are entities is not tantamount to the claim that these properties have no kind of being whatsoever. It may be that these properties 'are' in the generic sense even if they lack any specific kind of being. Moreover, this is a problem only if it turns out that the Thesis of Ontological Difference – the claim that being is not an entity – is indispensable for Heidegger's philosophy of being, or at least its core. I think that this is not the case. Although Heidegger himself clearly maintains that kinds (and structures) of being are not entities, there are no good reasons for thinking this, and much of Heidegger's philosophy of being – including, by my lights, the most interesting parts – can get along just fine without it.

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### Notes

- 1 Works by Heidegger are cited in the text using the following abbreviations (see References list for complete bibliographic information):
  - EWM*: ‘Einleitung zu “What ist Metaphysik?”’, in *Wegmarken*, pp. 365–84. Translations of this work are by Walker Kaufman, ‘Introduction to “What Is Metaphysics?”’, in *Pathmarks*, pp. 277–90.
  - GP*: *Die Grundprobleme der Phänomenologie*.
  - NWM*: ‘Nachwort zu “What ist Metaphysik?”’, in *Wegmarken*, pp. 303–12. Translations of this work are by William McNeill, ‘Postscript to “What Is Metaphysics?”’, in *Pathmarks*, pp. 231–8.
  - SZ*: *Sein und Zeit*. Translations of this work are by Macquarrie and Robinson, *Being and Time*. Note that I have systematically lowercased the word ‘Being’ and, where appropriate, changed ‘being’ to ‘entity’.
- 2 ‘Entity’ is my translation of ‘*das Seiende*’. See §4.1 for a brief discussion of this term.
- 3 I will often talk about different ‘kinds of being’ when it would be more accurate to talk about ‘being’ of different kinds. What entities literally ‘have’ is *being* (of some kind or another), not *kinds* of being. Here is an analogy: we may speak loosely of someone having a certain kind of dog, but what he or she literally ‘has’ is a *dog* (of some particular kind), not a *kind* of dog.
- 4 Given the extensions of these kinds of being, one might wonder if, according to Heidegger, the very same entity can have more than one (specific) kind of being. For a recent discussion of this question, see McDaniel, 2013.
- 5 This raises two questions: First, can anything have the generic kind of being (beingness) but no specific kind of being? Second, is this generic kind of being what Heidegger refers to as ‘being as such’ (*Sein überhaupt*), the explication of which is the ultimate goal of the (unfinished) project of which *Being and Time* is but the first part (*SZ*, pp. 17, 27, 436–7)? These are difficult questions, and I cannot go into them here. For a short discussion of the first of these questions, see §4.1.
- 6 I take no stand on whether or not the generic kind of being (beingness) has structures.
- 7 One might object that ‘character of being’ is a better translation of ‘*Seinscharaktere*’ than ‘characteristic of being’. But, in fact, ‘character’ and ‘characteristic’ are, in this context, synonyms: ‘this ball has the character of being shiny’ means the same thing as ‘this ball has the characteristic of being shiny’. It is worth noting that Macquarrie and Robinson often translate ‘*Charakter*’ as ‘characteristic’. See, for example, their translations of *SZ*, pp. 42, 54, 63, 64.

- 8 My choice of 'property' is somewhat arbitrary. If someone objects to my use of this particular word, then I am happy to replace it with any of the following: 'aspect', 'attribute', 'characteristic', 'determination', 'feature', 'quality', or 'trait'.
- 9 For example, *Eigenschaften*, but not structures of being, might be understood as (metaphysical) 'parts' of the entities that have them.
- 10 The claim that structures of being are instantiated does not follow from the fact that structures of being are properties, for there might very well be uninstantiated properties. Rather, it follows from the fact that uninstantiated properties are unlikely to play a central role in an account of anything, including an account of being.
- 11 This claim is further supported by the fact that Heidegger refers to structures of being as 'characteristics' of entities. For example, he refers to existentiality, facticity, and being-fallen as 'fundamental ontological characteristics' (*fundamentalen ontologischen Charaktere*) of Dasein (*SZ*, p. 191).
- 12 If Dasein's being is care, and care is a whole of which existence, facticity, and falling are parts, then where do all of the other structures of Dasein's being (e.g., state-of-mind, understanding, discourse, etc.) fit in? They are parts of these three top-level structures.
- 13 More precisely, bundle theorists hold that properties are parts of whatever entities instantiate them, and these entities have no other (metaphysical) parts (e.g., a 'substratum' or 'bare particular').
- 14 While material substances provide the easiest illustrations for this view, a bundle theorist need not think that only material substances have metaphysical parts. If there are immaterial souls, for example, then a bundle theorist will understand their properties as (metaphysical) parts of them.
- 15 There are two worries here. First, one might object that not everyone countenances conjunctive properties or, if one does, believes that they are wholes of which their conjuncts are parts. This is irrelevant, for Heidegger might countenance such properties even if others do not. Second, one might argue that if *conjunctive* properties are complex properties, then so are *disjunctive* properties (e.g., *being either round or red*). Even so, Dasein's being is better understood as a conjunctive property, for anything which has Dasein's kind of being also has every structure belonging to that kind of being. This makes sense if Dasein's being is a conjunctive property but not if it is a disjunctive property.
- 16 Perhaps these parts cannot 'exist separately from each other' only in the sense that each of them cannot be instantiated unless all of the others are co-instantiated along with it.
- 17 An example of a moment (*Moment*) is the particular brownness of this particular table; an example of a piece (*Stück*) is a leg of this table. See Investigation III in Husserl, 1901.
- 18 Øverenget's thesis, if correct, also helps rebut the objection that Heidegger's talk of Dasein's being as a 'whole' of which its structure are 'parts' is not meant to be taken seriously. If Heidegger is really employing Husserl's mereological terminology, as Øverenget argues he is, then it stands to reason that his talk of 'parts' and 'wholes' is meant to be taken literally, not metaphorically. Thanks to Kris McDaniel for drawing this to my attention.
- 19 It is worth noting that Macquarrie and Robinson translate this sentence as saying that presence-at-hand and readiness-to-hand are 'attributes' of entities; 'attributes' is just another word for 'properties'.
- 20 Detailed discussions of these three reasons can be found in Loux, 1978.
- 21 It is worth noting that (a) Dreyfus (1991, p. xi) refers to being as 'a fundamental aspect of entities' (i.e., their intelligibility) ('aspect' is just another word for 'property'), and (b) after denying that intelligibility is a property of things, Dreyfus says

- that 'it is relative to Dasein' (1991, p. 257). Accordingly, one might interpret Dreyfus as denying, not that intelligibility is a *property*, but that it is a *non-relational* property.
- 22 Cf. *SZ*, pp. 4, 38, 230; *GP*, pp. 22, 109.
- 23 A consequence of this view is that the word 'entity' is not a maximally general count-noun. For this I have been using the word 'thing'.
- 24 A more might object that a better canonical translation of 'all properties are entities' is ' $\forall x$  (if  $x$  is a property  $\rightarrow x$  is an entity)', which is *not* a logical truth. This is irrelevant, for I offer this translation only to illustrate a point.
- 25 See fn. 26 for an explanation of what I mean in saying that Heidegger 'can' deny this.
- 26 In saying that Heidegger 'can' reject these reasons, I do not mean that he can do so coherently or even justifiably. What I mean is that doing so does not cause him any additional trouble than he already has in virtue of denying that being is an entity.
- 27 The word '*seiende*' is translated as 'existing' because there is no verbal adjective of the English verb 'to be'.
- 28 See fn. 26 for an explanation of what I mean by 'can' in this context.
- 29 What about Heidegger's apparent endorsement of the scholastic dictum that being is not a genus (*SZ*, p. 3)? Doesn't this suggest that he does not understand being as a property? Well, it might support the view that Heidegger does not understand 'beingness', the *generic* kind of being that applies to everything, as a property. But that is beside the point, for the Property Thesis is limited to *specific* kinds of being (e.g., care, readiness-to-hand, and presence-at-hand).
- 30 Moreover, Heidegger says that the characteristics of Dasein's being are not '*present-at-hand* properties'. If this refers to properties that are present-at-hand (i.e., have presence-at-hand as their kind of being), then Heidegger's statement is consistent with the claim that the characteristics of Dasein's being are *properties*, so long as they are *present-at-hand* properties.
- 31 For example, *SZ*, p. 133. The same is true of passages where Heidegger apparently denies that particular structures of Dasein's being are properties of Dasein (e.g., *SZ*, pp. 56–7, 176, 179).
- 32 *Categories*, 4a10–11.
- 33 *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Ch. 23, §§1–2.
- 34 *A Treatise of Human Nature*: Book I, Part 1, Section VI.
- 35 *Principles of Philosophy*, Part 1, §51.
- 36 Thanks to Kris McDaniel for raising this objection.
- 37 See note 6 in van Inwagen (2009b, p. 307).
- 38 Note that even if this interpretation of Heidegger is correct, it undermines only *half* of the Property Thesis. It is still true, on this interpretation, that *structures of being* are properties.
- 39 'The thinking attempted in *Being and Time* (1927) sets out on the way to prepare an overcoming of metaphysics' (*EWM*, p. 368).
- 40 A similar rejoinder can be given to another objection to my interpretation of Heidegger, namely that I treat him as engaged in an 'ontic' rather than 'ontological' enterprise: if 'ontic' inquiries are concerned with entities and 'ontological' ones with being, then, on my interpretation, Heidegger's enquiry is ontological. This objection assumes that all properties are entities, which, on my view, Heidegger denies.
- 41 This is true even of analytic philosophers who are nominalists. Analytic philosophers who deny the existence of properties nevertheless generally understand what properties are supposed to be.
- 42 Of course Heideggerians will insist that this account also concerns the *being* of these entities. Whether or not this is true is a different issue. We can easily imagine

some analytic philosophers agreeing with Heideggerians that entities do indeed have the properties Heidegger ascribes to them while disagreeing that these properties have anything to do with their 'being'. A position of this sort is suggested by Peter van Inwagen (2009a, p. 475fn.4; 2009b, pp. 287–9).

43 Thanks to Kris McDaniel for pressing me on this point.

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