



*A poor workman always blames his tools.  
~ Popular saying*

## 2. Religions as Something Present-at-Hand

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger focuses on the properties of existent beings, mostly those which have the kind of Being of Dasein, but he also is drawn by the logic of his inquiry to survey entities which do not have the kind of Being of Dasein, especially insofar as these latter have the Being of equipment. The intention in the remarks on equipment is to give a general, non-metaphysical account of situationally equipmental entities as their existence is determined by the existence of Dasein, and to this end, he proceeds to survey equipment not as it is in itself, but as it is experienced by concerned Dasein in its involvements with the world. A sense of the Being of equipment is relevant to the problematic of the relationship of religion and ideology because both religion and ideology are slated to be thematically treated as equipment in this essay.

Within the framework of *Being and Time*, equipment in the world of Dasein is conceived as liable to be experienced in one of two modes, as present-at-hand and as ready-to-hand. That equipment can be related to Dasein in these two ways meets the first epistemological problem of how religion and ideology as questions could come to our attention in the first place; it happens that *religion's* presence-at-hand called attention to the problem in this case, but, one suspects, on the other side of the world *ideology* could perform in much the same way. Regardless of whether the equipmental nature of religion or of ideology is discerned first, the next step should reveal that the problem is larger than just a single term. Before getting into the specific dynamics of the tension that appears to obtain between religion and ideology, let us consider what it means to say that religion and ideology can have the Being of equipment.

"The kind of Being which equipment possesses — in which it manifests itself in its own right — we call '*readiness-to-hand*.'"<sup>1</sup> It is the nature of equipment that it be put to use, Heidegger claims, and it is only in being put to use that equipment can realize itself as being ready-to-hand. Readiness-to-hand, which is not simply usability (but which includes usability), is primarily a relationship of equipment to Dasein in which the equipment functions unobtrusively. "Unobtrusiveness" is not just an arbitrary matter of taste; it belongs categorically to the Being of equipment. Dasein itself is the origin of the Being of equipment; it is, in other words, the referential center for "equipment." Citing as an example the hammer, which he imag-

ines showing itself most genuinely as hammer when it is being put to its intended use (in this case, hammering), Heidegger demonstrates that an experience of the readiness-to-hand of equipment is one that virtually any entity with the Being of Dasein will have had, with the lone possible exception of the "primitive man."<sup>2</sup> We are expected to be able to identify readily and understand without rigorous explanation what he is talking about here. Because this element of readiness-to-hand is constitutive of the Being of a hammer (which is being understood ontologically as equipment whose reason-to-be is hammering), it is the case that any given hammer is "more of a hammer" when it is being put to use than when it is just lying around. The hammer, which is ontologically defined as a tool, was never intended just to lie around and thus it cannot fulfill itself as equipment by manifesting itself as a tool when it is not at work.

It is significant for the religion/ideology problematic that a necessity to be at work pervades the Being of the tool (as tool) as far as Dasein is concerned. If, as I am explicitly contending in this study, actual religions and ideologies can be beneficially and truthfully imagined as symbolic equipment, or tools essentially-metaphorically like the hammer, but of a different order, then they would be subject to the same basic conditions as more tangible tools; in this case, there is an implication that it is an ontological necessity, arising out of their existentially-and culturally-determined natures, for both religions and ideologies to be put into practice. When they cannot be put into practice readily, then they are bound to come to presence as problems. When religions and ideologies cannot be put into practice at all, they come to presence as curiosities.

The hammer's Being as hammer is determined in this ontology by its primarily equipmental nature. The nature of equipment, for its part, appears on closer analysis to be ontologically defined for Heidegger in the equipment's having an unquestionable reason to be as it is. This reason to be is the equipment's "towards-which."<sup>3</sup> The towards-which of something is defined for Heidegger by the specific involvement of the item of equipment within the primordial-given totality of involvements that makes up the worldhood of the world. As Heidegger construes it, the "towards-which" is essentially the understood purpose, or serviceability, of a thing, but this purpose is not limited to Dasein's concernfully anticipated tasks at hand for which the tool might be used; the tool is ultimately brought into play for the purpose of the presencing of the Present (a