

**a response to sheehan's  
attempted paradigm shift in  
heidegger studies**

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This paper is a first response to Thomas Sheehan's recently published book *Making Sense of Heidegger: A Paradigm Shift*.<sup>1</sup> In the first part of this paper I address Sheehan's attack on the hypostatization of being on the one hand and his radical shift towards meaning and intelligibility on the other hand. I claim that while Sheehan's critique may serve as a certain corrective in Heidegger scholarship, his proposed solution to eliminate "being" from the lexicon of Heidegger's philosophy is not warranted at all. In the second part of the paper I look at Sheehan's proposed paradigm shift in relation to the paradigm it is meant to replace. Here I claim that Sheehan's new paradigm is not as radically new as he makes it out to be, and I point out severe shortcomings in his argumentation for the new paradigm. In the last part of the paper I discuss Sheehan's concept of meaning, which I believe can help to start a much needed discussion in Heidegger scholarship.<sup>2</sup>

**PART I — FROM HYPOSTATISED BEING TO MEANING AND  
INTELLIGIBILITY**

Let me begin by saying that I believe that Sheehan's study contains so many important insights and precise observations, and asks so many probing, inconvenient, and provocative questions that it will become a mainstay in future Heidegger scholarship, regardless of whether or not Sheehan's main objectives, first and foremost the establishment of a new Heidegger paradigm, can be vindicated

in the end.

Sheehan's new interpretation is fundamentally directed against the view that the kind of *being* at issue in Heidegger's philosophy can be isolated and hypostatized, as if it were something absolute, something above all beings and entities, a mysterious super-being<sup>3</sup> with an agency of its own, in short, "a supra-human Cosmic Something."<sup>4</sup> Sheehan's rejection of all interpretations that attribute to Heidegger such a mystical "Sein-ology"<sup>5</sup> or "crypto-metaphysics"<sup>6</sup> constitutes the negative foil for his own careful reconstruction of the ineluctable and intrinsic correlation and reciprocity between Dasein and *Sein* in Heidegger's philosophy.

However, Sheehan spares himself the effort to record and carefully evaluate how pervasive the critiqued tendency is, and he does not find it necessary to name at least the more prominent offenders in this category. The impression Sheehan sometimes gives as if Heidegger scholarship as such, or to a large extent, has been in the grip of a mystical misreading of Heidegger is surely an unacceptable exaggeration on his part. The same holds for the insinuation that all attempts at interpreting Heidegger from the centrality of the concept of being are destined to end up in some mystification of being.<sup>7</sup> In other words, there is rhetorical overkill in Sheehan's attack, reflecting negatively on the credibility of his overall project.

Nonetheless, I think that Sheehan is quite successful at showing that for Heidegger, being [*Sein*] is indeed no absolute and no stand-in for an absolute either. Instead, being stands in correlation with humans. This "correlativity" is constitutive for Heidegger's basic take on being; there is no being as such outside this correlation with the human or with Dasein. Sheehan adduces ample textual evidence for this claim. The quotes that Sheehan puts together speak for themselves: "It is with us human beings that *Sein* comes into play," and "*Das Sein*: that which happens only and specifically in man," and "There can be no *Sein des Seienden* without man."<sup>8</sup> Moreover, in *Die Grundprobleme der Phänomenologie* we read: "There is being only if there is understanding of being [*Seinsverständnis*], that is to say, if Dasein exists."<sup>9</sup> In more elevated language Heidegger even says: "Being is the atmosphere we breathe, without which we would descend to [the level of] the mere beast."<sup>10</sup> Strict reciprocity between being and man is affirmed in this passage in the *Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis)*: "Being [*Seyn*] needs man in order that it may be [*wese*], and man belongs to being [*Seyn*] in order that he achieves his fullest determination as Da-sein."<sup>11</sup> According to Sheehan, "the necessary correlation of being and man"<sup>12</sup> is the thread that runs through all of Heidegger's works,

from his early interest in Aristotle,<sup>13</sup> his appropriation of Husserl,<sup>14</sup> the conception of *Being and Time*,<sup>15</sup> and all subsequent works.<sup>16</sup>

Of course the prominent role of this correlativity in Heidegger's work is a well-established trope in Heidegger scholarship, which is something that Sheehan fails to acknowledge, because of his egregious misjudgement to sidestep almost all engagement with existing scholarship.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, Sheehan also passes up the opportunity to reflect on the recently brought up new challenges to the idea of correlativity in modern philosophy at large, and in phenomenology and Heidegger in particular.<sup>18</sup> But without such critical engagement, Sheehan's bland defence of the correlativity in Heidegger faces the danger of appearing dogmatic, even antiquated, and not pitched at the appropriate level of theoretical sophistication.

In any case, Sheehan is not content with the mere rebuttal of the mistaken hypostatization of being or the firm establishment of the alternative thesis of the foundational correlativity of man and being. In fact, Sheehan argues for a much more radical and, it must be said, much more contestable position, namely that, contrary to the received view, being as such is not really Heidegger's main topic at all.<sup>19</sup> According to Sheehan, in Heidegger's works the term "being" connotes "the meaningful presence" of things to humans, that is, the presence of things "within the worlds of human interests and concerns, whether those be theoretical, practical, aesthetic, religious, or whatever."<sup>20</sup> For humans there is no being as such outside or beyond these humanly intelligible worlds; there are only these meaningful things as encountered in the world.<sup>21</sup>

But this cannot be right, for Heidegger takes great pains to distinguish between meaningful things and entities on the one hand and being on the other hand. In *Sein und Zeit*, Heidegger holds that being is, first, that which "determines every entity as an entity" and, second, that with regard to which entities are always already "discussed" and "understood."<sup>22</sup> In fact, this difference between being and beings or entities is codified as the "ontological difference" in *Die Grundprobleme der Phänomenologie* where Heidegger writes that "being is essentially different from entities," and that it is, therefore, not an entity itself.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, Heidegger insists that being is "what is transcendent *simpliciter*."<sup>24</sup> Therefore, the straightforward identification of being with meaningful things as they show up in the world contradicts Heidegger's own text.

Nevertheless, one might be tempted to argue that Heidegger's existential concept of the *world* delineates it as the meaningful horizon "in" which Dasein encounters things, namely as "determined" by it, which, given Heidegger's idea of being outlined above, seems to imply that the world as such, though not the meaningful things in it, would be the equivalent to being. Sheehan exploits just this possible equivalence [world = being] for his interpretation, correctly noting that Heidegger understands the world as a nexus of meaning and "meaningfulness" [*Bedeutsamkeit*].<sup>25</sup> Thus things would acquire their meaning/significance or their "determination" in light of which they are "discussed" by assuming a place within the world in which they show up for humans. On this basis Sheehan implies that (1) "being" is another term for "the world;"<sup>26</sup> and, (2), since the world is the meaningful context or intelligibility of things, that "being" is then equivalent to "meaningfulness" or "intelligibility" as such.<sup>27</sup>

However, the equivalence of world = meaningfulness = being is nowhere affirmed or espoused by Heidegger, even though it is certainly true that Heidegger thinks that the world is meaningful. Therefore, what Sheehan could argue *at most* is that the world affords us a certain approximation or schema of being, although being cannot be identified with any particular world in the past or present. In any case, an in-depth discussion of this would be helpful in order to ground Heidegger's conception of being in something more tangible and real, for Heidegger certainly did not think that being was just an abstraction. Yet Sheehan is not content with exploring this possible equivalence or analogy between *world* and *being* in Heidegger's thought. Instead, he pursues how the world's *meaningfulness* and *significance* is the model and even the *real subject matter* of Heidegger's philosophy, for as we have seen Sheehan argues that being is Heidegger's term for meaningfulness or intelligibility.

As every reader of *Being and Time* knows, Heidegger vacillates already on the first pages of this work between making "being," the "meaning of being," and even "the expression" of being the issue of his philosophy.<sup>28</sup> In line with the correlativity thesis one might argue that Heidegger is really after the "meaning of being," because meaning is the third term that mediates between "being" and "man." Indeed, that Heidegger is not after *being per se*, but after the *meaning of being* is a perfectly acceptable thesis in my view. But Sheehan is not arguing along these lines at all. For him, the issue is not the "meaning of being" or the "understanding of being" or the "interpretation of being," but rather "meaningfulness" or "intelligibility" as such.

Although Sheehan often repeats his thesis that “being = realness = meaningfulness” “is Heidegger’s own,”<sup>29</sup> he provides no textual evidence whatsoever for this extraordinary interpretation. Nor does he adduce any reference in support of this interpretation from the existing body of Heidegger scholarship. Unimpressed by this embarrassing deficit, Sheehan attempts to patch up his position by “translating” Heidegger’s word “being” by the English word “meaningful presence,” or “significance,” or “intelligibility.”<sup>30</sup> This is as unprecedented as it is blatantly false, for “being” never means “intelligibility” or “significance,” or even “meaningful presence.” Sheehan’s translational legerdemain obviously fails to make up for the lack of textual evidence in his argumentation. Not only does this “translation” generate plenty of quotes where Heidegger talks about “meaning,” although in reality he talks about “being,” but it also serves another purpose. For if the very word “being” is expunged from Heidegger’s lexicon, one can certainly not fall into the error of reifying it. But one cannot help feeling that Sheehan is here throwing out the baby with the bathwater.

In support of his thesis that “being” must be interpreted and translated as “meaningfulness” or “intelligibility,” Sheehan claims that it follows from Heidegger’s commitment to phenomenology and the phenomenological reduction. Thus Sheehan argues: “For Heidegger, *Sein* in all its forms is always written under phenomenological erasure—that is, under the aegis of phenomenological reduction of things to their meaningfulness to man.”<sup>31</sup> The idea is that after executing the phenomenological reduction we deal with meanings only and that meaningfulness is the only thematic left. But that is not even true for Husserl. For instance, the *Crisis* work does not deal with “meaningfulness as such,” or even the “meaning of science,” because modern science is not determinable without its historical genesis and its ontic-historical facticity in the world. Moreover, Husserl always insists that after the reduction we are still dealing with what is given to the natural attitude.

Sheehan is of course right in insisting that phenomenology is important to Heidegger, especially phenomenology’s careful attention to the appearing of things. Yet it is quite doubtful that Heidegger ever subscribed to the Husserlian kind of phenomenological reduction as invoked by Sheehan. In *Being and Time* Heidegger famously discusses the phenomenological method without any reference whatsoever to the reduction.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, Sheehan’s bold claim that “the only entrance into Heidegger’s work is through the phenomenological reduction”<sup>33</sup> is nowhere supported by Heidegger himself. There is neither textual evidence nor explicit

testimony by Heidegger which would verify Sheehan's thesis. It does not follow from this that Heidegger is philosophizing in the "natural attitude." In fact, in *Grundprobleme der Phänomenologie* Heidegger does endorse an *ontological* reduction, leading beings and entities back to being. And although Heidegger even calls this a "phenomenological reduction," he is quick to distinguish it from Husserl's, as it is not, *nota bene*, a reduction to "transcendental consciousness and its noetic-noematic lived experiences."<sup>34</sup> Indeed, as if to contradict Sheehan's assertion directly, Heidegger immediately adds after the quoted sentence that in any case the method of reduction is neither the "only" nor even "the central" piece of his method.<sup>35</sup> Sheehan's broad and unqualified subsumption of Heidegger's work under the banner of Husserlian phenomenology is simply not borne out by Heidegger's texts, nor does it agree with recent Heidegger research which has shown not only Heidegger's critique of Husserl, but also the heavy hermeneutical inflection in Heidegger's philosophizing.<sup>36</sup>

In fairness to Sheehan, he does acknowledge a hermeneutical side in Heidegger too. According to Sheehan, "being-in-the-world" entails being-in "meaningfulness," or being engaged with "intelligibility," which means that as humans "we are ineluctably hermeneutical," or even "pan-hermeneutical."<sup>37</sup> But for Sheehan "being hermeneutical" means nothing more than the levelled-down idea that we as humans happen "to make sense" of things and that we "cannot *not* make sense" of the things we encounter.<sup>38</sup> The particular anti-Cartesian and historical dimension opened up by hermeneutics and adopted by Heidegger is thus entirely lost in Sheehan's interpretation. In fact, in stark contrast to hermeneutics and Heidegger's own adoption of it, Sheehan sees "sense-making" as the prerogative of the isolated thinking subject. He writes:

Even if I get information about a thing from someone else, it is still *I* who get that information in the first person. (This is the unavoidable truth of Descartes' *ego cogito*.) And no matter where I get the information from, I cannot *not* make sense of it. (In other words, human being is pan-hermeneutical.)<sup>39</sup>

It is rare that Descartes' placeless and timeless *cogito* figures as an exemplification of hermeneutical philosophy, and indeed Heidegger's!

However, retiring the notion of "being" and replacing it by "meaning," or "meaningfulness," or "intelligibility" is only the first step in Sheehan's interpretation. He

also argues that what Heidegger really is after is the “meta-metaphysical question” of “what accounts for such intelligibility at all.”<sup>40</sup> This, then, is the real research topic of Heidegger, and not being or the meaning of being, as so many readers of Heidegger have thought. The inquiry into the possibility of intelligibility replaces what in the former Heideggerian idiom was a question about being: “How is (...) being possible and necessary at all?”<sup>41</sup> For Sheehan, Heidegger’s answer is a third term, “the open” [*Offene*], or “the thrown-open domain” [*Entwurfbereich*], or “the clearing” [*Lichtung*],<sup>42</sup> or “the appropriated clearing” [*Ereignis*],<sup>43</sup> or, especially in his later writings, the “place” and “*Ort/Ortschaft/topos*,”<sup>44</sup> also circumscribed as something like an open region, “the expansive countryside” [*die Gegend*] where things show up for humans.<sup>45</sup> This “openness” or “open space”<sup>46</sup> first enables the encounter in and through which humans experience, find, and think entities and their being, or, rather, in Sheehan’s reinterpretation, find the meaning and intelligibility of things or intelligibility as such. By means of this open space humans also think and define their own being or meaning, which is precisely the very hermeneutic pivot of the intrinsic relatedness that unites humans with being or, as Sheehan would have it, meaning.

Having thus identified the *terminus ad quem* of Heidegger’s research as “‘the open space’ or clearing within which the meaningful presence of things can occur,” Sheehan claims that this phenomenon stands at the centre of all of Heidegger’s research.<sup>47</sup> Moreover, he asserts that it is this “same phenomenon” that Heidegger merely baptizes differently in different periods of his career as a writer.<sup>48</sup> Thus Sheehan provides a long list of German terms (together with his translations) that allegedly describe “the same phenomenon,” i.e., the open:<sup>49</sup>

Appropriation	<i>Ereignis</i>
Thrownness	<i>Geworfenheit</i>
thrown-openness	<i>der geworfene Entwurf</i>
the thrown-open realm	<i>der Entwurfbereich</i>
the essence of human being	<i>Existenz or Da-sein</i>
the clearing	<i>die Lichtung</i>
the appropriated clearing	<i>die ereignete Lichtung</i>
the open	<i>das Offene</i>

As one can see, Sheehan casts the net wide indeed. And the obvious problem is whether the breadth is bought at the price of analytic yield. Even if “openness” is

the core meaning in all of these key terms, the differences are just as striking. Of course Sheehan acknowledges the crucial differences in the various formulations of “the open,” but he identifies one definitive focal meaning of these different ways of talking about “the open.” According to Sheehan, the focal meaning of “the open” is human Da-sein, understood as human subjectivity. Thus Sheehan writes: “Metaphorically speaking, as thrown-open (i.e., appropriated), human being is the “open space” or clearing within which the meaningful presence of things can occur.”<sup>50</sup> And to make sure that no one misses the point he immediately adds in parenthesis that this just quoted “sentence is Heidegger’s philosophy in a nutshell.”<sup>51</sup> Clearly, Sheehan assumes that what is a proper characterization of “the open” in *Being and Time* fits all other works by Heidegger as well.

But even if one grants Sheehan that “the open” is the “*to pragma auto*”<sup>52</sup> “of all Heidegger’s work,”<sup>53</sup> it will not do to fix its meaning in terms of *Being and Time*. It speaks volumes that Sheehan nowhere engages later Heidegger’s topological thought on the fourfold or the open region,<sup>54</sup> although it is Sheehan himself who emphasizes the “open space” as the central concept in Heidegger. By blocking out this part in Heidegger’s work, Sheehan effectively concedes that, contrary to his plan, the real scope of his study is not Heidegger’s entire *oeuvre*. Instead, it is a very partial view on Heidegger’s work from the assumed centrality of *Sein und Zeit*.

## PART II: SHEEHAN’S NEW PARADIGM

Sheehan attempts nothing less than to overturn what he considers the reigning paradigm in contemporary Heidegger scholarship.<sup>55</sup> This paradigm divides an early “Heidegger I” from a later “Heidegger II.” Opposing this view, Sheehan argues that “Heidegger II” is neither “a fundamental departure” from Heidegger I, nor is he “a retrieval of the earlier” Heidegger I.<sup>56</sup> Instead, Sheehan finds “unity and continuity of Heidegger’s thought”<sup>57</sup> by identifying one umbrella theme governing the “whole of Heidegger.” This central theme is not being, but, as we have seen, “meaningfulness and its source.”<sup>58</sup>

Sheehan’s new paradigm of the essential unity and continuity throughout Heidegger’s works challenges head-on what Bill Richardson, his intellectual mentor, put forward, namely the alleged division between Heidegger I and Heidegger II. In other words, Sheehan’s new paradigm comes with all the trappings of a classical patricide, executed with due care, and also including the obligatory and heart-

felt dedication to William Richardson—“gentleman and scholar *sans pareil*,” “in respect and gratitude.”<sup>59</sup> However, the irony is that Sheehan’s interpretation is actually much more indebted to Richardson than one would think at first blush, namely negatively in what Sheehan contests, and positively in what he affirms.

For, when all is said and done, Sheehan’s new paradigm affirms more or less what Richardson’s “Heidegger I” stands for, while it delegates most of “Heidegger II” to the sidelines as either irrelevant, or philosophically untenable. To begin with the negative side, since it is Sheehan’s general claim that “Heidegger’s philosophy was not in pursuit of *Sein* at all,”<sup>60</sup> it follows that Sheehan cannot make room for Heidegger II who seems ever more concerned with being, the fate of being, and even the different spellings of it, *Sein*, or *Seyn*, or *Seyn*. Indeed, Sheehan flatly asserts that Heidegger “would have been better off without that story [of the history of being].”<sup>61</sup> Continuing in the same vein, he also sees no merit whatsoever in Heidegger’s critique of technology and modernity. He rejects these writings as “outside the pale of serious discussion.”<sup>62</sup> Concerning the other works of later Heidegger, Sheehan has nothing to say. In other words, Sheehan either dismisses or disregards and ignores the signature developments in “Heidegger II,” which means that “Heidegger I” alone is the focus of his new paradigm. Put differently, Sheehan passes off “Heidegger I” as the whole of Heidegger. Even with a fair measure of charity, one cannot help but think that this is not a new paradigm, but half a paradigm at best.

Turning now to the positive side of Sheehan’s dependence on Richardson, we should note that Sheehan and Richardson agree on Heidegger’s underlying so-called phenomenological outlook, from his early beginnings to his last writings. In fact, Richardson explicitly states that, notwithstanding his later transition to the thought of being, “Heidegger’s perspective from beginning to end remains phenomenological.”<sup>63</sup> Sheehan concurs with this, claiming that “Heidegger’s work was phenomenological from beginning to end.”<sup>64</sup> Here, the new paradigm turns out to be the old one!

However, unlike Richardson, Sheehan casts Heidegger’s allegedly constant phenomenological tendency in terms of “Heidegger I” alone. For instance, Sheehan correctly notes that Heidegger dropped his former phenomenological “transcendentalism” which lent itself to the dangerous misinterpretation as if being or “the clearing” were constituted by transcendental subjectivity. But Sheehan’s subsequent account of later Heidegger’s re-conceptualization of “the clearing” as an

“a priori fact,”<sup>65</sup> and as *Ereignis* amounts to nothing more than a new version of Heidegger’s old concept of facticity and “thrownness”<sup>66</sup>—in *Being and Time*. In other words, to the extent that Sheehan notes a positive development after *Being and Time*, he sees it as a mere clarification and “re-inscription” of what we already have in early Heidegger.<sup>67</sup>

No doubt, Sheehan’s chosen hero is “Heidegger I.” This bias in favour of *Being and Time* permeates his whole interpretation. At the end of his book, Sheehan summarizes Heidegger’s overall contribution to philosophy as follows:

Heidegger’s philosophical work stands, and may endure for a while, as the text in which radical human freedom was shown to be the ungroundable ground of the phenomenal world we inhabit.<sup>68</sup>

This characterization may be true of one of Heidegger’s works, i.e., *Being and Time*, but only if one reads this book as an existentialist treatise, which is precisely what Sheehan does, and Heidegger always rejects.<sup>69</sup> Moreover, in the face of Heidegger’s clear protestations to the contrary, Sheehan argues that both Sartre and Heidegger share the interest in human freedom and finitude.<sup>70</sup> Sheehan writes: “Personal freedom in Heidegger is every bit as radical as freedom in Sartre, and every bit as groundless and absurd.”<sup>71</sup> Conceding that Heidegger had disagreed with Sartre on this very issue in the “Letter on Humanism,” Sheehan boldly argues that Heidegger is “a bad reader of Sartre,” unable to see the commonality between his view and Sartre’s because of his (Heidegger’s) unfortunate overrating of the question of being. Thus Sheehan asserts that:

‘Being’ is not some ‘higher dimension’ added on to and surpassing existence. It [i.e., being] is simply what we do, finitely and mortally, in our groundless freedom.”<sup>72</sup>

I doubt that Heidegger would be willing to entertain this at any stage of his career. But the quote shows that Sheehan reads all of Heidegger’s work through the prism of a rather existentialistically interpreted *Being and Time*. In fact, Sheehan himself claims that “*Being and Time* had already laid out the basic pattern that would remain unchanged *in its essentials* for the remainder of Heidegger’s career.”<sup>73</sup> In other words, “Heidegger I” is the whole of Heidegger. “Heidegger II” is either an inconsequential afterthought or a mere continuation of “Heidegger I.” But Sheehan arrives at this by simply ignoring most of what “Heidegger II” has written.

Sheehan's entirely unwarranted privileging of *Being and Time* in Heidegger's overall work is one thing. His concomitant bias for an existentialistically conceived subjectivity is quite another. Reading Sheehan's new paradigm one could believe that Heidegger's main achievement was the apology of modern subjectivity. Thus Sheehan writes:

Modern subjectivity, in and of itself, is a glorious fact that should be celebrated, along with all its humanizing achievements, including calculative thinking, scientific discoveries, and technological advances. Heidegger's grounding of such subjectivity in the finite and mortal clearing in no way puts the brakes on such achievements.<sup>74</sup>

As far as I can see, Heidegger never was a champion of calculative thinking or the principle of subjectivity. Instead, he gladly sided with Yorck von Wartenburg's harsh verdict that "modern man" and the principle of subjectivity had run their course. Quoting Wartenburg at length Heidegger writes in *The Concept of Time*:

The ripple effects caused by the eccentric principle, which ushered in a new age more than four hundred years ago, seem to have become exceedingly broad and flat; knowledge has advanced to the point of nullifying itself, and man has become so far removed from himself that he no longer catches sight of himself. 'Modern man,' that is man since the Renaissance, is fit for the grave."<sup>75</sup>

Heidegger inserts the exact same quote in *Sein und Zeit*, as well as his public lectures on Dilthey in 1925.<sup>76</sup> It is not a view that Heidegger ever changes as the recently published *Black Notebooks* demonstrate. Sheehan finds all this anti-modernism in Heidegger so distasteful that he does not bother to engage it or account for it. In fact, Sheehan brushes aside Heidegger's philosophical texts addressing the devastating impact of modern technology and modernity as a "Solzhenitsyn-like jeremiad against modernity."<sup>77</sup> Here Sheehan's own philosophical commitment to the project of modernity and subjectivity gets in the way of a fully comprehensive and fair account of Heidegger.

### PART III — SHEEHAN ON MEANING

I want to return to Sheehan's account of meaning in Heidegger. That meaning is of importance in Heidegger's work is pretty uncontroversial. However, that

meaning is of overriding significance or that it is the sole subject matter in Heidegger's work is unconvincing as I have argued above. There is no textual basis for this and systematically it does not make sense, *pace* Sheehan. For instance, one would hardly get different meanings of what it means to be—Da-sein, ready-to-hand, present-at-hand, the fourfold, the enframing, the gathering, to name but a few—by simply analysing meaning or the meaning of meaning or the source of meaning! There is no purchase for an analysis of meaning or intelligibility as such, as meaning is always the meaning of something or other, of things, of Dasein, of contexts in which we live, etc. In other words, an analysis of what *is* there, or an analysis of what we actually encounter *in its being* in the world is the necessary starting point. In short, an *ontology* or *life-world* analysis is inescapable. One cannot simply jump to the level of meaning as such. If one does, one deals in abstractions only.

Even if we grant Sheehan's rather non-phenomenological argument that "at least since Homo sapiens came on the scene some 200,000 years ago, 'to be' has meant to 'to be meaningful,'"<sup>78</sup> it does not follow that "being" can be replaced by "meaningfulness." All it could suggest is that what is at issue is the "meaning of being," which is not the same as "meaningfulness as such."

As we have seen, a linchpin in Sheehan's argument is that Heidegger discovers meaning through phenomenology, in particular the "phenomenological reduction," because it opens up the field of meaning in which things become manifest to humans.<sup>79</sup> I have discussed above why I think that Sheehan's attribution of a Husserlian reduction to Heidegger is untenable. Here I want to note that while it is true that intentionality and meaning, understood as an achievement of consciousness, come to the fore by way of the phenomenological reduction, it does not follow that meaning, and in particular meaningfulness, is the prerogative of philosophical or phenomenological reflection alone.<sup>80</sup> In fact, it is clear that even Husserl holds that what is experienced in the natural attitude is precisely not a disparate assortment of mere things, but the meaningful and rich texture of personal interactions, engagements, and projects, all of which are undertaken within the familiar, meaningful world inhabited by acquaintances, friends, and foes, etc. In the natural attitude we deal with various tools and implements, as they are used in long-standing practices, habits, traditions, and so on. Meaning [*Bedeutung*] or meaningfulness [*Bedeutsamkeit*] is not at all a second-order phenomenon, which comes to light by means of the phenomenological *epoché* only. Rather, it is a first-order experience, readily understood and constantly "lived" by each one of

us, simply in virtue of being-in-the-world.

This idea is developed in great detail by Dilthey's descriptions of the objective arrangements, practices, and traditions, in which and through which our lives are shaped, formed, understood, interpreted, and have meaning. As Dilthey puts it:

We live in this atmosphere [of intelligibility, IF], it constantly surrounds us. We are immersed in it. Everywhere we are at home in this historical and intelligible world, we understand the sense and meaning [*Sinn und Bedeutung*] of all of it, we are interwoven into these shared understandings.<sup>81</sup>

The ubiquitous hermeneutical experience Dilthey describes here is precisely Heidegger's concept of intelligibility too. Like Dilthey, Heidegger takes the very categories with which the experiences are interpreted and clarified from the experiences themselves. The hermeneutical account, however, is neither blindly immersed in the ongoing affairs of life, nor does it step outside the lived contexts to interpret them with theoretical or philosophical concepts taken from elsewhere (a separate sphere of intelligibility). Hermeneutics is nothing other than the interpretive effort to explicate and understand the structure of human experiences in the world—relying on what we always already do: interpret the world. This approach is neither “inside” nor “outside” the natural attitude, because hermeneutics does not validate this dichotomy to begin with. Moreover, it shows that “meaning” is not something merely methodologically arrived at through philosophical abstraction, or something tied down to “the achievement” of meaning in transcendental consciousness. In short, I think that Sheehan overplays the influence of Husserl on Heidegger and thus misses the importance Dilthey had on his understanding of philosophy.

It is true that Sheehan occasionally mentions the hermeneutical cast of Heidegger's concept of meaning, and even verbally explicates it in hermeneutical fashion.

We *are* structurally dis-closed (*erschlossen*) and thus sustain the space within which the [hermeneutical] “as” can function and the discursive understanding of things can take place. As such, we are pan-hermeneutical. [...] Our existential thrown-openness entails that we can and must make sense of whatever we meet. We are *ur-hermeneia*.<sup>82</sup>

But despite the verbal recognition of the hermeneutical bent in Heidegger, Sheehan neither abandons his dogmatic claim concerning Heidegger's allegedly phenomenological outlook, nor does he acknowledge Heidegger's indebtedness to Dilthey and Schleiermacher. This is not only a matter of historical truth, for Sheehan's indifference to this matter also obscures, on a systematic level, what is at issue in Heidegger's concept of meaning. Since Sheehan is guided through the phenomenological approach to meaning, his concept of meaning remains within a subjective cast. Wherever Husserl would refer to transcendental consciousness, Sheehan puts the "human being" or human Dasein as the ground of meaning or that which discloses meaning or appropriates meaning within the appropriated clearing. As Sheehan writes, "the thrown-open clearing is the core of Heidegger's thought,"<sup>83</sup> meaning that the human is the very site, Da-sein, where the clearing comes to pass or is achieved.

Although Sheehan acknowledges that Heidegger effectively de-transcendentalizes his approach after *Being and Time*,<sup>84</sup> he never calls into question his thesis that at the very heart of meaning stands human intentionality. Sheehan does recognize that already in *Being and Time* thrownness and facticity imply that "it is not by a subjective act of will" that "the clearing is indeed projected open."<sup>85</sup> But interpreting the later Heidegger he holds that "thrownness and appropriation [i.e., *Ereignis*] are identical, simply earlier and later names for the same existential structure."<sup>86</sup> And "existential structure" clearly refers to the site of the human being, at least in Sheehan's account. This shows that Sheehan bends everything back to *Being and Time* and its privileging of meaning and understanding as something achieved through Dasein. After all, in *Being and Time* Heidegger writes:

Meaning is an existential of Dasein, not a property that adheres to entities, which would either lie 'behind' them or be held in abeyance somewhere in some 'intermediate realm.' Only Dasein has 'meaning' in that the disclosedness of being-in-the-world can be 'fulfilled' through the beings discoverable in it. *Thus only Dasein can be meaningful or meaningless.*<sup>87</sup>

Sheehan never extricates himself from this Dasein-centric conception of meaning, which, moreover, he tends to render in subjectivist terms. It is symptomatic that Sheehan focuses his most extensive discussion of meaning on *Being and Time*, skipping over crucial later essays such as *Building Dwelling Thinking* and Heidegger's Hölderlin interpretations.

In a groundbreaking study of the difference between Husserl's and Heidegger's concept of meaning, Dahlstrom has shown that Husserl's uses the word "meaning" in four different senses, i.e., (1) a verbal sense, the act of meaning something (where the issue is what a speaker is trying to convey or communicate by using an expression); (2) the semantic or lexical sense of an ideal content of an expression; (3) the sense of an indexical or occasional expression, and (4) the sense of the reference of an expression or phrase.<sup>88</sup> As Dahlstrom shows, nothing of this is of much interest to Heidegger. Instead, Heidegger approaches meaning from three different but interrelated senses: (1) a "functional" sense that addresses what a particular tool or implement is for, (2) the sense of the primary purpose of a complex of implements, and (3) finally, an existential or formally indicative sense, for instance, the meaning of "I am," the meaning of which is not fixed by reflection on an ideal self-same meaning, but is only realized if understood as a call to transform and re-enact it by projecting one's possibility to be into the future.<sup>89</sup> Meaning, for Heidegger is primarily "functional, purposive, and existential."<sup>90</sup> At least for *Being and Time* we can say that semantics is supplanted by purposive practices and context-dependent "entailments." Thus Sheehan is wrong in claiming that Heidegger's concept of meaning is phenomenologically inspired and beholden to a phenomenological method. As I have tried to argue above, it is a further development of the concept of hermeneutical experience along the lines of Dilthey.

In fairness to Sheehan, his very lucid discussion of Heidegger's so-called "'teleological' theory of meaning" within the context of tool use shows that in *Being and Time* meaning is fundamentally keyed to purposiveness, in the sense outlined by Dahlstrom.<sup>91</sup> But the question is whether this pragmatist approach to meaning is still relevant in Heidegger's later writings, which Sheehan unfortunately fails to address. Moreover, from a hermeneutical perspective it is obvious that tool use and various projects make only sense within the pre-given matrix of a tradition, which provides the meaningful and objective structures to which we respond, to which we belong, and without which we cannot exist. Sheehan's own concept of "reci-pro-ci-ty"<sup>92</sup> between man and being or meaning implicitly refers to this in-between of tradition (facticity) and thrown-projection (understanding). But he does not fully recognize the significance of this. After all, the hermeneutical relation of belonging to the already interpreted and meaningful world precludes the reduction of meaning to the subjective and projective act of interpretation. What is interpreted must already be meaningful in itself. Meaning cannot reside on one side of the equation only. To develop such a non-subjective conception of meaning is surely a desideratum in current Heidegger scholarship. Sheehan's work is a

welcome challenge to work that out—without falling into ontological mysticism.

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## NOTES

1. Thomas Sheehan, *Making Sense of Heidegger: A Paradigm Shift*. London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015.
2. I would like to thank two anonymous reviewers for very helpful comments.
3. See *Making Sense*, xv.
4. *Making Sense*, 235.
5. *Making Sense*, xii.
6. *Making Sense*, 237.
7. See for instance, Tobias Keiling, *Seinsgeschichte und phänomenologischer Realismus* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015).
8. *Making Sense*, 11.
9. Martin Heidegger, *Grundprobleme der Phänomenologie*, in Martin Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe*, Vol. 24, ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann (Frankfurt: Vittorio Klostermann, 1975), p. 26.
10. *Making Sense*, 99. This sentence from Heidegger's 1936 Schelling lecture (GA 42: 169) appears also in Heidegger's *Black Notebooks* (GA 94: 232).
11. Martin Heidegger, *Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis)*, *Gesamtausgabe*, Vol. 65, ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann (Frankfurt: Vittorio Klostermann, 1989), 251.
12. *Making Sense*, 133.
13. *Making Sense*, 35-38, 85.
14. *Making Sense*, 62-64, 121.
15. *Making Sense*, 123-153.
16. *Making Sense*, 231-247.
17. In defense of his general rule not to discuss secondary literature in any detail Sheehan gives two reasons: "First, many scholars will take this reading of Heidegger to be quite controversial if not downright wrong—and they may well be right. So I wanted to show, as thoroughly as I can, how my reading is grounded in Heidegger's own texts and not in the work, as excellent as it may be, of others. (...) Secondly, my own understandings are heavily indebted—and gratefully so—to the superb interpretations of Heidegger that have been generated by scholars throughout the world (with a special shout-out to my colleagues in the Heidegger Circle). Nonetheless, I want to assume full and sole responsibility for what I write, especially for any eventual errors." (*Making Sense*, xiii) But in avoiding a full engagement with the secondary literature, even though he allows himself sweeping but undocumented statements about Heidegger scholarship in general, Sheehan effectively passes over in silence the very work of those colleagues from whose work he says he has gained so much. The only extensive references are to his own mentor William J. Richardson, giving the impression as if the relevant Heidegger scholarship plays itself out between him and Sheehan.
18. See Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, trans. Ray Brassier (London: Bloomsbury, 2012).
19. *Making Sense*, xi.
20. *Making Sense*, xii.
21. See *Making Sense*, 118 notes 26 & 27.
22. Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, *Gesamtausgabe*, Vol. 2, ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann (Frankfurt: Vittorio Klostermann, 1977), 8.
23. *Die Grundprobleme der Phänomenologie*, 22.
24. *Sein und Zeit*, 51.

25. *Making Sense*, 118.
26. *Making Sense*, 118. On the same page Sheehan goes on to suggest that Heidegger directly equates being with the world and he quotes Richardson's statement that in Heidegger "world is equivalent to being." But that is of course no textual evidence for the view that Heidegger himself would make this claim. However, in *Beiträge* Heidegger once writes that "world," in contradistinction to "nature" and "earth," is what is "closest to appropriation" (*Beiträge*, 275).
27. *Making Sense*, xv, 112.
28. *Sein und Zeit*, 1-3.
29. *Making Sense*, xv.
30. *Making Sense*, xiv/xv.
31. *Making Sense*, 13.
32. See Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit, Gesamtausgabe*, Vol. 2, ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann (Frankfurt: Vittorio Klosterman, 1977), pp. 36-42.
33. *Making Sense*, 10.
34. Martin Heidegger, *Grundprobleme der Phänomenologie*, in Martin Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe*, Vol. 24, ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann (Frankfurt: Vittorio Klosterman, 1975), p. 29.
35. *Grundprobleme der Phänomenologie*, 29.
36. See for example, Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann, *Hermeneutik und Reflexion: Der Begriff der Phänomenologie bei Heidegger und Husserl*, Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 2000. See also my own essay "Heidegger: Transformation of Hermeneutics" in *The Routledge Companion to Hermeneutics*, ed. Jeff Malpas and Hans-Helmuth Gander (New York: Routledge, 2015), pp. 107-126, and very recently Daniel O. Dahlstrom, "Hermeneutics in *Being and Time*," in *Hermeneutical Heidegger*, ed. Michael Bowler and Ingo Farin (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2016), pp., 115-141.
37. *Making Sense*, 124 & 130.
38. *Making Sense*, 130.
39. *Making Sense*, 130.
40. *Making Sense*, 20.
41. *Making Sense*, 16.
42. *Making Sense*, xviii.
43. *Making Sense*, xv (my transliteration of the Greek term)
44. *Making Sense*, xviii.
45. *Making Sense*, 222.
46. *Making Sense*, xv.
47. *Making Sense*, xv.
48. *Making Sense*, xv.
49. *Making Sense*, xv.
50. *Making Sense*, xv.
51. *Making Sense*, xv.
52. My transliteration of the Greek term.
53. *Making Sense*, 144.
54. See for instance, Jeff Malpas, *Heidegger's Topology* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2006).
55. *Making Sense*, xi.
56. *Making Sense*, 185.
57. *Making Sense*, 185.
58. *Making Sense*, xi.

59. *Making Sense*, frontispiece.
60. *Making Sense*, 9.
61. *Making Sense*, 293.
62. *Making Sense*, 293.
63. William J. Richardson, *Heidegger: Through Phenomenology to Thought* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1963), p. 627.
64. *Making Sense*, 23.
65. *Making Sense*, 222.
66. *Making Sense*, 236.
67. *Making Sense*, 236.
68. *Making Sense*, 294.
69. In his *Überlegungen II-VI* (Schwarze Hefte 1931-1938) Heidegger shows his utter contempt for existentialism and all attempts to associate his work with that philosophical current. He speaks of “the ridiculousness of ‘a philosophy of existence,’ being no better than ‘life-philosophy.’” *Überlegungen II-VI* (Schwarze Hefte 1931-1938), ed. Peter Trawny (Frankfurt: Vittorio Klosterman, 2014), p. 19.
70. See *Making Sense*, 94.
71. *Making Sense*, 94.
72. *Making Sense*, 95.
73. *Making Sense*, 184.
74. *Making Sense*, 210.
75. Martin Heidegger, *The Concept of Time*, transl. Ingo Farin with Alex Skinner (London: Continuum, 2011), 8.
76. *Sein und Zeit*, 529; Martin Heidegger, “Wilhelm Dilthey’s Research and the Struggle for a Historical Worldview,” transl. Charles Bambach, in Martin Heidegger, *Supplements*, ed. John von Buren (New York: State University of New York Press, 2002), p. 176.
77. *Making Sense*, 283.
78. *Making Sense*, 111.
79. *Making Sense*, 10.
80. See Paul Ricoeur’s essay “Phenomenology and Hermeneutics,” in Paul Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics & the Human Sciences*, edited and translated by John B. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp., 101-128.
81. Wilhelm Dilthey, *Der Aufbau der Geschichtlichen Welt in den Geisteswissenschaften*, in Wilhelm Dilthey, *Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. VII (Stuttgart, B. G. Teubner: 1958), 147.
82. *Making Sense*, 104/105 (my transliteration of the Greek term).
83. *Making Sense*, 144.
84. *Making Sense*, 189-229.
85. *Making Sense*, 208.
86. *Making Sense*, 236.
87. *Sein und Zeit*, 201.
88. Daniel O. Dahlstrom, “Husserl and Heidegger on Bedeutung,” in *Heidegger and Husserl: Heidegger Jahrbuch 6* (Karl Alber, Freiburg: 2012), pp. 200-217, here 205-206.
89. Dahlstrom, 212.
90. Dahlstrom, 215.
91. *Making Sense*, 147.
92. *Making Sense*, 239-241.