

Astonishing!  
Things Make Sense!

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With the appearance of human being, meaning dawned in the universe, and nothing has been the same since. For the first time in the 13.7 billion years of the cosmos, things were no longer just “out there” but instead became meaningfully present (*anwesend*). As far as we know, only human beings can question things, recognize them for what they are in themselves, name them, talk about them in soliloquy or dialogue, and even talk about that talking. Once man is possessed by the Promethean fire of intellect and language, human history begins as a complex unfolding of meaningful lives.<sup>1</sup>

Heidegger’s philosophical focus never strayed from *die Sache selbst*, the astonishing fact that with human existence sense irrupts into an otherwise meaningless universe.<sup>2</sup> Throughout his career he remained fixed on the twofold question of (1) the meaningful presence (*Anwesen*) of things, and (2) above all, what *lets* such meaningful presence happen (*das Anwesenlassen*).<sup>3</sup> The latter is what Heidegger called his basic question or *Grundfrage*. If philosophy begins with astonishment, then the ἀρχή—the origin and ordering—of all Heidegger’s thought was the wonder of all wonders: that things make sense.<sup>4</sup>

The back story of this essay has been argued in recent publications and, given the necessary brevity of the present text, cannot be detailed here.<sup>5</sup> The main point is that Heidegger’s work unfolds with unprecedented clarity, simplicity, and force once one realizes that by equating

*Sein* with *Anwesen* and by casting his thought in the mode of phenomenology and hermeneutics, Heidegger himself placed the problematic of being squarely within the parameters of meaning.

For example, in 1919, during his first course after the Great War, Heidegger asked what it is we immediately encounter in lived experience. Is it blanched out “beings” that only later acquire the hue of meaning? No, what we first encounter and always live with is:

the meaningful [*das Bedeutsame*]—that is what is first and immediately given to you without any mental detour through a conceptual grasp of the thing. When you live in the everyday world [*die Umwelt*], everything comes at you loaded with meaning, all over the place and all the time. Everything appears within a meaningful context, and that context *gives those things their meaning*.<sup>6</sup>

And in 1924 he remarked:

For a long time, I have been designating the being-character of human existence as *meaningfulness*. This being-character is the primary one in which the world is encountered.<sup>7</sup>

Again in his 1925–26 course on *Logic* he signaled the centrality of meaning to human being:

Because by its very nature existence is sense-making, it lives in meanings and can express itself in and as meanings.<sup>8</sup>

A year later, in *Being and Time*, Heidegger declared that the hermeneutics of *Dasein* was the indispensable basis for the doctrine of meaning (*Bedeutungslehre*) that he presented there.<sup>9</sup> The center of that doctrine of meaning is being-in-the-world. But the essence of world is meaningfulness (*Bedeutsamkeit*).<sup>10</sup> Therefore, we may interpret being-in-the-world (*In-der-Bedeutsamkeit-sein*) as man’s thrown-projective

engagement-with-meaning. In addition, throughout his career Heidegger interpreted the pre-Socratic thinkers as proto-phenomenologists focused on the conjunction (τὸ αὐτό) of meaningful presence (εἶναι) and human apprehension of it (νοῦς). And when it came to Plato and Aristotle, Heidegger read οὐσία, the Greek word for “being,” as παρ-ουσία, meaningful presence in and to λόγος. No λόγος, no παρ-ουσία.

The danger of hypostasizing *Sein*—always a Heideggerian temptation—readily dissolves once we understand that human existence is *for the sake of meaning* (early Heidegger) or is *a priori appropriated into the meaning-process* (later Heidegger). Meaning is the *raison d'être* of human being. “The clearing grants Dasein as such.”<sup>11</sup> In this shift to an emphatically phenomenological-hermeneutical way of reading Heidegger, the *Da-sein* / *Sein* correlation is transformed into the *Da-sinn* / *Sinn* conjunction: man as the only “place” where meaningful presence or *Anwesen* occurs.<sup>12</sup> We can read the *Da-sinn* / *Sinn* conjunction from either side: No man, no meaning (Heidegger I), or no meaning, no man (Heidegger II).<sup>13</sup> The crux of the reversal (*Kehre*) between the earlier and later Heidegger is the recognition that human beings do not generate the space of meaning *sua sponte* but are pulled into it *a priori*. In the final analysis, to fail to see that sense-making is the most basic thing that human being is and does, is to entirely miss the point of Heidegger’s thought.

In this paper I argue that Heidegger’s extensive corpus from beginning to end remained a hermeneutics of *Dasein* or an analytic of human existence, in which Heidegger, like Theseus,

made fast the guiding thread of all philosophical inquiry  
at the point where it *arises* and to which it *returns*,<sup>14</sup>

namely, human being. This entails that all the key terms in Heidegger’s lexicon—*Ereignis*, ἀλήθεια, *Lichtung*, even *Seyn*—are existentials precisely in the sense that the early Heidegger gave this term: necessities and abilities that *a priori* determine the human way of being. In Heidegger’s world, apart from the fact of *Da-sinn*/*Sinn*, there is no further, higher level where things like *Seyn* and *Ereignis* carry on their

business. That would be metaphysics in its worst form (even though it is frequently peddled about as “Heidegger’s thought”). Heidegger remained on one level only, that of the man-meaning conjunction, and everything in his corpus is about that. No matter how wide his thinking ranged or how deep it reached, Heidegger never got beyond human being, and never intended to. Nor did he need to. This may be a *scandalum piis auribus*, but so be it. The only *pietas* philosophers should respect is that of thinking *qua* questioning.

The questioning that this essay pursues is twofold, even though I can only sketch out the second part: (I) How do human beings make sense of the things they encounter? And (II) What does this have to do to the basic question (*Grundfrage*) of Heidegger’s thought?

## I. HOW WE MAKE SENSE

The first page of *Being and Time* proper offers the clue to why human being is intrinsically and exclusively bound up with making sense of things. There Heidegger designates the first characteristic of human existence as “having to be” (*Zu-sein*).<sup>15</sup> I hope to show that having to be entails having to make sense of things. This requires a number of steps, some of which Heidegger laid out in his 1929–1930 course *Basic Concepts of Metaphysics* under the rubrics of (A) animal life as projected into possibility and (B) human being as world-forming.

### A. ANIMAL LIFE AS PROJECTED INTO POSSIBILITY

#### 1. *Life as possibility*

For Heidegger as for Aristotle, life, whether it be the ζωή of plants and animals or the βίος of human beings, is necessarily bound up with possibilities of itself. It is an *Entheben in das Mögliche*: a being lifted up and away into the possible. Life’s actuality is caught up in possibility.<sup>16</sup>

In the last analysis, potentiality and possibility belong precisely to the essence of the [living being] in its actuality, in a quite specific sense.<sup>17</sup>

In its most basic form, life is a natural drive to be underway to more of itself, an on-going genesis (*Sichzeitigung*) of itself as appearing in a new εἶδος, which in turn generates ever more possibilities.<sup>18</sup> Insofar as life consists in constantly bringing forth something new of itself, it is a natural process of ἀλήθεια, of revealing itself as this or that.<sup>19</sup> The reason? Life is a kind of φύσις, and φύσις is a kind of κίνησις, and κίνησις is a kind of μεταβολή (change whereby something hidden comes to light), and μεταβολή is a kind of ἀλήθεια. Φύσις/κίνησις = μεταβολή/ἀλήθεια, the single process of bringing-forth from itself what was heretofore hidden from view.

But the living being is not thrown or appropriated into just any possibilities. Most basically it is an intrinsic *Ermöglichung*, an enabling *of itself*, in the sense of making itself possible. A living being naturally sets forth its own whereunto (*Wozu*) and sets itself forth *into* it, while always remaining with itself as source of this drive.<sup>20</sup> Unlike an implement, which gets its capacity to serve some end from its maker, living beings produce their own ability to achieve their *Wozu*. They are “self-enabling” acts of becoming.<sup>21</sup>

## 2. *Self-preservation*

Every living being—and not just human being—is stamped with the essential characteristic of *Zu-sein*, not just “having to be,” but having to *become* in order to stay alive. A living thing has its τέλος as self-preservation.<sup>22</sup> It is driven to survive, to keep on keeping on, until its ability to supply its own self-sustaining self-empowerment runs out naturally or is cut off accidentally. This also entails that something that is alive is able to die at any moment. This does not refer to the obvious fact that the living being, whether human or animal, moves diachronically into the future in the direction of its demise. Rather, the living being is always *zum Ende, zum Tode*, that is, *ever-at-the-point-of-death*. For something to live is to always live mortality, at the very edge of its ultimate possibility, which is to have no more possibility and so to be dead.<sup>23</sup>

All of this, we stress, is structural and essential to life—it is of *a priori* necessity. When we speak of the living being as “thrown” or

“appropriated” into possibility, both of those terms indicate a living being’s “facticity,” that which it cannot not be. (The term “facticity,” like “being-at-the-point-of-death,” applies properly only to human being, but analogically to all life.) Life entails being always more than it is de facto (*tatsächlich*), but never more than it is *faktisch*, never more than the self-possibilizing that it is “obliged” to be.<sup>24</sup>

### 3. *Movedness and ownness*

Another aspect of the structure of life is the bivalence of its κίνησις. Living is not only an instinctual movement that is stretched out into possibility (*Hin zu, Weg-von-sich*).<sup>25</sup> It also remains one with itself: “an exiting from itself in the essence of its being, yet without abandoning itself.”<sup>26</sup> Life is a constant presence to itself, a “retaining itself within itself.” A living thing, Heidegger says,

does not lose itself in the sense that an instinctual impulse to something would leave itself behind. Rather it retains itself precisely in such a drive and remains “its self,” as we might say, in this drive and driving.<sup>27</sup>

On the one hand, life is bound to its future, a further becoming beyond what its previous becoming has already achieved. On the other hand, it constantly remains with the source of movement that it itself is. This is what Heidegger calls a living being’s “self-like character” or “ownness” throughout change.<sup>28</sup> To take the plant as an example: Out of its root and stem emerge the leaves, then the bud, which opens up as the flower, which in turn gives way to the fruit. The plant actualizes new possibilities for itself while still remaining the same plant, the source of its own growth.

### 4. *Openness and ἀλήθεια*

When it comes to animals, the *a priori* stretch into possibility wherein the animal retains its ownness has a certain (delimited) character of openness about it. As an instinctual drive to more of itself, animal life has

the character of a traversing, of a dimension in the formal sense. . . . Dimension is not yet understood in a spatial sense here, although the dimensional character of drive is . . . presumably the condition of the possibility of the animal's being able to traverse a spatial domain in a quite determinate manner.<sup>29</sup>

This "dimension" names the animal's very limited openness that "clears the way" for sense perception. In their very different ways of being ψυχή, both animals and humans are "open" and "intentional" in the broadest sense of (1) going beyond any supposedly monadic self-enclosure and (2) being disclosive of what is other than themselves.<sup>30</sup> We recall that, for Heidegger, the nature of ψυχή, i.e., of life, is *entbergen*, uncovering something heretofore hidden.<sup>31</sup> To live is to be beyond any supposed encapsulation, to be open to and disclosive of something other, which in the animal's case is the αἰσθητόν of the corresponding αἰσθησις.<sup>32</sup>

### 5. *Captivation*

Heidegger speaks of the animal, *qua* sentient, as captivated by what it is open to. The sense organs have "no choice," as it were, about their corresponding objects. The eye sees light, no matter what. The alternative to seeing light is not to see at all. We noted that animals as sentient are open, and to that degree alethic, disclosive of their corresponding objects. Or to reverse the trajectory, the senses' objects open *them* up in a process that Heidegger calls *Entthemmung* ("disinhibiting"). However, such sense-openness is restricted to merely taking what the sensible appearances offer and dealing with that within the limitations of instinct. The animal "behaves" (*benahmen*) rather than properly "relating itself to" (*sich verhalten zu*) in the way that human being does. This confinement to behavior is what Heidegger means by "captivation" (*Benommenheit*) and also by "putting aside" (*Beiseitigung*), i.e., the animal does not recognize those appearances *as* what and how they are in themselves. The objects as such remain withdrawn from animal perception,

unable to be apprehended as something intelligible. In that sense, “the animal is separated from man by an abyss.”<sup>53</sup>

## B. HUMAN BEING: HERMENEUTICAL OPENNESS

When we turn to the human being, a vast new dimension of freedom and possibility breaks out, which Heidegger describes with the image of “the open.” By its very essence, human being is the genesis of νοῦς or mind: “The primary openness of human beings is grounded in νοῦς.”<sup>54</sup> “Mind” as we use it here is neither a subject’s consciousness nor the neurological processes at work when it feels something, knows something, or chooses among options. Rather, it is the condition of the possibility of all of those. It is what allows for the specifically human form of knowing: discursiveness or διάνοια, the ability to understand something *as* something. With νοῦς, one is no longer confined to receiving things in perception but is freed to *relate* oneself to them, to take them as they are in themselves and in terms of how they relate to us. Νοῦς ruptures the limitations of the animal’s sense experience and instinctual behavior as well as the constraints of its encircling ring. Human being is now able to make sense of things.

Over the course of his career Heidegger analyzed human νοῦς, understood as the possibility of intelligibility, under a number of rubrics, among them: openness or clearing; world; ἀλήθεια; λόγος; the “as”; *Inzwischen*; *Austrag*; and “time.” I briefly take up each of those in turn.

### 1. *Open-ended receptivity and the clearing*

Unlike the restricted range of the animal soul, the human is, in Aristotle’s words, πῶς πάντα, which Heidegger glosses as “openness to *everything*.”<sup>55</sup> We can “become” everything we meet in the universe—not ontically by fusing our identity with the thing, but by understanding the thing’s meaning (“receiving its form”). We understand things in *their* possibilities by taking them in terms of *our* possibilities, whatever they might be.<sup>56</sup> Thus they become familiar, a part of our “family.” We have learned to live with them. They make sense to us.

Heidegger's preferred image for human openness is that of a clearing (*Lichtung*). By this spatial image, he understands the condition of the possibility of understanding anything at all. The clearing, he writes, is the "open region of understanding"<sup>37</sup> into which human being is appropriated by its very nature. This ur-openedness is

the region of unhiddenness or clearing (intelligibility)  
wherein for the first time all understanding, i.e., project-  
ing, is possible in the sense of bringing into the open.<sup>38</sup>

By "intelligibility" Heidegger is referring to every kind of accessibility to specifically human experience, whether theoretical, practical, or whatever.

To be sure, man is still a "πάθος, a *being-approached* by the world" through the senses.<sup>39</sup> Here Heidegger employs Aristotle's technical term for the structural ability to receive (δέχεσθαι) what the senses convey. But this is not the mere givenness of things to an αἴσθησις-bound and instinct-ruled animal, captivated and merely stimulated by the things in its environment. Drawing on *De Anima* III 5, 430a 15-25, Heidegger says: "The νοῦς παθητικός is possible only through the νοῦς ποιητικός, i.e., a νοεῖν that uncovers the world."<sup>40</sup> In other words, the aspect of νοῦς whereby we receive things through the senses (νοῦς παθητικός) is possible only because the νοῦς that allows intelligibility to happen at all (νοῦς ποιητικός) has always already done its work such that what we receive through the senses can be known as what and how it is.

## 2. *The world*

Heidegger writes, "The clearing, and it alone, is world."<sup>41</sup> But world is the matrix of meaningfulness (*Bedeutsamkeit*). If things make sense within the open/clearing/world, where does that sense or meaning come from?

In *Being and Time* Heidegger argues that the meaning of something is its intelligibility to man.<sup>42</sup> Meaning is not a property attached to things, nor is it to be found "behind" or "above" them. Meaning is an existiale of human being, and existence alone "has" meaning.<sup>45</sup>

That is, man's *a priori* engagement-with-meaning opens a "region" in which things can be understood as what they are. Thus only human existence is meaningful or meaningless. Other things are meaningful only insofar as they enter the range of human understanding and are "discovered together with human existence."<sup>44</sup> Only then do they have *Anwesen*—which entails that their *Anwesen* is their *meaning*. Their "being" consists in their involvement in the meaningful context that human being generates *a priori*. "If we say that entities 'have meaning,' this signifies that they have become accessible in their being."<sup>45</sup>

But things come in wholes or sets, not as just one thing by itself nor as an undifferentiated "wall" of things out there. That is because human being is not imprisoned in some kind of monadic subjectivity but is embodied, situated, and contextual. Human being is a hermeneutical field of force that, like a magnet, draws things together into the unities of meaning. World is not a sum total of things—a "what"—but rather is human being itself as appropriated to sustaining the clearing. "As existing, human being *is* its world."<sup>46</sup> World is human being writ large, so to speak, as the matrix of intelligibility. "World" is another name for the open-ended human *νοῦς* that gathers (λέγει) things into unities of sense.<sup>47</sup>

A specific world is a particular lived context within which things can have some meanings but not others. In that sense a specific world is a *restrictive* context: it constrains the range of possibilities in terms of which we can understand something. To cite Heidegger's famous example (1925): At night in the Black Forest, you might mistake a bush for a deer, but you probably wouldn't mistake it for the Shah of Iran. And yet strictly speaking (and at a huge stretch) it is not impossible that the Shah might show up at night in the woods around Todtnauberg; but you would never mistake the bush for the cubed root of sixty-nine.<sup>48</sup>

### 3. Ἀλήθεια

Another term for the open clearing (*νοῦς*) is "disclosedness as such," *ἀλήθεια* in its primary sense. We must rescue this key term from its general translation as "truth." As Heidegger understands it, *ἀλήθεια* refers most basically not to the correct correspondence between thoughts

and things but rather to *meaningfulness* on at least three analogous levels. Only on the third and most derivative level does it mean “truth” as the conformity of a mental or spoken proposition to a given state of affairs. Heidegger’s interests lie primarily with the first two senses below, and ultimately with the first, ἀλήθεια-1, as the ground for the derivative forms of ἀλήθεια-2 and -3.

1. ἀλήθεια-1: The most basic meaning of ἀλήθεια is human being’s thrown-openness or disclosedness as such, the ability to make sense of whatever one encounters. It is the structure of human existence as “world-open,” both disclosed and disclosive.<sup>49</sup> This ἀλήθεια-1 marks the *a priori* fact that meaning is ever possible within the world of νοῦς.

2. ἀλήθεια-2: In a second and derived sense, ἀλήθεια refers to the disclosedness *of things* to understanding in our everyday, pre-propositional involvement with them. We cannot encounter anything except under the rubric of meaningfulness. Even if we merely wonder what something is, we have already brought the thing into the realm of possible sense. And unless something were disclosed already, we could not make propositional statements about it.

3. ἀλήθεια-3: The third and most derivative sense of ἀλήθεια refers to that particular (and utterly necessary) state of meaningfulness that we call the “correctness” of a judgment, the agreement of a propositional statement with the already disclosed state of affairs it refers to. Only at this third level do we have truth as *adaequatio intellectus et rei*, a position that goes back through Kant and Aquinas to Aristotle.<sup>50</sup>

It is the first of these three levels that corresponds to the clearing.

#### 4. *Zwischen, Austrag*

Heidegger likewise speaks of the clearing as *das Inzwischen*, the “space between” a thing and its meaning that allows for the combination of the two.<sup>51</sup> Further, echoing Aristotle’s ἀφαίρεσις (Latin, *abs-tractio*: *De anima* III 7, 431b 13), he calls it *Aus-trag*, the possibility of distinguishing and uniting a thing and its meaning. With this latter term we begin to see the hermeneutical dynamics of the opening up of the clearing. Heidegger begins spelling this out under the rubric of σύνθεσις/διάρεσις, which is bound up with his analysis of λόγος.<sup>52</sup>

#### 5. Λόγος and the “as”

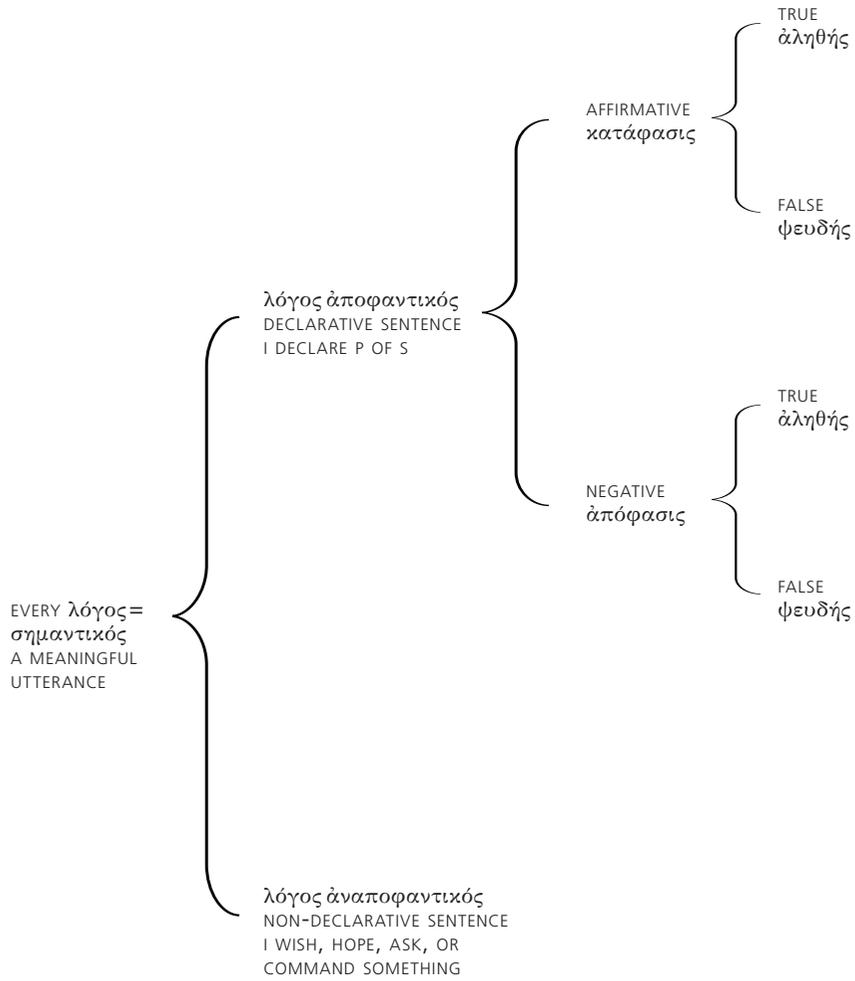
In Heidegger’s interpretation, λόγος is not “speech” but what makes speech possible: the ur-openedness (ἀλήθεια-1) thanks to which something can be disclosed as meaningful (ἀλήθεια-2). To see how this is the case, we take up two different kinds of λόγοι or sentences: one that is meaningful *simpliciter* and another that is *apophantically* meaningful.

Every human utterance – whether “Hello,” “Let’s go,” or “I hope the revolution succeeds” – gives forth something to be understood. However, some sentences go further and make a claim about what they give forth as understandable, a claim that could be either true or false. As regards the first case: If I’m standing in the kitchen and say “Hand me the spatula,” my fellow cook will no doubt understand what the sentence means. I too understand: I need it for the scrambled eggs. This sentence or λόγος gives forth something that people can understand: it is *σημαντικός*, meaningful.

As regards the second case: When I follow up and say “The spatula’s in the drawer,” my statement, in addition to being meaningful, makes a claim. It is a *declarative* sentence insofar as it declares something about the status of the spatula. In this second instance I have made not only a meaningful statement, a λόγος *σημαντικός*, but in addition an indicative one, a λόγος *ἀποφαντικός*. The second, unlike the first, purports to show something (-φάινεσθαι) about (ἀπό-) the spatula itself. A declarative sentence can be in either the affirmative or the negative. But the

important thing is that, to be a declarative sentence, it must necessarily be true or false. It *indicates* something *as*—regardless of whether the indication is right or wrong, or whether I am sincere (I really believe it's in the drawer) or deceitful (I know it's not there).

A further step: When I utter the declarative sentence “Socrates is an Athenian,” I synthesize “Socrates” with the category “Athenian.” However, Socrates does not exhaust the category of “all Athenians.” Therefore, while synthesizing the two, I also maintain a distinction between them. A declarative sentence is constituted by both *σύνθεσις* and *διαίρεσις*—the uniting-*and*-distinguishing of the subject and the predicate. Both together are necessary, *whether* the sentence be true or false and *in order for* the sentence to be true or false. But such *σύνθεσις*/*διαίρεσις* is possible only because of the basic openness or freedom of human being, which in turn generates the interpretative *as*-factor, i.e., the ability to take Socrates *as* one thing (an Athenian) or another (perhaps a Theban).<sup>55</sup>



6. *The existential and the hermeneutical “as”*

For Heidegger, the phenomenon of the “as” functions apophantically in declarative sentences only because it functions existentially as the very structure of human existence. Here Heidegger’s argument reflects the medieval Scholastic axiom *operari sequitur esse*: activities are consonant with and derive from natures; or in the reverse: natures determine activities.<sup>54</sup> In the present case, one’s sense-making activities follow from one’s *a priori* engagement-with-meaning (being-in-*Bedeutsamkeit*).

In what sense does “as” define the structure of human being? The movedness of human life is analogous to the bivalent movedness of the animal, which we noted above: being stretched ahead beyond itself (*Weg-von-sich*) while ever remaining present to itself (*Bei-sich-sein*). In the case of man, Heidegger calls this movedness a *fortnehmende Zukehr*; a being carried away into itself as possibility (*fortnehmende*) that always returns to and stays with itself (*Zukehr*).<sup>55</sup>

This being-ahead-of-oneself as a returning [*Sich-vorweg-sein als Zurückkommen*] is, if I may put it this way, a peculiar kind of movement that existence itself constantly makes.<sup>56</sup>

Heidegger now reads that movement of thrown-ahead-returning in terms of *existential σύνθεσις/διαίρεσις*.

Projection is this simple, unified happening that can be formally characterized as *σύνθεσις* and *διαίρεσις* both at the same time. Projection is *διαίρεσις* insofar as, *qua* “taking away,” it takes away the one projecting. In a certain sense it stretches him apart from himself, endows him with a stretching forth [*Erstreckung*]. It takes him away into the possible, not so as to lose himself there but rather so as to let the possible, as the possibilizing of the actual, speak back precisely upon the projector himself as binding – uniting and binding: *σύνθεσις*.<sup>57</sup>

In other words, the structural movedness of human being is an existential, world-opening σύνθεσις/διαίρεσις, which in turn serves as the basis for the *apophantic* synthesizing-that-distinguishes. Its bivalent self-presence-while-stretched-ahead generates the “as” of sense-making—in this case the apophantic “as” of declarative sentences. Thus the appropriated projection that is man

is also that happening in which there originates what we problematize as the as-structure. The “as” is the expression for what breaks out in the in-break [of man among things]. . . . Only because we have broken into the dimension of this distinction between the actual and the possible—between being and entities in the broadest sense—do we have the possibility of grasping and understanding something as something.<sup>58</sup>

The as-structure that *is* human being is thus responsible for the as-structure of making sense of things whether predicatively or pre-predicatively. Man is appropriated for sustaining the clearing in such a way that the “as” emerges and discursive meaning becomes possible. This constitutes a new kind of *Ermöglichung*, the enabling that lets human beings make sense of themselves and other things. In Heidegger-code, *Da-sein* as thrown or appropriated is the occurrence of disclosure: *das Grundgeschehnis der Wahrheit*.<sup>59</sup> In another, perhaps more accessible code, human being is pan-hermeneutical. Our environment—no longer just a natural encircling ring but now an as-structured world—is an open-ended hermeneutical space of mediation in general and of sense-making in particular. Whatever we meet, we meet under the rubric of “is manifest as,” i.e., “is accessible as” and therefore “is meaningful as.” We can make sense of whatever we meet (even if only interrogatively), and if we cannot make any sense of something, we cannot meet it. We are condemned to *ur-ἐρμηνεία*.

7. “Time” as hermeneutical openness

“To exist,” Heidegger says, “might be more adequately translated as ‘sustaining a realm of openness.’”<sup>60</sup> What is this “sustaining”? How does human being open up and maintain the disclosive realm of νοῦς?

When Heidegger speaks of the genesis of the space of meaning, he describes it in terms of man’s being stretched out into the possible (*Erstrecktheit*). For this he drew on Augustine’s *distentio animi*, which in turn derives from Plotinus’ διάστασις ζώης.<sup>61</sup> In man, being-stretched-forward is man’s already-aheadness in the world of meaning, i.e., in the possibility of sense-making (*schon vorweg sein*). This “carries us away and gives us distance,” i.e., opens up the clearing.<sup>62</sup> But along with this “distance,” human being also returns to itself and renders things meaningfully present, both itself and others (*Sein bei* as *Gegenwärtigung*). The “actuality” of the human being is its living in possibility, which in turn generates the possibility of making sense of things. We recognize this *schon vorweg Sein bei* as the structure of care (*Sorge*).

Care, in turn, maps on to, and in fact is grounded in, what Heidegger initially called temporality. Temporality (*Zeitlichkeit*) is what opens up the field of ur-time (*Temporalität*), which Heidegger later defined as ἀλήθεια-1, hermeneutical disclosure: “The term ‘time’ is a preliminary word for what was later called ‘the truth of being.’”<sup>65</sup> The structure of ἀλήθεια-1 *qua* ur-time is discoverable through the structure of temporality, which is *gewesend-gegenwärtigende Zukunft*. This parses out as the *a priori* becoming (*gewesende Zukunft*) that opens a clearing for taking something *as* something and thus rendering it meaningfully present (*gegenwärtigende*).<sup>64</sup>

Understanding itself and its world ecstatically in the unity of the “open,” factual existence comes back from these horizons to the things encountered within them. Coming back to these things understandingly is the existential meaning of letting them be encountered by making them present.<sup>65</sup>

The conjunction of time/temporality is an early name for what the existential “as” sustains: the clearing.

## II. HEIDEGGER’S *GRUNDFRAGE*

What effect, if any, does the above have on our understanding of Heidegger’s basic question, his *Grundfrage*?

### A. Μέθοδος

First, a word about the question of μέθοδος—not “method”—but the path to be followed in pursuing the *Grundfrage*. In its most basic form, phenomenological-hermeneutical “method” is a matter of learning how to stand thematically where we always already stand existentially. The upshot of Heidegger’s phenomenological reduction is that we engage with things (1) from a first-personal experiential stance that (2) is inevitably sense-making. 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). This first-person experiential sense-making, whereby what I encounter is ineluctably significant to me, is where I stand prior to any move into the theoretical or the practical.

Someone could deny this basic stance, but that would entail making sense of human being some other way—but still making sense, and doing so from a first-person *jemeinig* stance. Hence, by an argument from performative contradiction or retorsion, the denial can be shown to cancel itself out and to confirm the prior point.

All this means that I have no reality, no “being,” other than that of making first-person sense of things. Take away first-order hermeneutics and I am not left with a remainder, some more basic level of existence as the supposed bottom-line me-ness of me. No, take away sense-making and I’m no longer there. To be human is fundamentally to render things intelligible insofar as existence is thrown open as a space of possible as-structured relations. As such I have always already

enacted the hermeneutical transcendence that bridges the thing and its meaningfulness, what Heidegger referred to above as the difference between an entity and its beingness.<sup>66</sup>

## B. HEIDEGGER'S BASIC QUESTION

But to go only this far is merely to have restated metaphysics' question about beings in a phenomenological-hermeneutical framework. One has simply taken the beingness of beings out of its *vorhanden* status of *existentia* and transposed it phenomenologically into its hermeneutical status as the meaningfulness of the meaningful. But what if we took the next step, into the *Grundfrage* itself?

The basic question of Heidegger's thinking concerns how *Sein/Anwesen* comes about, i.e., comes to be disclosed *a priori* in human being. He calls this "the allowing of meaningful presence," *Anwesenlassen* (see note 3 above). In other words, Heidegger's basic question asks for "the essential provenance"<sup>67</sup> of meaningful presence. In another formulation it asks, "What is the ground for the inner possibility and necessity of the openness of *Sein*?"<sup>68</sup> Or yet again: Insofar as openness/clearing/*ἀλήθεια* is the "most worthy of questioning,"<sup>69</sup> the *Grundfrage* becomes "Where does the clearing come from?" *Woher die Lichtung*.<sup>70</sup> In short: How does meaningful presence occur at all? *Wie west das Anwesen?*

Such an inquiry marks the surpassing of the twofold guiding question of traditional onto-theology: (1) What is the beingness common to all things? and (2) What is the highest instance of such beingness? That is, Heidegger's basic question overcomes the ontological difference between things and their being<sup>71</sup> by asking: What and how is "the disclosure of be-ing and its grounding in human being"?<sup>72</sup> Or in another iteration: "How does the disclosure of be-ing come about?"<sup>73</sup> This question, of course, "forces us into the question of man"<sup>74</sup> insofar as the *a priori* thrownness or appropriation of existence is what opens up the clearing as the realm of possible intelligibility. To say that the "answer" to the question is *Ereignis* is to point back to man's *a priori* thrown-openness or appropriation whereby the dynamic realm of possible meaning is generated (*zeitigt*). The appropriation of human being

to the meaning-process opens the clearing within which things can be understood and so be meaningful.

In other words, granted the inevitability of the man-meaning conjunction and the pan-hermeneutics that is human being, Heidegger's *Grundfrage* is necessarily changed into "How come meaning at all?" *Wie west die Bedeutsamkeit?* What is the source or provenance of world or clearing? With this question, the meaningful presence of this or that entity is no longer the focal topic but instead yields to the questions: "*Wie aber dieses, das Seyn?*"<sup>75</sup> How does ἀλήθεια-1 get opened up at all?

The answer forms the center of Heidegger's work: the insight that man is for the sake of meaning or, equally, that meaning is the *raison d'être* of man.<sup>76</sup> From that center, which is "without why" and remains a mystery, there unfolds all the rest of his thinking.

But after the reversal (*Kehre*), didn't Heidegger give being—i.e., *Bedeutsamkeit*—the primacy over human being? No, that primacy was already established at least from *Being and Time* on, and the reversal merely exfoliated its *a priori* status. We can see the reversal already in the core phenomenon, being-in-the-world, i.e., engagement-with-meaning. Such engagement is designated as "thrown" (*geworfen*) in the early work and as appropriated (*ereignet*) after the reversal. In showing, as we have done here, that meaning τὸ οὐ ἔνεκα of appropriated human being, we have also shown that *Sinn* is the reason that *Da-sinn* exists. Since the clearing is why human being is at all, one need not—in fact, cannot—leave the precincts of Heidegger's central topic, human being in the fullness of its essence.

## Notes

- 1 Note: (1) I cite texts by page and line, separated by a period. The line-count does not include headers but does count titles within the text. The numbers that appear after the equals sign indicate page and line/s in the English translations. (2) I use the term “man” as gender-neutral and as referring to human being as such, i.e., *Dasein*.
- 2 GA 28: 236.10–12: “... der Mensch [ist] das Seiende ..., das *den Einbruch in das Seiende* so geschehen lässt, dass dieses *in ihm 'selbst'* offenbar wird.”
- 3 GA 14: 45.28–30 = *On Time and Being*, 37.4–6. The Greek for meaningful presence is *παρουσία*; for *Anwesenlassen*: *παρουσίωσις*.
- 4 GA 9: 247.27 = *Pathmarks*, 189.27 (*ἀρχή*). GA 77: 155.12, “erstaunlich”; also GA 16: 624.6 = “On the Question Concerning the Determination of the Matter for Thinking,” *Epoché* 14 (2010), 216.23. GA 9: 307.23–24 = *Pathmarks*, 234.18, “Wunder aller Wunder: *daß Seiendes ist,*” and GA 52: 64.24–25.
- 5 Thomas Sheehan, “Facticity and *Ereignis*” in Daniel O. Dahlstrom, ed., *Interpreting Heidegger: New Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 42–68. “The Turn,” in Bret W. Davis, ed., *Heidegger: Key Concepts* (Durham, UK: Acumen Publishing, 2009), 82–101. “What If Heidegger Were a Phenomenologist?” in Mark Wrathall, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to “Being and Time”* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).
- 6 GA 56/57: 73.1–5 = *Towards the Definition of Philosophy*, 61.24–28.
- 7 GA 18: 300.15–17 = *Basic Concepts of Aristotelian Philosophy*, 203. 27–29.
- 8 GA 21: 151.4–5 = *Logic: The Question of Truth*, 127.30–32.
- 9 SZ 166.2–10 = *Being and Time* (1962), 209.18–28.
- 10 SZ 87.17–18 = 120.23; SZ 334.33–34 = 384.1.
- 11 GA 16: 631.30–31 = 220.31.

- 12 On *Ereignis* as that conjunction see GA 11: 39.19–21 = *Identity and Difference*, 31.12–14, “übereignet.”
- 13 GA 45: 212.10–11 = 179.29–30: “Wäre der Mensch nicht seiend, dann könnte auch diese Lichtung nicht geschehen.”
- 14 SZ 38.22–24 = 62.33–35. Cf. GA 16: 221.20.
- 15 SZ 42.4 = 67.10.
- 16 GA 29/30: 528.4 = *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 363.19, “Entheben”; 321.26–30 = 220.3–6, “nicht anderes ist als dieses”; 343.22–24 = 235.42, “Fähigkeit gehört zum Wirklichsein.”
- 17 Ibid. 343.18–20 = 235.38–40.
- 18 Ibid. 331.1 = 226.31, “Drängen zu”; 334.1–3 = 228.33–35, “*treibt sich*,” “*Vorgetriebensein*”; 335.25–26 = 230.5–6, “Hineintreiben zu.” “Sich-zeitigung” or “Zeitigung” is never to be translated as “temporalization”; see *Zollikoner Seminare*, 203.7–8 = *Zollikon Seminars* 158.10–11: “Zeitigung als Sich-zeitigen ist Sich-entfalten, aufgehen und so erscheinen.”
- 19 GA 45: 94.9–10 = *Basic Questions of Philosophy*, 83.38–39, “Hervor-bringen heißt Ans-licht-bringen.” This is said properly of human being but applies analogously to all life.
- 20 GA 29/30: 339.17–18 = 232.33–35, “Sich-*vor*-in das eigene Wozu”; 339.35 = 233.6, “Sich-in-sich-selbst-Vorlegen.” GA 9: 258.16–17 = 198.6, “in seine ἀρχή zurückstellen.”
- 21 GA 29/30: 325.11, 16–17 = 222.27–28, 32: “Sie [die Maschine] kann sich nicht selbst auf einen Betrieb einstellen und umstellen, während der Organismus seine eigene Bewegtheit leitet, einleitet und umleitet . . . sich selbst wiederherstellt und erneuert. *Selbsterstellung* überhaupt, *Selbstleitung* und *Selbsterneuerung* sind offenbar Momente, die den Organismus gegenüber der Maschine kennzeichnen . . . .”
- 22 Ibid. 339.23 = 232.38 and 377.22 = 259.34, “Selbst-erhaltung.”
- 23 Ibid. 343.24–26 = 263.1–3: “Nur was fähig ist und noch fähig ist, lebt; was nicht mehr fähig ist, . . . das lebt nicht mehr.” Cf. GA 27: 331.33–332.1–8, “[Dasein] existiert ständig entlang diesem Rande

- des Nicht.” This is said properly of human being but analogously fits animal life.
- 24 SZ 145.32-35 = 185.23-26.
- 25 GA 29/30: 343.2-3 = 235.14-15.
- 26 Ibid. 531.15-16 = 365.36-37. This is said properly of human being but applies analogously to animal life.
- 27 Ibid. 340.29-32 = 233.32-234.2; 342.19 = 235.9, “bei sich selbst einzubehalten.”
- 28 Ibid. 339.34 = 233.5, “Selbstcharakter”; 342.16 = 235.7, “Eigentümlichkeit” (McNeill: “proper peculiarity”); 347.25-26 = 238.40, “Bei-sich-sein.”
- 29 Ibid. 334.9-15 = 229.1-8.
- 30 Regarding animal “intentionality,” see GA 29/30: 350.3-5 = 240.22-24: “... die Bewegung ist in sich selbst eine Bewegung nach ...; ein Greifen nach ... Das Sehen ist das Sehen des *Gesichteten*, das Hören ist das Hören des *Gehörten*.”
- 31 *Zollikoner Seminare* 47.16-21 = *Zollikon Seminars* 37.25-31.
- 32 SZ 33.30-35 = 57.11-17.
- 33 GA 29/30: 384.3-4 = 264.10.
- 34 GA 18: 326.7-8 = 220.26.
- 35 Ibid. 326.12 = 220.30. See *De anima* III, 8, 431b 21.
- 36 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, I, 71, 11, “intellectus noster ... potentiam per potentiam cognoscat.”
- 37 GA 9: 199.21-22 = 152.24.
- 38 GA 16: 424.20-23.
- 39 GA 18: 326.19 = 220.35.
- 40 Ibid. 326.24-26 = 220.39-40.
- 41 GA 9: 326.15-16 = 248.36-37.
- 42 SZ 151.25-26 = 193.6-7, “Verständlichkeit.”
- 43 Ibid. 151.34-36 = 193.11-13, “Sinn ‘hat’ nur das Dasein.”
- 44 Ibid. 151.22-23 = 192.35-36.
- 45 Ibid. 324.33-34 = 371.35-36.
- 46 Ibid. 364.34-35 = 416.8: “Dieses [=Dasein] *ist* existierend seine Welt.”

- 47 GA 9: 279.1-7 = 213.10-15, “zusammenbringen ... In das Unverborgene der Anwesenung.”
- 48 GA 21: 188, no. 3 = 158-159, no. 3.
- 49 GA 21: 164.13 = 137.29, “die Weltoffenheit des Daseins”; GA 27: 135.13, “erschließend erschlossenes”; GA 49: 68.19: “ein geworfener.”
- 50 Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A 58 = B 82; Aquinas, *Quaestiones disputatae de veritate, quaestio 1, articulum 1, respondeo*; Aristotle, *Metaphysics* IV 7, 1011b 26-28.
- 51 Cf. GA 29/30: 531.2-4 = 365.26-27: “Das ‘als’ ist die Bezeichnung für das Strukturmoment jenes ursprünglich *einbrechenden* ‘Zwischen’.” For a brief statement on the clearing as hermeneutical space and time, see GA 16: 630.32-631.2 = 221.3-7.
- 52 In what follows I treat only the apophantic as, not the hermeneutical as.
- 53 GA 21: 148.29-149.7 = 125.15-17.
- 54 See, for example, Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, 75, 3, *respondeo, ad finem*: “similiter unumquodque habet esse et operationem.” Or to reverse the direction, “qualis modus essendi talis modus operandi”: a thing’s way of being determines its way of acting.
- 55 GA 29/30: 527.35 = 363.15-16.
- 56 GA 21: 147.23-26 = 124.19-20. I here correct my earlier reading (*ibid.*) of “Zeit” in place of “Dasein.”
- 57 I cite Heidegger’s words spoken in the classroom (Thursday, 27 February 1930) from the typescript of the Simon Moser *Nachschrift*, p. 703.12-13, corresponding to the much abbreviated passage at GA 29/30: 530.23-28 = 365.14-19.
- 58 This text is from the *Nachschrift* (see previous note), 703.28-704.6, corresponding roughly to GA 29/30: 530.30-531.7 = 365.21-30.
- 59 GA 36/37: 178.3-5 = 138.38-40; *ibid.* 178.20-22 = 138.9-10, “Grundgeschehen im Wesen des Menschen.”
- 60 *Zollikoner Seminare* 274.1 = 218.15, “aus-stehen eines Offenheitsbereich.”
- 61 Respectively *Confessions* XI.26.33 and *Enneads*, III, 7, 11, line 42.

- 62 GA 26: 285.18-19 = 221.17-18, “uns entrückt und die Ferne gibt; Wesen der Ferne.”
- 63 GA 14: 36.11-12 = 28.20-2. See also GA 9: 377.4 = 286.13 and GA 69: 95.3-5.
- 64 SZ 326.21-21 = 374.7-8.
- 65 Ibid. 366.14-19 = 417.30-34.
- 66 GA 29/30: 530.33 = 365.22-23, “Unterschied vom Sein und Seiendem.”
- 67 GA 6.2: 304.11-12 (alternately *Nietzsche* II, 338.5-7) = *Nietzsche* 4: 201.13-15, “Wesensherkunft,” “Herkunft von Anwesen.”
- 68 *Japan und Heidegger*, ed. Hartmut Buchner (Sigmaringen: Jan Thorecke, 1989), 201.12-14.
- 69 GA 45: 113.8 = 100.14, “Offenheit,” “Fragwürdigsten”; *ibid.*, 187.16 = 161.21-22.
- 70 GA 14: 90.3 = 73.3.
- 71 GA 81: 348.4-5, “Überwindung der ontologischen Differenz zwischen Sein und Seiendem.”
- 72 GA 66: 420.10 = *Mindfulness*, 371.15, “nach der Wahrheit des Seyns und ihrer Gründung im Da-sein.”
- 73 Ibid. 422. = 373.6-7, “wie west die Wahrheit des Seyns.”
- 74 GA 31: 123.10-12 = *The Essence of Human Freedom*, 85.36, “drängt ... in die Frage nach dem Menschen.”
- 75 GA 66: 146.12-13 = 124. 29-30.
- 76 GA 9: 325.20-21 = 248.11-12: “der Mensch west so, daß er das ‘Da,’ das heißt die Lichtung des Seins, ist.” Cf. GA 69: 101.12-13: “*Die Lichtung-sein* – in sie als Offenes sich loswerfen – das *Da-sein*.”