

Husserl and Heidegger on *Bedeutung*

Die Bedeutungslehre ist in der Ontologie
des Daseins verwurzelt. Ihr Gedeihen und
Verderben hängt am Schicksal dieser.
Sein und Zeit, 166

The horizons of Husserl's and Heidegger's early considerations of meaning are decidedly different. While Husserl hardly restricts meaning to linguistic expressions, in the *Logische Untersuchungen (LU)* he focuses on the meanings of linguistic expressions because of the essential role that those meanings play in theoretical knowing – in keeping with investigations aimed at “a pure phenomenology of the experiences of thinking and knowing.”ⁱ Meanings themselves are constituted by means of distinctive acts of consciousness, i.e., those intentional acts of meaning, supposing, entertaining, opining and the like (*meinen*) that refer to something.ⁱⁱ Thus Husserl analyzes meanings or what it is for something to be meant, in terms of *being conscious* of it and, indeed, precisely insofar as the conscious act of meaning it is essential to the conscious act of knowing it. By contrast, in *Sein und Zeit* Heidegger conceives meaning more broadly. For example, in Heidegger's account, ‘meaning’ can refer to, among other things, an essential characteristic of a complex of implements in which we are involved by virtue of being here. To be sure, expressions are in an important sense implements and herein lies one of several lines of convergence in their treatments of meaning. But the horizon for Heidegger's early analysis of meaning is fundamental ontology, the understanding of being that is disclosed in basic ways of *being here*, more or less authentically. These ways of being here, dubbed “existentials” by Heidegger, have a fundamental ontological significance inasmuch as they disclose meanings of ‘being’ in the course of existing or, equivalently, in the course of projecting possibilities against various horizons. To put the difference in somewhat truncated fashion, whereas Husserl is concerned with being conscious of meaning as essential to epistemology, Heidegger is concerned with the meaning of being here that is essential to fundamental ontology.

The difference between Husserl's and Heidegger's approaches to meaning corresponds directly to the difference in their phenomenologies. Whereas phenomenology is non-hermeneutical for Husserl, for Heidegger it is necessarily hermeneutical.ⁱⁱⁱ Once again, the contrasting centers of gravity – *being conscious* and *being here* – are helpful in elucidating the respective lines of convergence and divergence. Meaning, in the horizon of Husserl's phenomenology, is necessarily something of which one is conscious or potentially conscious and one typically exhibits this consciousness and means something precisely by saying it. Indeed, meanings must be interpreted in this manner if we are to explain their role in knowing as itself a conscious act different from an act of meaning. How would we know that-and-what we know if we did not know that we did and how would we know that we did if we were not equally conscious of not knowing as much, i.e. if we were not conscious of what something means in the absence of it and of knowing it? To be sure, the Husserlian phenomenologist is needed to make explicit this act of meaning something as well as its significance for knowing. Nonetheless, the Husserlian phenomenologist trades on not only a consciousness of something in the absence of knowing it but also – at least for certain paradigmatic cases – the full and transparent presence of it to the knower. In other words, the interpretation of at least two sorts of meanings, those of a categorical and those of a reflexive sort, come to closure in acts of knowing. Husserl identifies this closure with an intuition and his phenomenology is “non-hermeneutical” (as Heidegger

would have it) precisely because of the definitive role that Husserl assigns to intuition in contrast to understanding and interpretation.

Heidegger, too, is in the business of making meanings explicit but his main concern is with those implicit functions of meaning that do not belong, at least primarily, to the sphere of consciousness and conscious knowing. On Heidegger's account, meanings mean something and are understandable as part of our respective involvements in our worlds in the absence of anyone's being conscious of them or expressing them in language. These meanings, moreover, are essentially tied to the make-up and closure of being here, a headlong movement, not toward a clarifying presence, but toward a complete absence. Accordingly, these meanings are not the sort of meanings that can be transparently fulfilled in acts of knowing.^{iv} Our only possibility of availing ourselves of these meanings is by situating them in the hermeneutical circles – or, more precisely, the hermeneutical spirals – that constitute human existence.

The foregoing sketch of the ways Husserl and Heidegger largely diverge, in the early writings, in their accounts of meaning may suggest a basic complementarity between them. Thus, one might contend that Heidegger's focus on meanings insofar as they figure into our being here is not antithetical but simply different from Husserl's analysis of meanings insofar as we can be conscious of them and come to know things by means of them. While there is much to be said for this suggestion, I hope to show that at the most basic level their early approaches to meaning are nevertheless deeply incompatible.^v

A. The uses of 'meaning': from ideally unified to formally indicative meanings

In Husserl's early account of meaning, he identifies a paradigmatic sense of it but he does so in the course of acknowledging four ordinary uses of 'meaning'. In the first part of the following section, I review this account and, in the wake of that review, I identify three further senses of 'meaning' that Heidegger, by contrast, considers paramount to any *Bedeutungslehre*.

1. The primacy of meaning as an ideal unity: meaning in the service of knowing

Suppose that Sally is at an important sales meeting that will determine whether her proposal for a new marketing plan is approved. There is a good deal at stake at the meeting since approval could mean a salary increase, maybe even a promotion. At the meeting are three colleagues: Sam who supports Sally's proposal, Jane who has the only competing proposal, and Jill who supports Jane's proposal. These colleagues are evenly divided, but the decision rests not with them but with their supervisors, Tom, Dick, and Harry, who are at the meeting to hear the reasons for and against the competing plans. After Sally makes a strident case to the supervisors for her proposal, Jane and Jill tell them pointedly why, in their opinion, Sally's proposal is ill-conceived. As soon as Jane and Jill have finished making their points and Sally is wondering what the supervisors will decide, Sam turns to her and whispers in her ear: "The ducks are now all in a row." Sam is clearly trying to pass on some information to Sally. But Sam's words are puzzling to her and she asks herself "What does he mean?"^{vi}

As an expression of Sally's puzzle, this question is ambiguous but in ways that illuminate the sometimes confusing polyvalence of 'meaning'. To mean something is, paradigmatically, an act performed by someone with the requisite innate and acquired linguistic skills. One sense of 'meaning' is precisely this act of one person communicating or intending to communicate some message to some potential listener. So Sally's question might be faithfully rephrased as "What does he, i.e., Sam mean?" precisely inasmuch as Sam is speaking to her with the purpose of communicating something that he understands and wants her to understand.^{vii} In this sense the speaker conveys or announces (*kundgibt*) that he means something (as Sam does by turning to

Sally and whispering to her). Note that it is one thing for a speaker to give notice or convey that he intends to communicate something and quite another thing what his communication means. If Sally asks her question, we can presume that Sam has conveyed to her that he means something. Accordingly, by posing the question “What does he mean?” Sally may be asking what is, as it were, “going through his head” or “what he is trying to get across to me” when he says this or perhaps what motivates him to do so, perhaps even what he is attempting to accomplish by doing so.^{viii}

But Sally may simply be puzzled by the expression ‘the ducks are now all in a row’, quite apart from Sam’s intentions in voicing it in the present situation. For the expression, while not uncommon, is not so frequently used that any normal speaker of colloquial American English would necessarily understand it from context to context. A second sense of ‘meaning’ is the significance or content of an expression (or, more precisely, the type of which it is a token) inasmuch as that content does not vary from case to case, depending upon the particular intentions and act of expressing or upon the particular context in which the expression is employed. To suppose this second sense of meaning is to recognize that meanings, at least in some sense, are not tied to this or that precise act of meaning them. Instead, a meaning (in this second sense) to some extent transcends these individual acts (leaving aside the question of whether they also transcend their expressions). The issue, in other words, is not what the speaker means but what is meant by what he says. If this second sense of ‘meaning’ is at work in Sally’s question, it can be accurately rephrased simply as “What does ‘the ducks are all in a row’ mean?”

Suppose, however, that Sally understands the expression perfectly well (she used to go duck hunting with her father who used the same expression to indicate that the time was right to start shooting). But she doesn’t understand what Sam means by it or what is meant by it *in this case*. This confusion points to third and fourth senses of ‘meaning’. Unconfident as she is about the outcome and given the timing of Sam’s whisper, Sally may not be sure whether Sam is declaring her the winner or the loser, i.e., whether he means that “the ducks are now all in a row” for her or for Jane. In that case, when Sally asks “What does Sam mean?” the perplexity that she reveals is about a meaning based upon the particular circumstance, signaled by the adverb ‘now’ (“the ducks are *now* all in a row”). This adverb, like other spatial and temporal adverbs, personal pronouns, demonstratives and impersonals (e.g., “it’s raining”) are what Husserl dubs “systematically occasional expressions,” the meanings of which are in each case relative to the context in which they are used. These systematically occasional expressions introduce “unavoidable sorts of polyvalence,” as Husserl puts it, contrasting them with objective expressions, the meanings of which do not vary from circumstance to circumstance.^{ix}

But there is also a fourth sense of ‘meaning’ that could also be the source of Sally’s question, namely, her puzzlement over who it is about whom Sam is speaking. In other words, who are “the ducks”? Sam could be referring to Tom, Dick, and Harry but he could also be referring to Jane and Jill. Thus, for example, if Sam meant (i.e., were referring to) Jane and Jill, then his statement would also mean that Sally has won. Without in any way canceling the difference between the third and fourth meanings or uses of ‘meaning’, this conditional demonstrates how closely connected they can be, i.e., the contextual significance of an expression and its references, the objects or state of affairs to which a systematically occasional expression refers. (Obviously, in some cases, the referents are as occasional as the expressions are.)

The elaboration of four meanings of ‘meaning’ in the foregoing paragraphs recapitulates Husserl’s account of meaning in the First Logical Investigation. In that account, Husserl notes that ‘meaning’ may refer to:

- (1) the act of meaning something, conveyed in the example above by Sam’s whisper, prompting Sally to ask: “What does he mean by saying that?”;
- (2) the standard, iterable (ideal) content of a phrase, as might be conveyed by the query: “What does the expression ‘the ducks are all in a row’ typically mean?”;
- (3) the occasional significance of an expression like ‘now’, as might be conveyed by the question: “What does he mean by saying ‘the ducks are *now* all in a row’?”
- (4) the reference or set of objects about which a statement is made, e.g., in the example at hand: “Who are the ducks that are supposedly all in a row?”^x

Though Husserl distinguishes these senses of ‘meaning,’ for the most part he reserves the term *Bedeutung* for the second sense, namely, for what he calls “the ideal content” of an assertion or “the ideal unity” constituted in several distinct acts.^{xi} That ideal content can and should be isolated from the psychological, real content of the act and experience of expressing meaning (e.g., what Sam wants to communicate in whispering in Sally’s ear, the whisper’s sound, and the sentiment he feels in whispering). Similarly, Husserl speaks of an ideal distinction between a meaning and its expression. Husserl does not offer much in the way of an argument for this distinction. He presumes that when we inquire into the meaning of an expression, we are interested, not in (3), i.e., the words said *hic et nunc*, but in (2), i.e., the expression *in specie* (*Ausdruck in specie*) – or at least we are when it comes to “the theoretical content of a science” (LU II/1, 92). He observes that, just as we distinguish the type of an expression from its token and concern ourselves with the former, so we distinguish a meaning from (1) the manifold acts of asserting, judging, etc. in which it identically meant.^{xii} Though Husserl introduces the distinction between meaning and its expression by appealing to a true proposition in geometry, he contends, albeit again with little argument, that the distinction holds “for all assertions, *whatever* they say, be it false or even absurd” (LU II/1, 43ff).

Husserl also argues at length against reducing meaning to (4).^{xiii} Whether the ducks that Sam is talking about are Tom, Dick, and Harry or Jane and Jill, they would be the objects to which the expression refers. But in another sense the entire state of affairs, i.e., their being in a row, can be the object of the expression. Being the object of the expression in either sense is different from being its meaning since, as Husserl notes, an expression can have (a) several meanings but the same object (referent) or (b) the same meaning and several objects (referents). Thus, as an example of (a), ‘the ducks are all in a row’ can refer to the same objects (Tom, Dick, and Harry) or the state of affairs (their being in a row) but the expression can mean that they are ready for the taking either by Sally or by Jane. As an example of (b), consider Sam whispering the same words into Sally’s ear and meaning the same thing but after she’s made what he takes to be a persuasive case for her proposal in another meeting before three different supervisors. Here there is something the same that carries over from one usage to the other, accounting for what Husserl considers the ideal character of meaning, though clearly the references are different (LU II/1, 96f). Yet in the examples of both (a) and (b), the basic structural difference between a meaning and the object(s) meant by means of it holds. As Husserl puts it, while the meaning (content) of an expression must be distinguished from the object to which it refers, it designates the object “*by means of its meaning*” (LU II/1, 49).

Yet while Husserl insists on sharply distinguishing the act of meaning something and the object meant in such an act from meanings as ideal unities, he contends that systematically

occasional expressions are replaceable by the latter.^{xiv} Making this claim, he adds, amounts to claiming “the unboundedness of objective reason.” Husserl does not so much justify as he does explain the latter claim by setting up a parallel, first, between being “in itself” and truth in itself and, second, between truths in themselves and “fixed and univocal assertions in themselves.” In the course of drawing these parallels, Husserl makes the remarkable claim that “everything that is, is knowable ‘in itself’ and its being is, with respect to its content, determinate being,” documented in various truths in themselves. Thus, on this view, everything that is determinate in a fixed manner can be objectively determined and everything that can be objectively determined can be expressed “ideally, in meanings of words determined in a fixed manner” (*ideal gesprochen, in fest bestimmten Wortbedeutungen ausdrücken*). “Truths in themselves correspond to being in itself and, in turn, the fixed and univocal assertions in themselves correspond to those truths” (LU II/1, 90).

To be sure, in this same context Husserl concedes that substituting objective expressions for these systematically occasional ones “cannot be factually executed.” But he remains unfazed by this factual limitation. What is noteworthy is his insistence on the reducibility of the meanings of these “systematically occasional expressions” to what he takes to be meanings proper. There is supposedly a strict identity to meaning as the ideal content of an assertion – i.e., (2) above – and this identity contrasts sharply with individual experiences or acts of meaning something (however constant the psychological make-up of those acts) as well as the objects to which one refers by means of those meanings. Clearly, the same cannot be said for the meanings, if we may still use the locution, of systematically occasional expressions.

2. *The formal indication of meaning: meaning in the service of existing*

Sein und Zeit is replete with uses of the term *Bedeutung* to designate the meanings of words, terms (*Termini*), expressions, and concepts. Indeed, Heidegger frequently (albeit by no means invariably) heeds the distinction between use and mention by placing in quotation marks or italics the relevant words or expressions.^{xv} This use of *Bedeutung* corresponds to Husserl’s own practice of using the term chiefly “in relation to the linguistic sphere, to that of ‘expressing’.”^{xvi} Along with this use of *Bedeutung*, Heidegger gives an account of *Bedeutung* in *SZ*. The account is truncated, to be sure, yet it clearly establishes lines of convergence with and divergence from Husserl’s *Bedeutungslehre*.

Like Husserl at least by the time of the writing of *Ideas I*, Heidegger is not content to restrict meaning to “‘logical’ or ‘expressive’ meaning” (Id I, 256; *SZ* 166n.1). At the same time he also shares Husserl’s view that meaning, while clearly distinct from expression, is inherent to it and, indeed, precisely in the sense that expressions and their meanings go hand-in-hand (Id I, 257). Heidegger might be interpreted as according a priority at times to meaning over expressions (or at least expressions understood in a certain sense). “Words accrue to meanings. But word-things are not provided with meanings” (*SZ* 161). But if we interpret this last remark as a reference, not to meanings generally, but to the meanings of words, then the basic similarity with Husserl’s views is stark. In this connection and in anticipation of Heidegger’s own hermeneutical contribution to a theory of meaning, it bears adding that Heidegger lauds Husserl for placing the sense of expressing experiences through meaning in the forefront of his investigations, indeed, even according that sense a primacy over perception and the objects perceived or meant.^{xvii}

Talk is an existential, a performative self-disclosure of what it means for Dasein to be, i.e., what it means for this entity to be here. Talking is as basic to being here as are the ways

Dasein is disposed and understands. Indeed, talking is equally basic in the sense that “the disposed intelligibility [*Verständlichkeit*] of being-in-the-world enunciates itself as talk” (SZ 161f). That intelligibility or know-how – encompassing everything that falls within the active engagement of being-in-the-world and, equivalently, being-with – is “always already” in various ways divided up or sorted out. Talking articulates and shares that intelligibility, that sorting out inherent to Dasein’s know-how, its always foregoing engagement with the world. For example, in our scenario with Sally and the others, all the parties involved are sorted into various groups and, whatever Sam’s whisper in Sally’s ear means, it articulates and attempts to communicate in some fashion that sorting (e.g., who are “the ducks” and for whom they are the ducks). Heidegger designates what is thus sorted out (in course of that articulation) as “the entirety of meaning” (*Bedeutungsganze*) that can be analyzed into meanings (SZ 161).

Talking is not the same as language but the set of words said in the course of talking make up the language. This set of words is something handy (*ein Zuhandenes*) but it can also be broken down into “on hand word-things” (*vorhandene Wörterdinge*) (SZ 161). In this way Heidegger embeds his account of meaning within the ontological economy of *Sein und Zeit*, i.e., the three principal ways of being that he thematizes in the text: being-here, being handy, and being onhand (*Da-, Zuhanden- and Vorhandensein*). He is far from denying that meanings, like their linguistic expressions, may be tools or objects of theoretical scrutiny or that they figure necessarily in knowing. But the meaning of ‘meaning’ must be rooted in being-here as the condition of the possibility of disclosures of the meanings in these senses.

Heidegger’s understanding of how meanings are rooted in being-here is based upon his account of how Dasein’s being-in-the-world and foregoing disclosure of its worldliness make ontologically possible its engagement with implements as something handy (*Zuhandenes*). In other words, Heidegger offers an explanation of how meanings in general – of which linguistic meanings form only a subset – take shape in the use of entities and all that use implies. At the heart of that explanation, glossed below, are notions of relevance, referredness, and meaningfulness (*Bedeutsamkeit*).

The ontological make-up of tools and implements, i.e., their being-handy (*Zuhandensein*), consists of, among other things, their relevance or referredness to one another, what they are respectively for (*Wozu*). At the same time, Dasein and nothing handy is what these implements, taken together, are primarily for.^{xviii} Thus, for example, the nail is for the hammer, the nail and hammer are for hammering, hammering is for building while this entire complex of handy implements is for the sake of Dasein itself. But this relevance itself – constitutive, as it is, of the handy implement’s manner of being, its *Zuhandensein* – is discovered only on the basis of a foregoing disclosure of this entire system of relevance that entails the implement’s “suitedness to the world” (*Weltmäßigkeit*). This foregoing disclosure is “the understanding of the world, towards which Dasein as an entity always already comports itself” (SZ 86). At the same time, insofar as this worldliness is part of Dasein’s essential make-up (its being-in-the-world), Dasein in each case already refers to and understands itself as in this world. By no means requiring some sort of theoretical transparency, this self-referential understanding is a primordial, deep sense of trust-and-familiarity (*Vertrautheit*) and it is precisely in view of Dasein’s world and its primordial trust in that world and familiarity with it that implements can be encountered for what they are, namely, relevant, referring to one another.

After noting how understanding is able to refer “in and by” the relations among these implements, Heidegger employs the verb for “to mean” in the sense of “to point-to” (*be-deuten*) to characterize the way implements relate to one another by way of referring. (For example, a

hammer means – points to – a nail, Sally’s question means – points to the fact that – Jack whispered.) But he then extends this sense of ‘meaning’ – albeit at first qualifiedly, as indicated by the use of scare quotes – to Dasein’s self-understanding: “In the trust-and-familiarity with these [referential] relations, Dasein >>means<< [something] to or for it itself, it primordially gives itself its being and its potential-to-be to understand with respect to its being-in-the-world” (SZ 87). Immediately shedding the scare quotes and explaining himself further, Heidegger adds that the “for-the-sake-of-which [*Worumwillen*] means [i.e., entails] an in-order-to [*Um-zu*], the latter a for-which [*Dazu*], the latter in turn a wherewithal [*Wobei*] of allowing for the relevance, and the latter in turn that with-which [*Womit*] of involvement” (SZ 87). Implements and instrumental complexes are ultimately meaningful because they are for the sake of Dasein’s being-in-the-world and this being-for-the-sake-of also means (entails) that one thing is for and relevant (*Um-zu*) to another, and so on. In addition, embedded in and trusting in this web of meanings of implements relative to one another, Dasein also has a meaning, indeed, a primordial meaning, though one obviously different from the meaning of any implement or complex that is for the sake of Dasein. In this way Heidegger extends meanings from the ways implements or instrumental complexes refer to one another to being-here’s way of pointing to itself, i.e., its self-understanding qua being-in-the-world. “Meaningfulness” (*Bedeutsamkeit*) is precisely Heidegger’s way of designating “the relational whole of this meaning” (*das Bezugsganze dieses Bedeutens*) (SZ 87).

Meaningfulness is thus equated with a whole of “this meaning,” i.e., the sorts of referring and entailing involved in the use of what is handy. From the point of view of fundamental ontology, this meaningfulness is coincident with the disclosure of both what it means to be handy and what the handy is ultimately for, namely, being-in-the-world or Dasein’s worldliness. This meaningfulness corresponds to two further, ordinary senses of ‘meaning’. Consider, for example, someone seeing a machine for the first time and asking: “What does this lever mean?” The meaning of the lever is *what it is for*, what it does and what is affected by what it does, i.e., its function and thus necessary relation to other parts of the machine. The meaning of the machine in turn is its purpose and any such purpose is ultimately, in Heidegger’s jargon, *for the sake of Dasein*. Insofar as something is handy (*zuhanden*) and not merely this or that tool (i.e., ontologically and not merely ontically), its meaning is relative to its being for our being-here. Similarly, in the scenario of Sally and Sam, we might distinguish in this way the meaning of Sally’s presentation and the meaning of the meeting. Her presentation is for the supervisors and the meaning of the meeting with the supervisors is for the sake of everyone involved (namely, for the sake of choosing between hers and Jane’s proposals).

On the basis of this account of uses of the verb ‘to mean’ (*bedeuten*) in terms of meaningfulness, we can specify two further senses of ‘meaning’ as follows:

(5) the functional and necessarily relational structure of some implement(s), as might be conveyed by the question “What does this lever mean?”; inasmuch as meaning in this sense involves a complex of such implements that are necessarily related to one another, ‘entail’ can serve as a synonym for ‘mean’ in this sense; and

(6) the primary purpose of some system or complex of implements, as conveyed by the question “What is the (ultimate) meaning of this machine?”

The meaning of a lever in the sense of (5) is its function and what that function entails within a system of functions (a sense that need not coincide with the semantic or lexical meaning of ‘lever’).^{xix} So, too, the meaning of a machine in the sense of (6) is not the lexical meaning of ‘machine’ but rather its purpose. Yet despite the differences between these non-semantic and

semantic senses of ‘meaning,’ Heidegger maintains – albeit with all too little argument or explanation – that the latter is based on the former. More precisely, he contends that meaningfulness, as explained above, makes possible the disclosure of linguistic “meanings.”

The meaningfulness itself, however, with which Dasein is in each case already deeply familiar [*vertraut*], contains in itself the ontological condition of the possibility for the fact that Dasein, in its interpretive understanding, can disclose something like ‘meanings’ that for their part in turn found the possible being of word and language. (SZ 87)

Since Heidegger is short on details here, allow me to suggest the following gloss of what he has in mind here. We are engaged, in a primordial sense, with what is useful to us, i.e., things that are handy, and this engagement supposes (i.e., rests upon) a foregoing disclosure of the meaningfulness of our being-in-the-world. In light of this meaningfulness, there is meaning in sense (5) above, namely, the meaning, i.e., function of one implement in relation to another, what it does and entails. So, too, there is meaning in sense (6) above, the purpose of any complex of implements and the very engagement with it, i.e., its being for the sake of our being-in-the-world. Talking supposes these meanings that can then enter into a relationship with words and language in the senses – (1) through (4) – that are the focus of Husserl’s investigations.

Moreover, these additional senses of ‘meaning’ can also be fruitfully applied specifically to the question of the meaning of a linguistic expression. Perhaps the most straightforward way to extend (5) and (6) – i.e., the functional and humanly purposive senses of ‘meaning’ – to a linguistic expression would be to regard them as signaling syntactical and pragmatic dimensions of meaning, respectively. In keeping with the qualified holism of Heidegger’s account of meaning generally (implements have meaning only in relation to other implements and the entire complex of them only in relation to Dasein, while Dasein means something to itself primordially in terms of that complex), meanings of linguistic expressions would be a function of their relations among themselves and purposes served by those complexes. Oversimplifying, we might say that context and purposive practice supplant semantics.^{xx}

More mundanely, in our earlier example, when Sally asks her question, she might well be asking what the function of the remark whispered by Sam is in relation to other things said and/or what the purpose of the remark is. The possible meanings targeted by Sally’s question would then be the linguistic equivalent to (5) and/or (6). In other words, when she asks: “What does he (Sam) mean by saying ‘all the ducks are now in a row’?” she could be asking: “What connection does this remark have to what just happened or was said?” “What connection do his words have to what can or will be said?” “What purpose does his whispering those words in my ear now serve?” “Is he trying to prepare me for a negative decision?” and so on.^{xxi}

But these functional and humanly purposive senses of meaning by no means exhaust the extent of the ways Heidegger’s treatment of *Bedeutung* differs from that of Husserl. Heidegger is, to be sure, no less adamant than Husserl about the irreducibility of meaning to some psychological property inherent in acts of meaning. Yet it is also clear that Heidegger is unwilling to reduce the meaning of systematically occasional expressions to ideal, fixed meanings. Indeed, he considers something roughly equivalent to this contextually relative character a basic feature of existence. I am alluding here to what Heidegger insists, from the very outset of SZ, is a fundamental way that Dasein is to be understood. Dasein is to be understood as having the status of being, in each respect, mine or yours, what Heidegger deems *Jemeinigkeit*.^{xxii} Indeed, in speaking of Dasein, Heidegger observes, one is at the same time saying the personal pronouns and the corresponding verbs: “I am” and “you are” – the very sorts of expressions that Husserl deemed “systematically occasional” (SZ 41f, 54, 321).^{xxiii} Echoing

this point, Heidegger later adds that this reference to “I” is an essential determination of Dasein, though one that must be interpreted existentially (SZ 117).

Nor is Heidegger bent on identifying an ideal meaning of existence that can substitute for the meaning of *Jemeinigkeit*. In order to see this point, it is helpful to consider Heidegger’s characterization of the “respective mineness” as a “formal indication” (SZ 114). He uses and announces this methodological expression “formal indication” precisely to underscore that, contrary to certain habits of interpreting the Dasein of “I am” and “you are,” he uses them in a way that attempts to remain open to the question of their ontological significance and remains open precisely by lacking any binding ontological content. What he is targeting is an ontological obliviousness to the distinctiveness of being-here (*da-sein*) or, what is the same, the assumption that its manner of being is that of something simply on hand (*vorhanden*), capable of giving itself in an appropriate intuition. Formal indications, in other words, are not directed at achieving some intuition or insight into what is given. To the contrary, taking aim precisely at a Husserlian “formal phenomenology of consciousness,” Heidegger calls into question the supposed self-evidence of the view that access to existence is gained through a reflection on the I of acts, a reflection that simply takes up what it reflects (*eine schlicht vernehmende Reflexion auf das Ich von Akten*) (SZ 115). Formal indications are ways of meaning that capture the systematically occasional character of expressions like “I am” that Heidegger builds into his notion of existence as well as the need to ward off precipitous ontological interpretations of them. But they also introduce yet another dimension of meaning,

(7) a enactment or re-enactment (i.e., a transformative performance) on the part of the reader or listener and the demand for the same on the part of the author or speaker.^{xxiv}

Let us dub this seventh sense of meaning, following Heidegger, “existential meaning,” in contrast to the lexical or “categorical meaning” – taking the latter as Heidegger’s latter expression for the use of ‘meaning’ – (2) above – that Husserl privileges in his taxonomy of uses of “meaning” (SZ 119). The key difference between categorical and existential meanings is ontological; whereas categorical meanings are on hand (*vorhanden*) and in principle complete, existential meanings are in principle incomplete, though with a transformative potential that only the unique and authentic incompleteness of being-here – or, more precisely, being-toward-death – can entail.

By way of summary, the foregoing review of Husserl’s and Heidegger’s treatment of meaning has yielded the following seven senses of meaning. Meanings can be verbal, lexical (categorical), indexical (occasional), referential, functional, purposive, or existential. The differences among the last three correspond to different ontological relations since functional meanings are relations of handy beings (implements) to one another within a system, purposive meanings are relations of such systems to human beings, and existential meanings are relations to be enacted by human beings towards themselves.

2. *The meanings of ‘being’: from intuitive givenness to hermeneutic historicity*

Why does Heidegger reform phenomenology into hermeneutic phenomenology? What is gained, what is lost by this turn? Perhaps the most straightforward way to appreciate his rationale is to review Husserl’s account of the meaning of ‘being’. In the Sixth Logical Investigation Husserl couches his considerations of the meaning of ‘being’ in the context of his accounts of (a) the senses of ‘truth’ and (b) categorical intuitions. More precisely, in the first of these contexts, he introduces the senses of ‘being’ as an objectifying act’s correlate (he also dubs this correlate

“evidence”) that has the function of fulfilling something meant. This approach is motivated by the *prima facie* insight that ‘being’ and ‘truth’ are equivalent in some sense. Indeed, there is no apparent difference between affirming that a state of affairs is the case and affirming the truth of the proposition describing that state of affairs. Husserl explains the difference in accent or emphasis between uses of the terms ‘truth’ and ‘being’ but these nuances do not override his basic insight into the equivalence of truth and being (LU II/2, 122, 125f).

When it comes to the meaning of ‘being,’ Husserl emphasizes that, while it is the correlate of an objectifying act, it is not to be found either in any “real” characteristic of an external object (as is its color or form) or in any inner perception afforded by reflection.^{xxv} Instead, being must be given in some sense, i.e., it must be intuited.

But this analysis of being is problematic and, indeed, for reasons that help explain Heidegger’s turn to hermeneutic phenomenology. In the first place, at least from Heidegger’s vantage point, the analysis is problematic because it appears to render the question of the meaning of ‘being’ meaningless. To appreciate this point, consider the difference between open and closed sentences in logic, e.g., ‘Fx’ and ‘(Ex)Fx’. This sort of difference can be understood as the difference between meaning, i.e., entertaining the thought that *something is F* and asserting the existence of what is thus thought (meant) – in short, the difference between an empty and filled intention, in Husserl’s senses of those terms. But if existence or being is precisely fulfillment or instantiation of what is merely thought or meant, then it is difficult to see how ‘existence’ or ‘being’ can be said to have a meaning or how the question of their meaning can be meaningfully raised. For existence or being is precisely the identity of what is meant with what is perceived. As such, it can be neither simply what is meant nor simply what is perceived. Or, to put this issue in Husserl’s favored terminology at this time, he is emphatic that differences between ‘is’ and ‘is not’ pertain to the matter, not the quality, of the act (LU II/2, 127). But even if we suppose that those differences are differences of the matter (or, equivalently, meaning or sense that is grasped: the *Auffassungssinn*) rather than the quality of the acts, we are left without an account of what distinguishes the intentional matter of the act of meaning and that of the act of knowing.

The appeal to intuition is intended, among other things, to disentangle the matter known from its being merely meant, where the act of meaning is itself a contingent psychological and thus historical phenomenon, supposedly incapable of accounting for the ideal status of what is known. But why should one presume this ideal status, when it comes to existence or at human existence (being-here: *da-sein*)? To be sure, at one level Husserl and Heidegger have different themes and, to the extent that these different thematic levels can be sustained, it is possible to speak of a complementarity between their phenomenologies. However, as soon as the question of the meaning of ‘being’ is raised, the issue becomes more acute. For the differences become immediately apparent if the prerogative (literally, the first order of questioning) is accorded formal ontology rather than fundamental ontology or, equivalently, a discourse in the service of theoretical knowing rather than understanding. Meanings that await fulfillment or meanings that explain fulfillment.

For Heidegger in SZ the very problem is to raise the question of the meaning of ‘being’; and this question can only be raised if there is something about being that is not given and, indeed, cannot be given; the entire framework of empty and filled intentions coming to coincide, the very idea of a categorical intuition that renders transparently present its object (e.g., the “object” of “exists”) must be supplanted by considerations of understanding; Heidegger takes up Husserl’s

insight into the intrinsic inadequacy of sensory perception, the endless profiles of entities, and extends it to the meaning of ‘being’ itself

Conclusion

There is one more dimension of the two philosophers’ views of meaning that underscores their differences and it concerns their respective ways of using *Sinn* and *Bedeutung*. meaning and sense, i.e., horizon

ⁱ Edmund Husserl, *Logische Untersuchungen*, II/1: Untersuchungen zur Phänomenologie und Theorie des Erkennens (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1968), 2 (hereafter: LU II/1). For critical remarks on Husserl’s exclusion of nonlinguistic expressions and meaning from his use of “meaning,” see J. N. Mohanty, *Husserl’s Theory of Meaning* (New Haven: Yale U. Press, 2008), 107f.

ⁱⁱ LU II/1, 343f, 406; *Logische Untersuchungen*, II/2: Elemente einer phänomenologischen Aufklärung der Erkenntnis (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1968), 18: “*In diesem hinweisenden Meinen liegt und liegt ganz allein die Bedeutung*”; see *ibid.*, 28, 32 (hereafter: LU II/2); Mohanty, 87: “The essence of expressions then consist in (1) expressing meanings or thoughts and (2) being about, or referring to, some object.”

ⁱⁱⁱ In the Beiträge Heidegger refers to “non-hermeneutical phenomenology,” but he does not speak of “hermeneutical phenomenology” as such, though the expression is readily entailed by his gloss of phenomenology and hermeneutics at the outset of SZ. Oskar Becker appears to have coined the expression “hermeneutical phenomenology.”

^{iv} By ‘thematic knowing’ I am trying to capture Heidegger’s way – in *Being and Time* – of construing knowing as a “way of determining the present-at-hand by way of regarding it” (*betrachtendes Bestimmen des Vorhandenen*) and as “grounded in a foregoing way in already-being-alongside-the-world” (*vorgängig gründet in einem Schon-sein-bei-der-Welt*) (SZ 61). ‘Thematic knowing’ in this sense thus corresponds roughly to Ryle’s conception of knowing that (in contrast to knowing how).

^v In this study, for reasons of economy, I confine myself for the most part to consideration of Husserl’s first and sixth *Logische Untersuchungen* and Heidegger’s *Sein und Zeit*. For a more comprehensive consideration of Husserl’s theory of meaning and its development, see the following works by J. N. Mohanty: *Husserl’s Theory of Meaning* (Hague: Nijhoff, 1969); “On Husserl’s Theory of Meaning,” *Southwestern Journal of Philosophy*, 5 (1974): 229-244; and the already cited *The Philosophy of Edmund Husserl*, esp. 84-109, 224-241, and 377-386.

^{vi} Husserl regards expressions as meaningful, in contrast to indicating signs (*anzeigende Zeichen*) but notes that expressions in their communicative function serve as signs, announcing (*kundgebend*) to the listener the thoughts of the speaker. But he introduces his account of meaning by shifting to soliloquy where that function of announcing is necessarily absent and he does so in order to underscore both that meanings and not this function of announcing a thought are essential to expressions and that expressions and the meanings they express form “an internally fused unity”; see LU II/1, §§ 5-9, S. 30-42; see Mohanty 2007, 87f and Plato, *Theaetetus* 89c-d on the soliloquy called ‘thinking’.

^{vii} Further complicating matters but contributing to this first sense of ‘meaning’ is the fact that we use the verb to convey a sense of ‘intending’ as well, as in the expression ‘he means to say’; that is to say, he means something by saying *p* and he means to say it; this connotation is clearer in the French translations of Husserl’s text; see Jacques Derrida, *La voix et le phénomène* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1967), 34: “Les expressions sont des signes qui ‘veulent-dire.’”

^{viii} LU II/1, 33: “Diese Funktion der sprachlichen Ausdrücke nennen wir die *kundgebende Funktion*. Den Inhalt der Kundgabe bilden die kundgegebenen psychischen Erlebnisse.”

Husserl proceeds to distinguish narrow and broad senses of this function; see *ibid.*, 33f.

^{ix} LU II/1, 80-84; in this context Husserl adds that objective expressions are typically theoretical expressions of the sort on which abstract sciences such as mathematics are constructed. If it is not already, it will become clear below that this context drives Husserl’s rhetoric here, as one might expect in *logical investigations*; see LU II/1, § 29, S. 91-96: *Die reine Logik und die idealen Bedeutungen*.

^x These four uses of ‘meaning’ might be termed (1) verbal, (2) lexical or semantic, (3) indexical or occasional, and (4) referential.

^{xi} I write ‘for the most part’ since he also distinguishes intending and fulfilling meaning (*intendierender und erfüllender Bedeutung*); Husserl himself regards the application of the term *Bedeutung* to both the intention and its fulfillment as an “unseemly” but “hardly avoidable” equivocation; for the most part, however, he attributes meanings (*Bedeutung schlechthin*) to assertions whether the latter are true (“fulfilled”) or not; see LU II/1, 44, 50ff, 104.

^{xii} Indeed, as far as the identical meaning is concerned, Husserl contends, “absolutely nothing is to be discovered from a judging and the one judging” (LU II/1, 43). To be sure, something has to seem to us to be case for us to judge it to be the case and we only give notice of that by judging. Yet what is asserted in the assertion, i.e., the content or meaning, is “nothing subjective” (*ibid.*, 44). So, too, Husserl adds that every assertion has something meant or entertained (*Meinung*) and “that the meaning, as its unified specific character, constitutes itself in this entertaining” (*ibid.*, 45). Since the sense of ‘meaning’ that Husserl privileges here is accessible or recognizable apart from any particular use and thus can serve to categorize particular uses, it has a certain affinity with a dictionary definition and thus may be dubbed the lexical or categorical sense of meaning that underlies the semantics as opposed to the syntax or pragmatics of an expression.

^{xiii} In the LU, respecting common usage, Husserl treats *Sinn* and *Bedeutung* as equivalent and criticizes Frege for erecting, in effect, an artificial difference, such that what Frege understands by *Sinn* is equivalent to what Husserl understands as *Bedeutung* and what Frege understands by *Bedeutung* is equivalent to what Husserl understands as the objects expressed; LU II/1, 53; Gottlob Frege, “Über Sinn und Bedeutung” in: *Funktion, Begriff, Bedeutung*, vierte, ergänzte Auflage, hrsg. von Günther Patzig (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1975), 41f. As Mohanty observes, in *Ideas I* Husserl distinguishes *Sinn* as the general term for meanings in all acts, reserving *Bedeutung* to designate the conceptual meanings of corresponding acts of expression; see Mohanty 2007, 103. By contrast, Heidegger distinguishes *Sinn* and *Bedeutung*, albeit in a way quite different from anything that Frege envisions.

^{xiv} In other words, in terms of the four senses of “meaning” delineated above, (3) – in contrast to (1) and (4) – is reducible to (2).

^{xv} What follows is an extensive, albeit not complete list of terms that places in quotation marks or italics in the course of addressing their meaning: “zeitlich,” “Phänomen,” “logos,” “Erscheinung,” “phänomenologisch,” “Besorgen,” “Welt,” “Da,” “Gelten,” “Urteilsgehalt,” “Gerede,” “Tod,” “Gewißheit,” “schuldig,” “Zukunft,” “vor,” “Alltag,” “Geschichte,” “Welt-Geschichte,” *Beziehung, Hermeneutik, Kategorien, Aussage, Sorge* (SZ 19, 28-32, 37, 44, 57, 64, 119, 132, 154ff, 167, 192, 199, 237, 256, 281, 326f, 370, 378f, 389).

^{xvi} Ideen I, §124, S. 256.

^{xvii} GA 20: 75: “We see not so much primarily and originally the objects and things, but rather we first speak about them; more precisely, we do not say what we see but rather, vice versa, we see what one says about the matter.”

^{xviii} SZ 84: “Das primäre >>Wozu<< ist ein Worum-willen. Das >>Um-willen<< betrifft aber immer das Sein des *Daseins*,...”

^{xix} On the use of ‘semantic’ and ‘lexical’ in this connection, see n. 12 above. There is obviously a good deal more to be elaborated in this connection, given the impreciseness of my phrase “semantic meaning.” One might argue that genuine semantic meanings are never simply generic, dictionary definitions but context-specific, in which case the contrast with the functional meaning of a lever – (5) in our list of uses of ‘meaning’ – might well converge or coincide with the semantic sense of ‘lever’.

^{xx} Kusch article; this approach to meaning through context and practice moves the center of gravity from semantics if semantics is supposed to determine the relation of the linguistic expressions to something “outside” those expressions. Later Heidegger:

^{xxi} Though the foregoing proposal for additional senses of ‘meaning’ is derived from Heidegger’s account of meanings generally, he does not himself explicitly endorse such a proposal. Nevertheless, the endorsement is implicit in other analyses in *Sein und Zeit* when he takes issue with a restricted sense of *Bedeutung* as the ideal content of a judgment or with the “categories of meaning” of a linguistic science, oriented to assertions and grounded in an ontology of the present-at-hand; see SZ 156 and 165f. Above all, in addition to the remark, cited at the very outset of the paper, regarding the rootedness of *Bedeutungslehre* in the ontology of *Dasein* (SZ 166), see the following claim: “Aus der Zeitlichkeit der Rede, das heißt des *Daseins* überhaupt, kann erst die >>Entstehung<< der >>Bedeutung<< aufgeklärt...werden” (SZ 349).

^{xxii} (see Scotus *individualitas*)

^{xxiii} See also Heidegger’s reference to Humboldt’s consideration of the relation between personal pronouns and spatial adverbs (SZ 119).

^{xxiv} For a more detailed discussion of the various functions of formal indications, see my “Heidegger’s Method: Philosophical Concepts as Formal Indications.” *Review of Metaphysics* 47 (1994):

^{xxv} LU II/2, 139: “So wenig das Seine in reales Bestandteil irgendeines äußeren Gegenstandes ist, sowenig ist es ein reales Bestandteil irgendeines inneren; also auch nicht des Urteils.”