

QUINE AND HEIDEGGER ON MEANING

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I

In this paper I propose to carry out a comparative study of W.V. Quine and Martin Heidegger (in *Being and Time*), two apparently unlikely candidates for a philosophical dialogue on the seemingly improbable topic of meaning. Heidegger pursues the question of the “meaning of being” in his project of fundamental ontology, and his investigations into the “meaning of human existence” are the avenue for the realization of this project. Given Quine’s rejection of foundational projects in philosophy, his quantificational conception of existence, and his behavioral focus on the cognitive dimensions of linguistic meaning, Heidegger’s conception of meaning would evidently make no empirical or logical sense to him. Moreover, from the standpoint of the Heideggerean “destruction of traditional ontology,” with its concomitant critique of such “received” interpretations as those of being, existence, meaning, and language, Quine’s own positions would be swept through peremptorily on account of their uncritical immersion in such tradition.

“Meaning” in Quine’s naturalist and behaviorist theory, and “*Sinn*” and “*Bedeutung*” in Heidegger’s *Being and Time* are, nonetheless, commensurable in several significant respects. I intend to show that it is possible to tune into the convergences while remaining attuned to the undeniable divergences between these two particular contributions to the general topic of meaning. With this intention in mind, I compare and contrast their positions on different aspects concerning the problem of meaning. In Part II, I focus mainly on the points where they have coincided: their rejection of the notion of meaning as mediation and abstraction, and their acceptance of holism. In Part III, I concentrate on the

critical differences in their conceptions of meaning as related to reference and language.

II

A major congruence between Quine's naturalist and behaviorist theory of meaning and Heidegger's doctrine of meaning as an "existential of Dasein" resides in the fact that they share one common enemy: meaning as mediation and abstraction. Put in other words, both reject a third realm of meanings between what each defines as "language" and "world."

From Quine's critical standpoint, the "modern" notion of meaning is the Aristotelian essence applied, not to things, but to linguistic forms or words. As he has put it: "Meaning is what essence becomes when it is divorced from the object of reference and wedded to the word."¹ However, when the doctrine of meaning poses to itself the question regarding the nature of meanings themselves, it tends to forget that meaning and reference are distinct, and thus postulates meant entities or objects. In fact, Quine has pointed out, the question itself is already "rushing matters in supposing there to be such things as meanings."² In his diagnosis, the failure to distinguish meaning from reference has "encouraged a tendency to take the notion of meaning for granted," so that the questioning of such notion is seen to be tantamount to supposing "a world in which there is just language and nothing for language to refer to."³

Quine has urged in general that the "explanatory value of special and irreducible intermediary entities called meanings is surely illusory."⁴ The construal of meanings as entities of a special sort, whether mental or universal, as the idea expressed by a term, singular or general, is for him

¹ Quine, "Two Dogmas of Empiricism," in *From a Logical Point of View* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press 1980, 2nd ed. rev.), 22. Further references to this text will be given in the form: Quine, TDE. Cf. *Pursuit of Truth* (Cambridge, Mass.; London: Harvard University Press, 1992, 2nd ed. rev.), 55. Further references to this text will be given in the form: Quine, PT.

² Quine, "Use and its Place in Meaning," in *Theories and Things* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press 1981), 45. Further references to this text will be given in the form: Quine, UPM.

³ Quine, "The Problem of Meaning in Linguistics," in *From a Logical Point of View* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980, 2nd ed. rev.), 47. Further references to this text will be given in the form: Quine, PML.

⁴ Quine, PML, 12.

"worse than worthless for linguistic science," and the very "talk of ideas is bad business," for

[t]he evil of the idea is that its use, like the appeal in Molière to the *virtus dormitiva*, engenders an illusion of having explained something.⁵

Hence, he has insisted that "once the theory of meaning is sharply separated from the theory of reference, it is a short step to recognizing as the primary business of the theory of meaning simply the synonymy of linguistic forms," so *that* "meanings themselves as obscure intermediary entities, may well be abandoned."⁶

Since Quine has argued in favor of the primacy of sentences (as compared to words) in the process of language-learning,⁷ and since he has agreed with theories that classify sentences as the primary vehicles of meaning,⁸ the import of his arguments against various theories of sentence meaning is crucial. On the one hand, then, it is important to see that his repudiation of the notion of meanings as abstract intermediary entities is of a piece with his rejection of the conception of propositions as the meanings of sentences.⁹ Though Quine's attacks against the notion of proposition occurs along various fronts, his general enemy is the notion of proposition as an intensional object. In this sense, the general strategy he recommends and pursues is a "flight from intension" or a "dispensing with intensional objects."¹⁰ Thus, Quine sees the particular notion of propositions as meanings as a positing of abstract, intermediary, that is, intensional, objects or entities, and his attack on this conception stresses the vacuity of appealing to such entities. As to the more particular conception of propositions as translational constants or as "language-transcendent sentence-meanings,"¹¹ he will urge that "it is a

⁵ Quine, PML, 48.

⁶ Quine, TDE, 22

⁷ Quine, *Word and Object* (Cambridge, Mass.: M. I. T. Press, 1960), 9, 13, 17. Further references to this text will be given in this form: Quine, WO.

⁸ Quine, PT, 37.

⁹ However, Quine's confrontation with those doctrines which postulate propositions is not limited to those which see them as meanings. See, Quine, WO, §43. But this does not mean that he rejects propositions altogether, e.g., understood as sentences as such. See, for instance, Quine, PT, 77-8, and *From Stimulus to Science* (Cambridge, Mass.; London: Harvard University Press, 1995), 81-3. Further references to this text will take the form: Quine, FSS.

¹⁰ See Quine, WO, chap. 6, especially, § 43.

¹¹ Quine, PT, 53.

mistake to suppose that the notion of propositions clarifies the enterprise of translation,"¹² and that "the notion of proposition seems to facilitate talk of translation precisely because it falsifies the nature of the enterprise."¹³ Furthermore, he will claim that his thesis of the indeterminacy of translation shows that "the notion of propositions as sentence meanings is untenable."¹⁴

The appeal to meanings in general is, for Quine, the common characteristic of what he calls "uncritical semantics." He insists that the appeal to meanings, whether as mental entities or no, is still "mentalist" insofar as it does not see meaning from a naturalistic point of view as a property of behavior.¹⁵ Since he also sees intentionality as mentalism—in opposition to behaviorism,¹⁶ and since he recommends dispensing with intentional objects in his general flight from intensionality, he interprets such results as grounds for dispensing with the theory of intentionality and intentional objects. The postulation of translation relations as determinate relations of intentionality, for instance, would amount to the myth of a "mental museum" in which "the meanings of the words are determinate in the native's mind [...] even in cases where behavioral criteria are powerless to discover them for us."¹⁷

From a naturalist perspective, mind and meaning are "part of the same world that they have to do with." So, when the naturalist addresses the problem of mind (s)he does so in terms of language, which (s)he sees as "a social art which we all acquire on the evidence solely of other people's overt behavior under publicly recognizable circumstances." Since "[m]eanings are, first and foremost, meanings of language," meanings as the "very models of mental entities [...] end up as grist for the behaviorist's mill."¹⁸ The empirical semanticist, Quine explains, realizes that the place of meaning is in use and looks towards verbal behavior.

¹² Quine, WO, 207.

¹³ Quine, WO, 208.

¹⁴ Quine, PT, 102.

¹⁵ Quine, "Ontological Relativity," in *Ontological Relativity and Other Essays* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), 27. Further references to this text will be given in the form: Quine, OR.

¹⁶ Quine, WO, 219.

¹⁷ Quine, OR, 29.

¹⁸ Quine, OR, 26.

To see meaning as a property of behavior is thus to have the possibility to "take the behavior, the use, and let the meaning go."¹⁹

To adopt the naturalist perspective of language and its behavioral view of meaning is, for Quine, to "give up an assurance of determinacy" where behavioral criteria are lacking.²⁰ By recognizing that "there are no meanings, nor likenesses nor distinctions of meaning, beyond what are implicit in people's dispositions to overt behavior," the naturalist sees that "the question whether two expressions are alike or alike in meaning has no determinate answer, known or unknown, except insofar as the answer is settled in principle by people's speech dispositions."²¹

As for Heidegger, in *Being and Time* he characterized *Sinn*—traditionally translated as meaning or sense—²² as "that wherein the intelligibility of something maintains itself," and he defined it as

the 'upon-which' of a projection in terms of which something becomes intelligible as something; it gets its structure from a fore-having, a fore-sight, and a fore-conception.²³

Heidegger's definition is inscribed within his general aim of working-out the "question of the meaning of 'being'."²⁴ His proposal to inquire into the inquirer identifies the analysis of our being as what will "reveal the horizon for an interpretation of the meaning of being in general."²⁵ Such approach is justified basically on the grounds of the distinctiveness of our way of being, i.e., in our awareness and understanding of the being of beings. Since the avenue through which the question of the "meaning of being" in general unfolds is one in which Heidegger analyses the structure of our being and interprets the particular "meaning of

¹⁹ Quine, UPM, 46.

²⁰ Quine, OR, 28.

²¹ Quine, OR, 29.

²² Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson (New York: Harper and Row, 1962). Translation of *Sein und Zeit* (Tübingen: Niemeyer 1959, Siebte Auflage, 1982). Further references to these two texts will be given in the form: Heidegger, BT; SZ. Macquarrie and Robinson translate "'Sinn' as 'meaning' or 'sense', depending on the context," and "keep 'signification' and 'signify' for '*Bedeutung*' and '*Bedeuten*'"; Heidegger, BT, 19, trans. n. 2. I will follow their translations of these terms.

²³ Heidegger, BT, 193; SZ, 151.

²⁴ Heidegger, BT, 19; SZ, 1. While Macquarrie and Robinson generally write 'Being' (with a capital 'B') for Heidegger's 'Sein,' I will write 'being' (with a lower case 'b').

²⁵ Heidegger, BT; SZ, § 5.

our being,"²⁶ the problem of meaning as such takes on a specific guise. Thus, none of these contextual factors at play in Heidegger's definition are inconsequential to his conception of meaning as "an existiale of Dasein"²⁷ or an intrinsic feature of the distinctively human way of being (as *Existenz*). Hence, when Heidegger finally offers us his definition he is in the midst of carrying out his proposed analysis of the human way of being. A definition which, naturally, given the reasons for such approach, occurs in the section devoted to the human understanding.²⁸

Our awareness and understanding of being is originally prereflective. The deliberate and thematical or reflective acts, in which things are grasped in their sheer presence and properties are ascribed to them, are merely secondary and derivative. The epistemological model, in which a cognizing subject grasps its objects of cognition and issues judgments about them, thus fails to depict the human way of being in its most original mode.²⁹ In fact, such secondary and derivative modes of awareness and understanding not only are preceded and made possible by the prereflective mode, but they are also "deficient" modes.³⁰

The human way of being is in its most original mode a "being-in-the-world."³¹ To be human is to be immersed and engaged in a purposive whole of activities which we configure and which matters to us. "World" here is not a thing or an object. Nor are the other beings we encounter in the world at first things or objects. Rather, they are instrumental for our purposes, they play their particular functions for us. In Heidegger's terms, they are beings "ready-to-hand."³² They are intelligible to us in terms of their "readiness-to-hand," and they make sense to us in terms of their particular place within the collective totality of accouterments (or "equipment") at our disposal.³³

²⁶ Heidegger, BT, 38; SZ, 17. That is, the "preparatory" and "provisional" "analysis of Dasein," which attempts to "bring out the being" of Dasein, and the "primordial interpretation of Dasein," which "interprets the meaning of the being" of Dasein.

²⁷ Heidegger, BT, 193; SZ, 151.

²⁸ Heidegger, BT; SZ, § 32.

²⁹ See Heidegger, BT; SZ §13, §18, §§ 31–32.

³⁰ Heidegger, BT, 88; SZ, 61. Cf. Heidegger, BT, 103; SZ, 73–4.

³¹ See Heidegger, BT, 33, 36; SZ, 13, 15–16; BT; SZ, §§ 12–13.

³² See Heidegger, BT; SZ, § 15.

³³ Heidegger, BT, 97; SZ, 68.

Heidegger's general conception of meaning as an "existential of Dasein" will thus not only give particular importance to developing its uniquely human character, but also to searching for this uniqueness in the fundamental prereflective modes of the human way of being as a "being-in-the-world." Hence, from this general Heideggerean perspective any definition of meaning which is cast in terms of the epistemological subject-object model is inherently inadequate. Moreover, in his confrontation with "non-existential" notions of meaning, Heidegger also concentrates his attacks on those conceptions of meaning which take it to be either

a property attaching to entities, lying "behind" them or floating somewhere as an "intermediate domain";³⁴

what happens "in" a judgment besides the judging itself;³⁵

what is discovered for sight [in an assertion ...] a "meaning."³⁶

His main concern in these regards is to dispute those theories which hold that meaning is "present-at-hand." He thus denies that meaning is some abstract thing or object as a sheer presence grasped through the reflective acts of a merely cognizing subject, whether it is classified as a property, a domain, an entity, or an event. He will point beyond such abstraction and away from such mediation to the very activities of the human being in its concrete and direct understanding of its world.

In their particular rejections of the notion of meaning as abstraction and mediation, Quine and Heidegger thus share vaguely similar orientations. Quine proposes to turn towards human behavior, Heidegger to the very being of the human being (*Existenz*). Quine insists that meaning belongs within the natural world in which human beings interact. Heidegger emphasizes the thoroughly "existential" character of meaning as a fundamental mode in which the human being is in the manner of "being-in-the-world."

In their particular rejections, Quine and Heidegger have also underscored the (broadly) social-cultural dimensions of meaning. For Quine, a distinction between "meaning" and socially shared information is simply

³⁴ Heidegger, BT, 193; SZ, 151.

³⁵ Heidegger, BT, 195; SZ, 154.

³⁶ Heidegger, BT, 196; SZ, 154. Heidegger's critique of those theories which locate meaning in judgments or assertions is developed below, Part III.

not possible. The problem, as it is illustrated in his thesis of the indeterminacy of radical translation, is

precisely that we have made no general experimental sense of a distinction between what goes into a native's learning to apply an expression and what goes into his learning supplementary matters about the objects concerned.³⁷

More emphatically, he claims that such distinction is "illusory." Meaning "evolves *pari passu*" with the acquisition of socially shared information so that "even historical clairvoyance would reveal no distinction."³⁸ If meaning evolves with the socially shared information, then no objective distinction is possible.³⁹ Furthermore, insofar as meaning is "primarily a property of behavior," and "not a psychic existence," and language is "a social art which we all acquire solely on the evidence of other people's overt behavior under publicly recognizable circumstances," there is no such thing as a private language.⁴⁰

In Heidegger, discourse [*Rede*] is that fundamental feature of our way of being which determines the structural character of meaning. Defined as "the articulation of intelligibility," discourse is simply what holds everything together as an ordered meaningful whole, i. e., in a holistic manner. To say that our way of being is discursive is, in this sense, to say that beings are intelligible to us, or make sense to us, in their togetherness. Our quotidian activities are themselves a sort of network of interconnections which we constantly build. Our world is the fabric that we weave in our discursive manner of being. Such structuring of discourse is thus present in our way of being as a whole.⁴¹

Heidegger's discussion of the structure of discourse or its four constitutive moments, i.e., what the discourse is about, what is said in the talk as such, the communication and the making-known,⁴² also serves to

³⁷ Quine, WO, 38.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Quine, WO, 38-9. The solution in which there is no precipitating of the socially shared information permeates "observation" sentences (or those sentences which are firmly and directly associated with our sensory stimulations, such as 'It's raining.'). also. Even in their case Quine reiterates his claim on the illusory character of such a distinction. See Quine, WO, 43.

⁴⁰ Quine, OR, 26-7.

⁴¹ Heidegger, BT; SZ, § 34.

⁴² Heidegger, BT, 204-6; SZ, 161-8.

emphasize the derivative character of language in its own structure and in its various forms of employment. Language is only possible on the basis of our discursive way of being. It is merely a "phenomenon" (or, a particular manifestation of the human way of being in its world) that is rooted in our discursive way of being.⁴³ In this sense, words and sentences are about, say, communicate, and make something known only in a derivative sense.⁴⁴

For Heidegger, communication is not something that is essentially linguistic. Language is not some sort of channel through which communication is first made possible. Rather, language is itself possible on the grounds of our "existential" form of communication in our "being-with-others." It is a conversation which, having its ground in discourse, is only possible in the human being's conversance with itself, its world and the others with whom it shares this world. Moreover, there is no such thing as a private language, nor much less something like a private meaning or meanings—linguistic or otherwise. This also implies further that all the different forms of our employment of language (words and sentences in general), that is, our different kinds of conversations, are only possible on the grounds of an already ongoing interplay—the human conversance.

Evidently, Quine and Heidegger's conceptions of the "human being," and of its "world" are themselves worlds apart. Yet, in remitting to these "human" dimensions their intent is the same, namely, to pull meaning down from its residence in an intermediate sphere of abstractions and to plant it in the concrete soil of human action and interaction. However, Quine roots meaning in language and thus insists that verbal behavior is the ultimate criterion for a critical empirical semantics, while Heidegger roots language itself in meaning and claims that the "existential-ontological" analysis of meaning as an "existential of Dasein" in its "being-in-the-world" is the only adequate avenue to its foundations.

Meaning, in Quine's behaviorist view, is a thoroughly linguistic phenomenon, that is, the complex of overt verbal behavior and the dispositions to these behavioral responses to verbal and nonverbal stimuli. Such

⁴³ Heidegger, BT, 203; SZ, 160.

⁴⁴ It is perhaps the structural moment of what Heidegger calls "being-with-others" which pervades in these structural moments of discourse. See Heidegger, BT, 148–55; SZ, 114–18. The moment of communication is, furthermore, the one most closely related to this "being-with-others." See Heidegger, BT, 204–5; SZ, 161–2.

is also the avenue through which socially shared information, which is mixed into meaning, is itself acquired. In Heidegger's view, language itself is a phenomenon, a particular manifestation of the human being in its "being-in-the-world," an entirely derivative feature that is founded upon a prelinguistic and thoroughly "existential" meaning. Language, thus, never serves as the primary avenue of human interaction, rather it itself is possible only on the grounds of a shared "existential" meaning.

Quine and Heidegger also share a holistic view of meaning. From the standpoint of his naturalized epistemology, Quine has urged that a "critical" semantics is equal to a verificationist theory of meaning plus holism.⁴⁵ Seen in this light, "meaning, once we get beyond observation sentences, ceases in general to have any clear applicability to single sentences."⁴⁶ From Heidegger's perspective of meaning as an "existential of Dasein," our "being-in-the-world" as such is the distinctive way of being in which we configure, through our prereflective understanding, interpretation, and discourse, a structured, ordered, and interrelated whole.

Hubert Dreyfus already noted this point when he compared them from the perspective of hermeneutics and established a critical distinction between Quine's "theoretical holism" and Heidegger's "practical holism." Theoretical holism, according to Dreyfus's definition, construes "all understanding as theoretical" thus treating the problem of human understanding "as an epistemological problem, as a question of theoretical knowledge,"⁴⁷ while practical holism takes into account that "[a]lthough practical understanding—everyday coping with things and people—involves explicit beliefs and hypotheses, these can only be meaningful in specific contexts and against a background of shared practices."⁴⁸

Moreover, both philosophers share the common tenet that no human experience is "interpretationless," and that such interpretation is fundamentally holistic. Such view is evident in Quine's notion of "conceptual scheme" as that understanding through which we "interpret," "articulate,"

⁴⁵ Quine, "Epistemology Naturalized," in *Ontological Relativity and Other Essays* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), 80. Further references to this text will be given in the form: Quine, EN.

⁴⁶ Quine, EN, 89.

⁴⁷ Hubert Dreyfus, "Holism and Hermeneutics," *Review of Metaphysics* 34 (September 1980), 6. Further references to this text will be given in the form: Dreyfus, HH.

⁴⁸ Dreyfus, HH, 7.

and "break down," "fitting" and "arranging" our sense experiences, and which is "imposed upon "the world" or "reality."⁴⁹ It is also patent in Heidegger's notion of "interpretation" [*Auslegung*] as the development of the prereflective understanding into an explicit understanding of something as something, e.g. of a hammer as a hammer, in terms of its place within the interrelated whole of our "being-in-the-world."⁵⁰

However, as Dreyfus has already observed, for the Quinean theoretical holism, such interpretation is the "translation" of "theories," while from the standpoint of Heidegger's practical holism, interpretation is the "explication" of "cultural practices."⁵¹ Nonetheless, neither Quine's notion of a cognitive and conceptual interpretation, nor Heidegger's prereflective and existential model of interpretation are "presuppositionless." As Quine has put it, there is no "*pou sto*," there is no place where we humans can stand outside of a conceptual scheme and envision an unconceptualized, uninterpreted reality. We are all in Neurath's ship.⁵² Heidegger, for his part, has emphasized that we never interpret in a vacuum but that we always presuppose a basic understanding ("fore-having," "fore-sight," and "fore-conception") of that which we interpret, and he has characterized this phenomenon of interpretation in terms of the "hermeneutic circle."⁵³ Since Heidegger has said that "the 'circle' in un-

⁴⁹ Quine has referred to the notion of 'conceptual scheme' and has characterized it thus in many of his writings. For a sample of such characterizations, see Quine, "Speaking of Objects" in *Ontological Relativity and Other Essays* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969); Quine, WO; and, especially, "On the Very Idea of a Third Dogma" in *Theories and Things* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981). Further references to "Speaking of Objects" will be given in the form: Quine, SO. Further references to "On the Very Idea of a Third Dogma" will be given in the form: Quine, OVI.

⁵⁰ See Heidegger, BT; SZ, § 32.

⁵¹ See Dreyfus, HH, 4-6, 7-9.

⁵² Otto Neurath's metaphor of sailors who must rebuild their ship in the open sea without ever being able to dock at a port and renew it with better materials ("Protokollsätze," *Erkenntnis* 3 (1932): 206) is a favorite of Quine's. See, for instance, Quine, SO, 6; Quine, WO, 5; Quine, EN, 84; and Quine, "Identity, Ostension, and Hypostasis," in *From a Logical Point of View* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980 2nd ed., rev.), 79.

⁵³ Heidegger, BT, 194; SZ, 152.

derstanding belongs to the structure of meaning,"⁵⁴ meaning is, then, that "upon which" the interpretation is "set out in advance."⁵⁵

It is also worth noting that their holistic views differ with regard to the role of language. For Quine, the whole of meaning is thoroughly linguistic, i.e., that of interlocked sentences. Moreover, since for Quine language is itself the conceptual scheme in which we articulate and systematize our sense experiences, that is, our "world theory," interpretation is essentially linguistic in this sense.⁵⁶ For Heidegger, language is a derivative whole, a "totality-of-words" that is only possible on the basis of the thoroughly "existential" and "worldly" meaning. Given Heidegger's model of language as a derivative feature that harbors our understanding and its developments, language is interpretative only in a derivative sense. It is worth emphasizing that language as a "totality-of-words" is nonetheless a whole —derivative though it may be.

III

In one line of Quine's critique of the notion of meaning as an abstract intermediate entity he has traced the "hypostasis" of meaning back to the failure to distinguish between meaning and naming or reference. The meaning/reference distinction not only applies to terms, singular or general, definite or indefinite, but it also serves to distinguish between terms and sentences —that do not perform a referential role in the Quinean model. The positing of propositions as sentence meanings is, thus, itself one result of the failure to appreciate this difference between sentences and terms.

⁵⁴ Heidegger, BT, 195; SZ, 153

⁵⁵ Dreyfus goes further claiming that the "Quinean theoretical circle results from what Heidegger calls *Vorsicht* [fore-sight]," and that in the "Heideggerean hermeneutic circle [...] this whole theoretical activity [...] takes place not only on the background of implicit or explicit assumptions but also on the background of practices"; Dreyfus, HH, 10. However, this inclusion (of the Quinean theoretical circle in the Heideggerean hermeneutical circle) is based on the unwarranted assumption that Heidegger has succeeded in establishing a specific connection between the "theoretical" understanding and the "practical" understanding. For a critical view into this assumption, see Karl-Otto Apel, "Wittgenstein and Heidegger: language games and life forms," in *Martin Heidegger: Critical Assessments. Volume III: Language*, ed. C. Macann (London; New York: Routledge, 1992), 351–2.

⁵⁶ See, for instance, Quine, WO, 3; Quine, OVI, 41.

From Heidegger's theory of reference, signification, and meaning such analytic distinctions look superfluous, especially in the light of the practical and active dimension of the quotidian understanding, immersed as it is the worldly dealings with "equipment" (beings in their interconnected "readiness-to-hand"). It is, Heidegger insists, in such dimension that "reference" or "assignment" [*Verweisung*] occurs in its most original form when we assign a certain task to something and thus constitute it as something that is instrumental to our purposes.⁵⁷ Furthermore, it is only on the basis of this reference that such things as "signs" (whose particular assignment is that of indicating or of orienting us in our quotidian activities) are themselves possible as equipment.⁵⁸

The network of relationships in which we assign or refer is one in and through which we "sign-ify" or designate [*be-deuten*] the sense and direction of the "ready-to-hand," i.e., their "in-order-to ..." Since we are ultimately their purpose, we thereby "signify" or "point to" [*bedeuten*] ourselves as this purpose, and understand ourselves as this purpose. It is precisely the relational character of this network of assignments or references that Heidegger calls "signifying." And, it is this relational totality of "sign-ifying" or designating [*Be-deuten*] that he calls "significance" [*bedeutsamkeit*].⁵⁹ Simply put, then, significance is the way we are in our world and the way we understand the world in which we exist, that is, as a structured whole of purposive relations whose ultimate purpose is ourselves.

Significations or the designations through which we impart instruments with sense and direction "always carry meaning."⁶⁰ Heidegger emphasizes that what is understood is "not the meaning, but the entity" itself.⁶¹ If one is to say that an instrument "has" meaning, then, one must also say that we "give" it meaning, instilling it with meaning by installing

⁵⁷ See Heidegger, BT; SZ, § 17.

⁵⁸ Heidegger discusses "kinds of signs," and offers the following examples: symptoms, warning signals, signs of things that have happened already, signs to mark something, signs by which things are recognized. Some concrete examples offered by Heidegger are: signposts, boundary-stones, the ball for a mariner's storm-warning, signals, banners, signs of mourning, the adjustable red arrow in a motor car, the knot in a handkerchief. He also talks of the "establishing" of signs, or of "taking" things as signs, as when the south wind is taken as a "sign" of rain.

⁵⁹ See Heidegger, BT, 120; SZ, 87.

⁶⁰ Heidegger, BT, 204; SZ, 161.

⁶¹ Heidegger, BT, 192; SZ, 151.

it within the whole of significance —within our world. Hence, meaning is not a property possessed by those entities which we understand and relate to as “ready-to-hand.” Rather, to say that these beings “have” meaning is to say that they are understood, rendered intelligible, through our very way of being as a “being-in-the-world.” We “give” meaning to them only insofar as we understand them in their particular way of being as a being within our world.⁶² Furthermore, then, meaning is not some sort of intermediate being or domain between ourselves and our instruments. As an “existentiale of Dasein,” meaning is rooted in our very way of being as a “being-in-the-world,” and it is upon meaning, as the structure of our existence, that the entities within our world are understood as “ready-to-hand.”

Reference in the Heideggerean sense of the word is thus “to refer a being to ...” In the Quinean sense, it is “to refer to a being.” Heidegger’s notion of signs as equipment that indicate and thus orient us about in our quotidian activities would cover the Quinean reference and include much more than verbal expressions. It would also provide an account for the very use of the Quinean “terms,” or of those words used “to refer to a being,” by underscoring the fact that they can perform such a function precisely because they “have been referred or assigned to” this task. “Terms” would thus be, in the Heideggerean scheme of things, entities “ready-to-hand,” beings at our disposal for indicating other beings and orienting us in our worldly activities.

For Heidegger, “to refer this or that being to ...” is ultimately to “signify” or to “designate” its purpose for us within the purposive whole of our everyday dealings. Since he also stresses the holistic character of our understanding in our everyday dealings with beings that are at our disposal and to which we give sense and direction, from his standpoint the Quinean notions of reference, signs, and signification would be left in a sorry shape. Not only would they be abstract, but in this abstraction, they would also isolate beings from the contextual whole configured by the practical and active understanding.

Yet Quine himself has insisted that terms and reference are local to our conceptual scheme, and that the verbal activity of referring to this or that being is one that only makes sense within the linguistic apparatus as a whole.⁶³ He also purports to establish a distinction between “abstract”

⁶² See Heidegger, BT, 192–3; SZ, 151–2. Cf. Heidegger, BT, 371–2; SZ, 324–5.

⁶³ See, for instance, Quine, WO, 102.

and "concrete" objects, a distinction that, in the empirical spirit of his reflections, attempts to separate material from non-material things, while at the same time acknowledging that both are conceptual constructs or posits.⁶⁴ Nonetheless, even from a modified Heideggerean perspective in which some sort of holism were acknowledged to the epistemological model, it would still be an abstract holism. As such it is a mere system of abstract connections between objects or things, themselves abstract, where the "abstraction" is still that of the merely cognitive reflection of something out of the whole of significance in which it is installed within the world of "being-in-the-world." However, Quine's pragmatic orientation in his reflections on meaning and language, for instance, his view of language as conceptual tool serving and adjustable to our pragmatic concerns and needs, cannot be so readily discarded on account of its thoroughly epistemological intent.

On the other hand, the Heideggerean practical and holistic activities, such as assigning and signifying, are themselves only possible insofar as we already understand beings, i.e., they are intelligible, already mean something to us. Simply put, "reference" is only possible on the basis of "meaning." In this sense, there is indeed a distinction between "reference" and "meaning" in Heidegger's theory, but it claims that we can only refer a being to a given task because this being is intelligible to us in its possible functions and applications within the network of our purposive activities in the world. Since the prereflective and practical understanding is, for Heidegger, the most basic mode of human existence from which all forms of reflective and theoretical knowing are derived, such "existential" meaning and reference would themselves be the most original basis. In relation to this basis, objectual reference and empirical meaning would be merely derivative and thoroughly deficient in their abstractive character.

Moving one step further into the Heideggerean theory, we find that language, characterized as a "totality-of-words," is just the way in which we discursively speak out or put into words the "totality-of-significations."⁶⁵ In this sense, it is emphatically not the primary locus of reference, significations, and meaning. Rather, it has its place or is rooted in these existential activities in which the human being actively configures its world. By denying to language the principal role or (better) place

⁶⁴ See, for instance, Quine, TDE, 44; Quine, WO, 1, 3, 5, 22.

⁶⁵ Heidegger, BT, 204; SZ, 161.

of reference, signifying, and meaning, Heidegger is thus pointing out that language itself has its place in reference, signifying, and meaning. This means that neither reference, nor signifying, nor, much less, meaning are essentially linguistic, and that, if one is to talk of linguistic reference, signifying or meaning, then one is talking about something which is derivative. But this implies something much more crucial than merely saying that such linguistic features are secondary, for it is that language itself is a derivative feature. Language and words are just a medium of significance, that is, through language, through words, we express our understanding of world as a whole of significance.

Heidegger's main concern with the topic of language in *Being and Time* is "merely to point out the ontological 'locus' of language," that is, its existential foundation.⁶⁶ However, he does not question the view of language as an instrument of expression.⁶⁷ Rather, his claims amount to saying that it is first instrumental to the expression of what is more fundamental than any theoretical reflection, namely, to the very way the human being is in its prereflective way of being. Yet, in doing this, Heidegger is suggesting that language is not an instrument forged independently in and applied from some sort of intermediate domain between ourselves and the world in which we exist. Language is rather a manifestation of the way the human being is in its world, and it is forged and applied within this whole. It is thus an instrument that is formed by and conforms to the way the human being is in its world. Such way is emphatically one in which the human being forges itself and its world by building a unified structural whole. Language adheres and conforms to a structure that is already there.

However, language itself can also be taken as an object of a thematical or theoretical reflection and thus "broken up into word-things which are present-at-hand."⁶⁸ Of "word-things" in general, Heidegger says that they "do not get supplied with significations."⁶⁹ Only because we understand ourselves and our world in terms of "significance" is it possible for

⁶⁶ Heidegger, BT, 210; SZ, 166.

⁶⁷ Language itself, as the totality in which we manifest our way of "being-in-the-world," is primordially an "entity-within-the-world"; Heidegger, BT, 204; SZ, 161. This entails that language is fundamentally a being "ready to hand," an instrument which can be used (originally) for the verbal expression of our prereflective way of being and (derivatively) for the verbal expression of our thematical or theoretical reflections.

⁶⁸ Heidegger, BT, 204; SZ, 161.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

us to understand and interpret "significations."⁷⁰ And, there is (first) a "totality-of-significations" from which significations can be "dissolved" or "broken up."⁷¹ Heidegger says further that "the being of words and of language" is "founded" "upon" significations.⁷² Language, the "putting into words" of the "totality-of-significations" is, as a "totality-of-words," founded upon the latter, of which it is the "worldly" expression. Words are founded upon significations, that is, they "accrue to" or "thrive on" significations. Furthermore, just as the significations, which can be "broken off" from the "totality-of-significations," words, as what accrue to or thrive on significations, would also be what can be "broken off" from the "totality-of-words" (language).

In the end, then, words themselves can be said to "have meaning" only in a tertiary sense, that is, insofar as they thrive on or accrue to significations that "carry meaning," which in their turn are only able to do so because meaning is the way we are and understand what is. This not only means that reference, significance, and meaning are prelinguistic, but that they are protolingistic, that is, language is only possible because we actively understand and define beings by giving them sense and direction within the purposive whole of our "being-in-the-world." Hence, from a Heideggerean standpoint, Quine's definition of meaning as a property of verbal behavior and his circumscription of reference as a role played by the terms in language would be rejected, not only on the grounds of the prelinguistic character of "meaning" and "reference," but, more importantly, because of their protolingistic constitution.

From a Heideggerean perspective we can also see that by taking language, as Quine has, as a complex of verbal behavioral dispositions and responses to stimuli that is acquired on the evidence of the overt behavior of others, and by taking meaning and reference as features and functions of language thus defined, language and its semantical and referential factors still remain unaccounted for in terms of their possibility. In a Heideggerean view, then, Quine's account of language would be another instance in which a superficial conception is "raked up empirically" without giving due consideration to the *a priori* foundations of language.⁷³

⁷⁰ Heidegger, BT, 121; SZ, 87.

⁷¹ Heidegger, BT, 204; SZ, 161.

⁷² Heidegger, BT, 121; SZ, 87.

⁷³ See Heidegger, BT, 206–9; SZ, 162–6. Cf. Heidegger, BT, 155–6; SZ, 119.

Granting that such a demand goes against the grain of Quine's naturalist and empiricist position, indeed, that his adherence to the "linguistic turn" is itself a turn away from the "mentalist" and "innatist" underpinnings he has read into such demands, it is still worth asking critically whether the evaporation of linguistic meaning into verbal behavior or to the use of linguistic expressions merely evades the problem of meaning while claiming to have dissolved it. Quine has depended upon an "intuitive" understanding of "meaning," that is left undefined, and yet serves as the basis for semantic concepts such as "empirical meaning" and "stimulus meaning."⁷⁴ The crucial question left unanswered is still what is meaning, what can be reduced to verbal behavior or use, and why?⁷⁵

While Quine has fervently argued against "mentalist" semantics and in favor of a behaviorist approach to the problem of meaning by focusing on the use of a given linguistic expression, Heidegger has offered us an account of how such use is itself possible by focusing on the pre-reflective intelligibility in which we actively configure our world. Such explication, I believe, avoids the pitfalls of "mentalism" as Quine has described them, especially in what regards the alleged mentalistic need to posit abstract intermediary entities such as meanings. At the same time, it responds to the questions Quine has left unanswered in his approach. Yet, from a general Quinean perspective, such Heideggerean accounts would most probably be lumped together with the other "uncritical," "mentalist" semantics he rejects. On the other hand, the Quinean mental/physical and subject/object distinctions that underlie his stance on the issue of behaviorist versus mentalist semantics are themselves already under attack in the Heideggerean theory of meaning.

Heidegger's theory of assertion as a derivative mode of being in which we reflectively point out something⁷⁶ also represents a significant problem for the Quinean critique of "mentalist" semantic. While sup-

⁷⁴ See, for instance, Quine, *WO*, 32–3, 36, n. 1, 37–8.

⁷⁵ Or, to put it conversely, what is it about verbal behavior or use that enables one (as Quine has done) to classify it according to semantic distinctions such as "significant," "insignificant," "synonymous," "heteronymous," or even to classify linguistic expressions according to their degree of "observationality"? See, for instance, Quine, *PML*; and Quine, *WO*, chap. 2. Cf. Quine, *PT*, 53–4, 58; Quine, *FSS*, chap. VII.

⁷⁶ This applies, in Heidegger, to assertions understood as judgments (the psychological act of binding representations or concepts) or categorical statements (as the ascription of a property to something "present-at-hand").

posing that assertions have what Quine would call a "referential role," and upholding a theory of intentionality, it neither posits abstract intermediary entities, nor falls into "mentalist" semantics, nor into "mentalism" in general. Heidegger defines assertion as "a pointing-out which gives something a definite character and which communicates."⁷⁷ In his analysis of "assertion" into a "pointing out," a "predication," and a "communication," he does not question that assertion has the role of pointing out as such. This implies that he does not reject the theory of intentionality as it would apply to assertion. Indeed, what he is doing is stressing (though not explicitly or in these words) that the intentionality of the assertion has "existential-ontological" foundations.⁷⁸

Heidegger has insisted that assertion is a way in which the human being is, a way in which the human being relates towards entities. Thus we have to look at these "existential-ontological foundations" of our practical everyday comportment as entities for whom beings are always already intelligible as beings, and not remain at some derivative level of the intentionality of consciousness or perception. Hence, he has emphasized that what is pointed out in assertion is neither something like a meaning nor even a representation or an abstract object of consciousness, but the entity itself. And, just as he has emphasized that meaning is an intrinsic feature of human existence, he also stresses and focuses on the "existential" roots of meaning understood as the property of an assertion:

In so far as assertion ("judgment") is grounded on understanding and presents us with a derivative form in which an interpretation has been carried out, it *too* 'has' a meaning.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Heidegger, BT, 199; SZ, 156.

⁷⁸ Cf. Heidegger, BT, 259; SZ, 216; and BT, 414; SZ, 363, n. xxiii. Heidegger thus emphasizes that assertion "is not a free-floating behavior which, in its own right might be capable of disclosing entities in general in a primary way," but that "it always maintains itself on the basis of being-in-the-world"; Heidegger, BT, 199; SZ, 56. In this sense he also maintains that "assertion cannot disown its ontological origin from an interpretation which understands"; Heidegger, BT, 201; SZ, 158. Hence, "[l]ike any interpretation whatever, assertion necessarily has a fore-having, a fore-sight and a fore-conception as its existential foundations"; Heidegger, BT, 199; SZ, 156.

⁷⁹ Heidegger, BT, 195; SZ, 153-4 (Heidegger's emphasis). Cf., Heidegger, BT, 199; SZ, 156. It is also worth noting that such "pointing-out" [*Aufzeigen*] is but a variation, or better, a derivation of what he has called "signs" and their particular role of "indicating" [*Zeigen*]. This would imply that the assertion is a particular kind of sign. It would mean that it is fundamentally something "ready-to-hand," and as such determined by refer-

Neither the assertion or, better, the asserting, nor the entity pointed out are originally "abstract" or "mentalistic." Insofar as assertion is a derivative mode of interpretation, that is, a mode in which we develop our reflective understanding of this or that being as something, meaning is not something belonging to the assertion; rather, assertion is only possible on the basis of meaning. And, what gets understood in this development is never something intermediate or abstract like "a meaning," but rather the entity itself. It is only because something is already intelligible to us, only because it already means something to us, that we can develop this intelligibility by pointing out, predicating, and communicating about a being as something, that is, by asserting.

Furthermore, insofar as meaning is that basis upon which the intelligibility of something stands, that is, inasmuch as beings mean something to us or we have an understanding of them in terms of their possibilities, so that when we assert we fix this intelligibility further, there seems to be no problem of indeterminacy to begin with. There are rather grades of progressive determinations of something which always already means something to us. To argue that such determinations are still abstract insofar as they are not inscribed within the confines of verbal behavior or use is to miss the point that such behavior and use are themselves—indeed language itself understood as a semantic and referential means is—only possible within the practical and concrete intelligibility in which the human comports itself in the world.

Heidegger's distinctions between the "ready-to-hand" and the "present-at-hand," and between the prereflective understanding and theoretical reflection, along with his theses regarding the "derivative" and "deficient" character of the latter in relation to the former, allow us to see how both assertions and language can be used as instruments and taken abstractly as entities "present-at-hand," and how they can serve as a means of interpretation of, and verbal expression about, entities "present-at-hand" or objects. It is significant, then, that not even in these latter "derivative" and "deficient" modes of being is meaning, or for that matter, are significations, abstract things or properties of abstract things.

From this Heideggerean perspective, then, the Quinean naturalist and behaviorist theory of language and meaning itself flounders by remaining

ence or assignment. However, insofar as the assertion is about objects or entities "present-at-hand," its particular mode of "indicating," that is, of "pointing-out" operates in the "deficient" mode of knowing, i.e., of theoretical reflection.

fixed on this level of abstractness while trying to infuse empirical concreteness into its concepts and deny it to others. By narrowing down the scope of the world —of which mind, language, and meaning are said to be part— to that of a “natural world,” and by narrowing even further the focus to that which can be captured by our “physical exteroceptors,” the active and practical intelligibility that holds the distinctly human world together is lost.

However, Quine unlike Heidegger has seen language as an integral part of the whole process in which human beings develop and exist within their particular theories of the world or conceptual schemes. Conceptual or theoretical as its function may be, language is not, in Quine’s view, a derivative semantical feature.

It is worth asking critically with regard to Heidegger’s theory whether the prelinguistic semantic determinations are not themselves, if not abstract, at least never transparent or distinct, or even expressible. Heidegger’s analyses of our quotidian “being-in-the-world” focused on the modes of “inauthentic” existence (in which the individual human being does not own its own being).⁸⁰ While he disclaimed any evaluative or ethical connotations in these general labels, he also underscored the vagueness and averageness of the “existentialia” as a whole. At the same time, the “authentic” mode of existence is determinate in its very indeterminacy, most pointedly, as the “silent call of the conscience to nothing.”⁸¹ It is only from the very indefiniteness of the “meaning of being in general” that such particular definitions or determinations are themselves possible.⁸² This is significant because language itself, while denied a voice in the “authentic” existence, and denied a primary place as the locus of meaning, exerts a powerful influence in the harboring of the

⁸⁰ For Heidegger’s introduction to the notion of “inauthenticity,” see Heidegger, BT; SZ, § 9. See, further, his discussion of “the they” in Heidegger, BT; SZ, §§ 25–27.

⁸¹ See Heidegger, BT, 316–18, 343–4; SZ, 271–2, 296.

⁸² In Heidegger, the features of our understanding of being and of the meaning of being are basically condensed into two words: “indefiniteness” or “indeterminacy,” and “obscuration” or “hindrance” to an “explicit illumination of the meaning of being”; Heidegger, BT, 25; SZ, 5. Dismal as these features may appear to be, the indefiniteness of our understanding of being is still a “fact” and a “positive phenomenon,” and some “kinds” of obscuration of the meaning or sense of being may even be “inevitable”; Heidegger, 25; SZ, 5–6. The “inauthenticity” of language as the “worldly” “expressedness” of discourse is particularly evident in Heidegger’s analysis of the phenomenon of idle talk [*Gerede*]. See, Heidegger, BT; SZ, § 35; especially Heidegger, BT, 211; SZ, 167.

"inauthentic" existential meaning and of "indefinite meaning of being in general."⁸³

All this leads in Heidegger to the linguistic ineffability of "authentic" meaning and to linguistic relativism. It is undeniable that his "Dasein analytic" was explicitly geared towards uncovering the *a priori* ontological features of human existence as such, that is, the way of being of the human being *qua* human being. His insistence on distinguishing his enterprise from "ontical" sciences such as anthropology and ethnology—which do not and cannot offer such insight—is no less patent.⁸⁴ Yet, the same can be said of the import he assigns to the influence of (Western) tradition in our interpretations of the being of beings, including that of ourselves.⁸⁵ Since in our "being-in-the-world" we also configure the world in which we exist, then evidently there are different possible configurations, namely, "worlds." Put in other words, there are different ways of "being-in-the-world." The possibility of verbal communication, even among those with whom we share our particular world, depends upon a prelinguistic intraworldly conversance. Linguistic relativism would be merely a derivative feature of something that itself defies a putting in words, in words other than those already adhering to the particular whole of significance of the "temporalized-historized" worlds of our different ways of "being-in-the-world."

The rejection of semantic intermediation and abstractness in both philosophers is at least a search for pragmatic frameworks or grounds from which to grapple with the general problem of meaning. What makes the differences and oppositions in the directions taken by each worth considering is precisely their explicit practical relevance. Yet, while Heidegger's theory in *Being and Time* is in certain senses more

⁸³ Already in the "Preface" and "Introduction" to *Being and Time*, Heidegger alludes to the problems of our understanding of the expressions or words '*seiend*' and '*Sein*.' The problem of language, and its connection with the problem of being thus arises, albeit inexplicitly, with this beginning. The problem of language also lurks beneath the surface of the relation between Heidegger's proposal to work out the "explicit" question of the meaning of being and our average and vague understanding of the meaning of being; Heidegger BT, 25; SZ, 5. He also refers to the language of his project of fundamental ontology as a problem that is intimately connected with the problematic of the oblivion of being; See Heidegger, BT, 63; SZ, 38–9. For his explicit references to the harboring of our average and vague understanding and interpretation in language, see Heidegger, BT, 199, 211; SZ, 157, 167–8.

⁸⁴ See Heidegger, BT; SZ, §§ 10–11.

⁸⁵ See Heidegger, BT; SZ, § 6.

pragmatic in spirit than Quine's, and while it offers us a more critical perspective into the presuppositions of epistemological models such as Quine's, it leaves us with a sense of semantic indeterminacy more consequential than that of Quine's.

Quine, for his part, has limited the problem of relativism to terms and non-observational sentences.⁸⁶ Yet, with his emphasis on the relativity of reference and terms to conceptual scheme, language or theory, Quine has upheld the theory that "what we say there is" is not only relative but virtually incommensurable, to the extent that the translation or interpretation of a given ontology will always comport a reinterpretation in terms of another.⁸⁷ Moreover, we are left wondering whether concepts and objects are all there is to the problem of "what there is." Yet, he has located an avenue of commensuration through those sentences with the highest degree of observationality and has thus allowed for a common semantical path between languages. Nonetheless, the distinctively "cognitive" (conceptual, theoretical, and empirical) tone of such possible dialogue remains "existentially" hollow and unaccounted for in terms of its very possibility and live consequences.

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⁸⁶ See, for instance, Quine, PML, 60-4; Quine, WO, § 15.

⁸⁷ See, for instance, Quine, SO, 1-6; OR, 34-5, 43-4, 45-68.

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