

A Critique of Heideggerian Theory Of “‘Meaning’ as ‘Use’”

**Malize Ferdinand U.
(aka Philo Malize King)**

PhD Student, Department of Philosophy

Nnamdi Azikiwe University, PMB 5025Awka, Anambra State Nigeria

+2348136147856 philomalizeking@gmail.com

Abstract

The neologistic revolution of Heideggerian language specifically being-in-the-world, Dasein and formal indication has marked his thought as phenomenologically and ontologically in-depth. Heidegger argued of a failure in ordinary language to mirror reality thus expressing their ontological root, that is being and meaningfulness. Neologism thus, shows the correspondence between language and ontology, and by phenomenological analysis, one is able to reach meaning, phenomenologically and ontologically. This paper however faults such neologism as ready-to-hand, present-at-hand and equipment. The engagement with such terms by Heidegger, is ontical, utilitarian, pragmatic and materialistic. Heidegger, rather than trace the ontological conditions of Seinedes within Being and meaning, argued that despite Seinedes being a part of being, it is unmeaningful and absurd. In order to validate this claim, hence the existence of such neologism as being-in, being-by, being-with, in-order-to implies individual meaningfulness, synergic with Dasein under Being, he interchangeably employed the term ‘use’ as being synonymous with ‘meaning’, but only in reference to Seinedes. ‘Use’ does not capture the fundamental essence of a being. It is only one type of how something fits into its context, a particular context at that time, and at a particular point in time. This paper concludes that meaning as use does not capture the meaningfulness in Seinedes, nor its being-in as a ‘with’ other beings whether ontic or ontological. The method used in this research is hermeneutics.

Keywords: Seinedes, Dasein, Ontic, Ontology, Phenomenology, Meaningfulness, Being.

Introduction

Heidegger’s use of the term ‘Being’ has given rise to much confusion and controversy. He explains clearly that by ‘Being’ he does not intend the sheer physical materiality of beings of what is or as a synonym for existence, rather, the ‘is’ implied in Heidegger’s discourse does not posit being but meaning. The question of being is thus, an attempt at penetrating phenomena and conceptualizing meaningfulness. Phenomenology was not enough, hence the hermeneutical turn; language and neologism. However, we are arguing here, that despite the optimism and rigour of Heidegger’s turn, there exist still a confusion of what Being really is, the place of meaning within entities/Seinedes and a failure to conceptualize meaningfulness in Seinedes as a being-in within Being. Lawrence said:

The famous Kehre announcement in “Letter to Humanism” can be understood in the context of conceptualization. The “failure” of ‘Being and Time’ is attributed to its language and not its underlying project: and the failure was not exactly its language but its participation in the language of metaphysics. “Being and Time” was laboring to draw out a radical “phenomenological seeing”, but in order for his work to gain traction and be “understandable for existing philosophy”, it could only be expressed “within the horizon of existing

philosophy and its current use of terms” (Hatab, 2016: 7).

More so, Heidegger notes that, the conceptual language of “Being and Time” was attempting a thinking that is “more rigorous than the conceptual” (Heidegger, 1955: 357, 271). Heideggerian neologism, which is a metaphysical language of a sort and a language of thinking, while underscoring being-there, man as the centre of the question of meaning, continuously confuses Being and being-Dasein hence his situating the Dasein as a point of reification of meaning, as Seinedes is articulated to the point of meaninglessness where its meaning is seen in terms of usage or utility. Although Heidegger takes cognizance of the fact that language in principle has an ontic character, thus ontological thinking must use ontic model because it can only make something manifest through words (Hatab, 2016: 9), yet Heidegger failed to understand that ontological thinking on Seinedes, an ontic entity does not imply a complete negation of Being or its meaning primordially. We are not denying of an ontic meaningfulness that can still be imputed by Dasein. No! Rather, while interpretation flourishes (via words or vocalization as the case may be), there also exist, or have always existed a pre-interpretation. Thus, the creation of new words does not in any way change the ‘isness’ of a thing, especially entities. For instance, according to Heidegger:

The ready-to-hand comes explicitly into the sight which understands. All preparing, putting to rights, repairing, improving, rounding-out, are accomplished in the following way: we take part in its in-order-to that which is circumspectively ready-to-hand, and we concern ourselves with it in accordance with what becomes visible through this process. That which has been circumspectively taken apart with regard to its in-order-to, and taken apart as such – that which is explicitly understood – has the structure of “something as something” (Heidegger, 1962: 189).

The neologistic in-order-to here, becomes the central magnet towards “something” becoming “something”. One might argue, what happened to its (ontology) “isness”? The explicitly ‘sightedness’ or something as something which is understood is no doubt as a result of taking that thing apart and its subsequent existing within a structure for Heidegger. But we may ask, what happen to pre-understanding? In fact, to put the argument more forceful, if encounter and in-order-to is the central magnet toward meaningfulness, what then is the essence of formal indication? We may allow that an ontological nature in Dasein can be contested given that the hermeneutic phenomenology of Heidegger is also an existentialistic theory, but our point is this, there is an ‘isness’ attached to all beings. Ontic meaningfulness can still be generated. Interpretations can still be elicited via understanding. Nevertheless, there always exist a pre-interpretation, a pre-understanding and an ordinary language; practices, social relations, world views, inherited traditions, or denotation (Russell) that cannot be done away with just like that.

Negation of ‘meaning’ as ‘use’

In Heidegger’s numerous works, he considers a great number of things and kinds of things, however, he refused to consider anything – things and events (that is Seinedes) with as much ontological depth, breadth and definition as he does Dasein. Heidegger is often described as a critique of technological society, or the dangers of obsessiveness to technology, but he in fact set the ground work for such a mentality or habit with his analysis or terminological definition of objects, things and events (Seinedes) in terms of usage or utilitarianism. He first began by positing that, in order to understand Being, there is a need to analyze the one being for whom Being is an issue, an existential concern, Dasein. He argued that no other entity could have the capability to carry out such an investigation (hence requiring self-consciousness, intelligence, imagination and tenacity). Heidegger’s analysis or Dasein’s analytic went on to outline structures of human existence, what he calls Fundamental Ontology as the methodological precursor to the ontology of

Being hence Dasein becomes an Ontological Explicator. This, for Heidegger is the meaning of Dasein (unlike Seinedes), (Dasein; human being, man, being-there) – that is how its contexts, which is, or rather are – other things, beings, world, (Dasein); Being. This, at the same time explains and implies Transcendence, Da-sein means: being held out into the nothing. Holding itself out into the nothing, Dasein is in each case already beyond beings, as a whole. Such beings we call transcendences(**Heidegger, 1929: 91, 96, 92**). Accordingly therefore:

For human, Dasein, the nothing makes possible the manifestness of beings as such. This is because human Dasein can comport itself toward beings only if it holds itself out into the nothing. Going beyond beings occurs in the essence of Dasein. But this implies that metaphysics belongs to the ‘the nature of the human being’. The important point now is that this transcendence shows the nothing belonging essentially to Dasein(**Sena, 2011: 76**).

Heidegger thus subsumes the totality of essential worldhood or meaningfulness, in fact even unmeaningfulness within the manifest of Dasein. We are therefore faced, in relation to Seinedes, with a theory of meaning as use. We must therefore ask, what is the (ontological or linguistic) theory of meaning as use? In Heidegger, meaning is only recognized in things given their use at a particular point in time. The deformatization of beings as a negatively-nothing, takes the form of a present-at-hand, equipment or tool for Dasein. Heidegger thus, deconstructs any ontological investigation into Seinedes as meaningful, rather as use priori to Dasein’s encounter thus as ready (or readiness)-to-hand. This is still within the context of meaning or meaningfulness as a framework or totality. The extent of this ontic analysis (hence Heidegger himself in his analysis of readiness-to-hand, characterizes such a pragmatic understanding as ontic(**Ibid. 75**)), could be seen in the different kinds of neologism used by Heidegger to describe anything Seinedes. Sena tells us, that this analysis of everydayness by Heidegger as interpreted by pragmatists, are taken as an analysis of tools in which the being of equipment in its readiness-to-hand (Zuhandenheit), is characterized in terms of a usability, instrumental for Dasein(**Ibid. 76**).

However, interpreting Seinedes as a tool, reducing its being as equipment, until its readiness-to-hand, hence usability and instrumental for Dasein arises due to an ontic understanding and a lack of phenomenological insight and approach. Although “use” certainly characterizes how a thing can fit within a context, for instance a hammer, a door wangle, nevertheless, meaning as contextual relation is more primordial, phenomenological and ontological (role) than use as instrument (role). “Use” does not imply a priori nor necessarily explicit intent and design, or substructural or base or ‘natural’ purpose from ‘creation’ but rather, meaningfulness-as-the-need-arises-then-meaningless-absent-need. What we are officially confronted by, is the complete negation of language as a correspondence to ontology given neologism. Formal indication which reiterates the hermeneutical turn of Heideggerian metaphysics on questioning of Being, radicalizing intentionality; the directedness of mental phenomena as not just private but universal and showing that there is a synergy between ontology and language, that if one is to arrive at the meaning of Being, the questioning, has to also take the form of questioning language, is thus brought under questioning. This was a hermeneutical necessity, and Lawrence presents this hermeneutical necessity in the form of Heidegger’s neologistic term Formal indication. According to him:

For Heidegger, all philosophical concepts are formal indications. Formal; in gathering the focal meaning of lived experiences, and indication; in pointing to engaged circumstances and practices that cannot be fully captured in, or exhausted by formal concepts (**Hatab, 2016: 2**).

Hence, it now seems to imply that formal indication is limited by this usability theory of meaning. As M. Sena notes:

It is also true that this interpretation fails to understand interpretation and that

beings in general have the capacity to point to their own being and to show themselves from within themselves. In the case of equipment, this means that the capacity of being 'available for use' and 'usable' is not their only capacity of indicating. Beyond the indicative capacity of pointing to their own being as equipment, equipments and beings in general are able to point to the very ground of their being that first grants to them their capacity to be (**Ibid.**).

Thus, 'Use', in place of meaning, or in the place of unmeaningful and absurd as Heidegger puts it, is negating beings as being capable of pointing to themselves as meaningful. This is on the one hand, on the other hand, it is also a denial of the meaningful totality theory of Heidegger, hence 'use' is a denial of beings ability to point to the world, even though not necessarily meaningful. In Sena words:

Indeed, it is the phenomenon of world, a phenomenon that is through and through ontological, that grants to beings this dual capacity of indication (**Ibid.**).

So it is not just that the idea or term present-at-hand, ready-to-hand or equipment negates the meaningful disclosure of the essence of things primordially, but that of other beings specifically Dasein. We should not forget that they can be no transcendence absent Seinedes. The very idea of being-in-the-world as non-Platonic and hermeneutical discloses or posits an unbifurcatedness of beings. This in itself is ontological. The same thing goes for Seinedes; also conceived within the context of formal indication. To further elucidate:

The dual character of indication is made more apparent in the specific being of equipment since equipment point beyond itself. NOT ONLY IS EQUIPMENT USABLE IN ITSELF; EQUIPMENT IN ITS BEING ASSERVICEABILITY MAKES READILY APPARENT HOW ALL BEINGS ALSO POINT BEYOND THEMSELVES (**Ibid.**).

So while Heideggerian phenomenology, which in itself is existentialist is ready to accept both ontic and ontological transcendence, it must also accept beings as meaningful ontologically. We are not suggesting that Seinedes is capable of transcendence, but we are saying that the transcendence of Dasein is not possible in the absence of Seinedes'isness' and meaningfulness, especially as mere equipment. Furthermore, the idea of equipment, or the mere usability of Seinedes within the context of formal indication is contradictory. For instance:

While the pragmatic interpretation of equipment sees how any item of equipment in its being points beyond itself to an involvement with a totality of other beings, it fails to see that beyond the "pragmatic" totality of in-order-to of equipments, equipments point to the phenomenon: world (**Ibid.**).

This is why we are arguing that Heideggerian theory of meaning is not satisfactory. The dual character of formal indication is an ontological thing. It makes beings meaningful, hence it is not only 'meaning' with regards to the encounter with Dasein, but meaning ontologically hence it is part of the ordering of the world; it points to the phenomenon – "the world exist". The beings of equipment and beings in general are indicative not only of themselves and of their Being with other beings; equipment and beings in general are indicative of their Being in the world (**Ibid. 76-77**). Thus, it is not only meaningful with regards to the encounter with Dasein, but meaningful ontologically, saying – the world exist. Sena notes that:

The pragmatists, however, restrict the phenomenal "being-in" of beings to what Heidegger characterizes in terms of an involvement that beings have 'with' one another. This leaves unclarified, the more fundamental condition of "being-in" of beings as rendering manifest a free involvement "with" beings by virtue of being-in-the-world (**Ibid. 77**).

This restriction or limitations by Heidegger or Heideggerian pragmatist is monumental. One

cannot but notice a calculated attempt to limit beings – Seinedes as ‘USE’ or equipment, hence if the being-in is phenomenal of beings – Dasein and Seinedes, then the ontic ontological involvement manifest as with other beings by virtue of being-in-the-world is conversely brought into question and undermined. Thus, equipment or Use is only one type of how something fits into its context, a particular context at that, at a particular point in time, hence this cannot define the meaning of beings/Seinedes, nor its being-in as a with other beings whether ontic or ontological. This pragmatist orientation, along with Heidegger fail to understand; that the involvement, indication and readiness-at-hand (conceived as being continual) implies a being-in of beings which involves a being-with other beings in the world. Dasein involvement which is said or claimed to bring about meaning is only possible because of its meaningful implicitness priori to their being-in. The research is of this view, hence to talk about use, is to imply a means to ends situation which may not always be valid for things and events, thus, “meaning” or meaningfulness is more inclusive and meaningful than use, or equipment unlike Heidegger held.

Similarly, the pragmatic understanding or interpretation of Seinedes within the context of use is restricted in its treatment of the role of Dasein as the ontic a priori condition that frees beings in their dual capacity of indication and that keeps Dasein open to them and to the phenomenon of world(Dreyfus, 1992: 173-185; Okrent, 1988; Rorty, 1992: 209-230). What this means is that Dasein is the measure of all meanings. What we have in the world, in which Dasein is a being-in, are clusters of meaningless entities floating completely apart. The being character of beings does not exist. In other words, when we talk of in-order-to, for the sake-of, being-in, being-with, we are talking of an a priori condition that frees beings in their dual capacity of indication and a pointing to the phenomenon of world, that is Dasein. If this is the case, then Heidegger is stylishly and strategically positing a technological and materialist conception of reality and meaning rather than its opposite. Unfortunately, Heidegger expresses this admittedly difficult though as follows:

Ontically, “letting something be involved,” signifies that within our factual concern we let something ready-to-hand be so-and-so as it is already and in order that it be such.... This is a priori letting-something-be-involved is the condition for the possibility of encountering anything ready-to-hand, so that Dasein, in its ontical dealings with things thus encountered, can thereby let it be involved in this ontic sense(Sena, 2011: 75).

The failure to approach Seinedes phenomenally here by Heidegger’s pragmatism, makes him not to be able to reach the full phenomenological level of understanding Dasein as the ontico-ontological a priori condition for the possibility of beings BEING THEMSELVES(Ibid.), rather Being is seen only in reference to Dasein(Heidegger, 1977: 117). This makes one wonder, why so much optimism of Heidegger in proposing neologism as a solution to understanding Being better, and the world? Fundamentally, does formal indication really play any role against the backdrop of unmeaningfulness and meaning as use? More so, Heidegger tells us:

Dasein is the ontic condition for the possibility of discovering beings, which are encountered in a world of involvement (readiness-to-hand) as their kind of being, and which can thus make themselves known as they are in themselves(Sena, 2011: 78).

This means that, things as present-at-hand and equipment, and essentially unmeaningful or absurd except given an encounter with Dasein, thus, it is Dasein that ‘let – Seinedes-be-involved’ before things become useful, that is meaningful. And the moment Dasein lets something be or absent encounter, beings become absurd and unmeaningful, present-at-hand again. So it seems that Dasein is posited, not only as the ontical but also the ontological condition of beings’ discovery and meaningfulness, in other words, Being. Sena puts it thus, that when the for-the-sake-of is interpreted in this manner, beings must exist for-the-sake-of Dasein’s use, with the consequences

that Dasein's orientation toward beings is taken by the pragmatist EXCLUSIVELY IN TERMS OF THEIR USEFULNESS FOR DASEIN. This is due to the fact that the pragmatists do not take the for-the-sake-of-which of Dasein's being back into the fuller phenomenon of world (**Ibid.**). So, apart from this usefulness to Dasein within this or that context, there are useless, that is, meaningless within the overall phenomenological scheme of worldhood or being-in-the-world. Sena notes, there is a failure to see the for-the-sake-of-which of Dasein's being from within the deeper phenomenal structure of Dasein's being as being-in-the-world (**Ibid. 79**). This makes us wonder, is the for-the-sake-of-which of Dasein an island of a sort? Is Heidegger bringing back directedness as a private content, if not within consciousness, then within what?

Conclusion

I have argued in this paper that there is a failure to completely grasp the full phenomenological cum ontological ground or conditions of being-in-the-world within beings specifically Seinedes. We may even add ontical too. The level of utilitarian, pragmatic and materialistic engagement with Seinedes is oppressively over whelming, and other times, overtly ontical rather than ontological. It is against this backdrop, that Heidegger interchangeably employs 'use' as meaning with Seinedes in order to posit meaningfulness as rooted in Dasein's encounter. Thus, they seems to be a disinterested phenomenological and ontological approach regards beings or Seinedes. Neologistic analysis and terminology constructed alongside are such that expresses instrumentality and usability. In situations where we find phenomenological and ontological essence, Heidegger often relegates Seinedes, or argues such neologism in an ontical manner, or rather utilitarian and pragmatic context with regards Seinedes (such as for-the-sake-of-which, being-with, being-in, being-by). Meaning as use fails to capture the essence, fundamentally in beings, especially given Being as the ground of beings rather than Dasein. It is not the case that the world and beings exist for-the-sake-of Dasein alone. This pragmatist understanding fueled by Martin Heidegger's conception of beings as tools, equipment, and meaning as use have led humanity into a more ready-to-hand conception of things and entities, and a negative obsessiveness with technology and science. Now, our only concern is what role or use can an entity give or play? If a present-at-hand, it is quickly discarded. In fact, even human interrelation is now grounded in a ready-to-hand.

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