

**Thomas Sheehan.** *Making Sense of Heidegger: A Paradigm Shift.* Rowan & Littlefield 2014. 370 pp. \$105.00 USD (Hardcover ISBN 9781783481187); \$34.95 USD (Paperback ISBN 9781783481194).

Thomas Sheehan's *Making Sense of Heidegger* argues that most accounts of Heidegger and his philosophical development fail to see that he was interested in what accounts for being, rather than being itself (16). Instead of pursuing a metaphysical inquiry into being, Heidegger pursued a 'meta-metaphysical inquiry' into its meaningful presence to human subjectivity (15).

Sheehan persuasively argues for three broad claims: that 'Heidegger's work was phenomenological from beginning to end'; that '*das Sein* is the intelligibility of things, their meaningful presence (*Anwesen*) to human intelligence', understood both theoretically and practically; and that Heidegger's 'final goal, the so called 'thing itself', was not intelligibility but what makes intelligibility possible, which, stated, formally, is *das Ermöglichende*; and materially is ex-sistence as the thrown-open clearing' (23). The book is divided into three parts, with a chapter of critical reflections, three appendices, and indices of German, Greek, and Latin terms at the end.

In Part 1, Sheehan focuses on Heidegger's early engagement with ancient Greek philosophy, especially Aristotle. Sheehan argues that Heidegger was particularly influenced by the view (attributed to Aristotle) that something has as much being as disclosedness, a principle that guided Heidegger's phenomenology throughout his life.

In Chapters 2 and 3, Sheehan surveys Heidegger's account of the importance of various ancient definitions of the concepts *ousia*, *eidos*, *physis*, and *alētheia*, and shows that for Heidegger the emergence or appearance of a thing (*physis*) is bound up with how that particular thing is disclosed (*alētheia*) (36-8). Heidegger sides with Aristotle over Plato: while Plato and Aristotle both take *ousia* to refer to 'the *realness* of a thing', Plato ultimately defined realness as permanence (34). Aristotle, on the contrary, offers a proto-phenomenological account of realness, on which realness is 'a thing's openness to human intellect' (54).

Chapter 3 chronicles Heidegger's gradual move away from Aristotle, focussing on his various interpretations of three senses of *alētheia*, and the concepts *idea/eidos* and *ousia*. For Sheehan, Heidegger's reflections on ancient philosophy led him to retrieve the 'unsaid' element of Greek philosophy, namely, that the essence of being can only be explained in terms of the essence of the human being (105).

Part 1 offers a meticulous overview of Heidegger's reading of Plato and Aristotle, helpfully sketching out their subsequent influence on his thought. Given Heidegger's creative and often controversial interpretations of Aristotle, Sheehan's claim that he offers a 'highly plausible reading of at least some of his corpus' would have been better defended by situating Heidegger's philological and philosophical interpretations in light of critical ancient scholarship (105).

In Part 2, Sheehan moves on to consider how Heidegger refined his discovery about meaningfulness during the period of the formulation and writing of *Being and Time*. Chapter 4 compellingly shows that in the 1920s, Heidegger's study of being is chiefly focused on meaning (116-23), and always in its relation to a practically engaged human subject (128). He emphasizes

that ‘without my ex-sistence there is no clearing’ (113). Yet for Sheehan, the world is also the clearing, since we only meaningfully understand objects in terms of worldly possibilities. This entails that for Heidegger, ‘the world is ourselves writ large as a matrix of intelligibility’ (125). Chapter 5 develops this point, arguing that fundamental ontology aims ‘to show that and how meaningful presence--‘being in general’--is made possible by and occurs only within human openedness as the clearing’ (134). Marshaling a wealth of evidence, Sheehan claims that the *Da-of Dasein* should not be translated as ‘here’ or ‘there’ but as ‘openedness’ or ‘the open’ (136-9).

After noting that much of Heidegger’s account of life as open projection of possibility derives from Aristotle’s concept of *kinēsis* (139-42), which culminates in an overview of how meaning is assigned (147), Sheehan argues that the structure of existence consists in a ‘bivalent’ movement, whereby we transcend things but return to take them up in terms of a specific possibility (150). This structure is expressed by Heidegger’s understanding of *logos* or *Rede*, ‘the holding together of one’s own existential structure as both possibility (thrown-aheadness) and actuality (return)’. This point has been fundamentally missed by the ‘received tradition’ of Heidegger scholarship (beginning with de Waelhens), which explains the structure of existence according to the tripartite ‘understanding’, ‘attunement’, and ‘discourse’ (151).

Throughout the preceding chapters, Sheehan has provided ample evidence to support this claim, which is perhaps why he dismisses the ‘received’ view in a mere two pages. But as Sheehan himself admits, Heidegger’s use of the terms ‘being’, ‘the thing itself’, and the ‘opening’/‘clearing’ is often unclear and shifting, admitting of multiple interpretations. A sustained engagement with the particular positions of the scholars cited as exponents of the prevailing view, who Sheehan groups together, would have given more reason to endorse Sheehan’s interpretation over the ‘received’ view, both of which, arguably, are supported by textual evidence.

Chapter 6 provides a thorough overview of Heidegger’s concepts of ‘resolve’ and *Angst*, what Sheehan calls his ‘protreptic’ to ‘become what you are’ (157). We can realize Heidegger’s protreptic because we are kinetically ‘stretched out’, which Sheehan says Heidegger named by the ‘potentially misleading’ and ‘ill-termed’ word ‘temporality’ (168-9). In his interpretation of temporality, Sheehan privileges the bivalent structural features of existence he has developed earlier, largely relying on his own paraphrases and translations (169-77). His account downplays the temporal features of *Temporalität*, arguing, for example, that *das Gewesen* and *Gewesenheit* are better understood in terms of Heidegger’s reading of Aristotle’s concept of essence (171). Sheehan offers a highly original interpretation, which helps to make sense of a number of difficult passages. While Sheehan is right to argue against a merely chronological view of temporality, one wonders whether ‘past’ and ‘pastness’ can be divested of their temporal nature, given Heidegger’s claim that the section on Historicity in *BT* is a more concrete working-out of the Temporality section.

Part 3 focuses on the later Heidegger. Chapter 7 claims that Heidegger worried that *BT*’s transcendental commitments made it seem as if meaningfulness was simply created by the subject (195), and in later work aimed to show that the clearing does not depend upon the subject (205). Sheehan offers an interpretation of ‘the open’ that focuses on the rich etymology of *die Gegend* (221-2), suggesting that the ontological difference of *BT* was too narrow, in that it depended on the clearing. The centerpiece of Sheehan’s account of Heidegger’s transition to his later work is the 1930 lecture ‘On the Essence of Truth’, where Heidegger claims that the clearing that allows for intelligibility remains fundamentally unknowable, a view Sheehan argues guides the later Heidegger

(226-7). This chapter offers a compelling account of Heidegger's development, demonstrating a high degree of thematic continuity in his thinking.

Chapter 8 argues that *Ereignis* and *die Kehre* 'actually name the same thing' (231): 'the appropriation of human being to its dynamic thrown-openness' (241). Citing Heidegger's own statements to the effect that *Ereignis* is not an 'event' in the usual sense, Sheehan argues that 'appropriation', in the sense of bringing something (*viz.* the clearing) into view, better captures the complex etymology of the word (235). And *die Kehre* is best expressed, for Sheehan, by 'oscillation', which 'says much more clearly what Heidegger meant', namely, the bivalent structure of existence (239). Controversial translation choices aside, while Sheehan's suggestion interestingly makes sense of the textual evidence, it is not clear why, given Sheehan's own conceptual criteria, 'appropriation' cannot be understood as an event (234).

Both *Ereignis* and *die Kehre* are implicated in Heidegger's history of being, which Sheehan argues in Chapter 9 ought to be understood as a history of various 'dispensations' or sendings of the clearing in Western thought (250). Sheehan helpfully identifies 4 chapters of this history (252-61), arguing that one may agree with Heidegger's invectives against the exploitative nature of modern technology without endorsing the conservatism, racism, and nationalism underlying them.

In the final 'Critical Reflections' chapter, Sheehan continues this line of thought, developing a considered critique of Heidegger's account of the decline of Western modernity, especially in his main essay on technology. In addition to the consequences noted above, Sheehan shows that Heidegger's account is historically suspect (289-90). Ultimately, Sheehan thinks there is a substantial 'retrievable core' of Heidegger's thought (a phenomenological account of how we make sense of the world, with an accompanying protreptic to live our lives accordingly) that is separable from his political commitments (266).

Drawing on an exhaustive command of the primary material, Sheehan offers a plausible interpretation of Heidegger's development and many of his key concepts, compellingly arguing that his thought is phenomenological from beginning to end. The argumentation is transparent and remains close to the texts, which readers can often consult (usually in the original language) in the footnotes. However, Sheehan's study relies on some translation decisions (e.g., in addition to those noted above, the reading of *Sein* (194), *das Sein selbst* (199), and *Seyn* (240; 247) as 'the clearing') that some readers will object to. Conspicuously absent is a discussion of Heidegger's writings on art, especially poetry, which in later work he claims discloses being most fundamentally. Given that Sheehan repeatedly points to the failings of most extant Heidegger scholarship (usually without naming and engaging with particular figures), more discussion of secondary literature would have allowed readers less familiar with interpretive debates to better understand the originality of Sheehan's claims.

All in all, this study offers a unique, compellingly argued account of Heidegger's thought, and a measured appraisal of its successes, failures, and merits. It ought to be a key point of reference in future Heidegger scholarship.

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