

UNDERSTANDING THE WORLD HOLISTICALLY:  
HEIDEGGER'S PRACTICAL PHILOSOPHY AND THE RETHINKING OF  
TRANSCENDENTALITY

I.

Much has been written about Heidegger's rehabilitation of Aristotle's practical philosophy and its relevance for a phenomenological analysis of worldly knowing and acting.<sup>1</sup> And plenty of ink has been spilled on Heidegger's so-called 'pragmatic' emphasis in which existentially engaged activities are understood in terms of non-conceptual coping skills or background practices.<sup>2</sup> As a result, part one of *Being and Time* has been read as de-emphasizing the role of mental states when it comes to analyzing the worldly nature of meaning emergence. The argument takes its start from Heidegger's examination of our dealings with the world, emphasizing how practical knowing is already present in the act of seeing, with Dasein *being* "this sight."<sup>3</sup> In this sense, Heidegger has been taken to endorse a form of practical knowing or circumspection (*Umsicht*) which is embedded in our pre-theoretical rapport with the world.

It is undoubtedly true that Dasein's being in the world does not occur "blindly."<sup>4</sup> In fact, for Heidegger, being-in-the-world *is* understanding as the existential projection of possibility, with understanding enacting itself in our relation towards things as how they are situated in a web of interrelated significance. Accordingly, orienting oneself in the world has its own form of knowing and this type of knowing is not theoretical, which Heidegger defines as "looking, without circumspection."<sup>5</sup> It is, rather, "practical knowing,"<sup>6</sup> or better the a priori structures that unfold in practical experience, which grounds the theoretical attitude. And this is evident in Heidegger's attempts to "trace how the theoretical attitude towards the 'world' 'arises' out of circumspective concern with the ready-to-hand"<sup>7</sup> as a founding mode of our being in the world. Being in the world is therefore a circumspectively oriented way of being towards this or that context and is shaped by the circumstances in which it finds itself. Circumspection thus provides the initial orientation—even though theoretical seeing, devoid of circumspection, becomes possible on this basis. Accordingly, the theoretical attitude emerges from what Heidegger calls the "disappearance of praxis"<sup>8</sup> and "the thematizing of the present-at-hand within-the-world [as] a change-over from the concern which discovers by circumspection."<sup>9</sup> Thus, as the practical and

---

<sup>1</sup> See Gerold Prauss, *Erkennen und Handeln in Heideggers „Sein und Zeit“* (Freiburg/München: Karl Alber Verlag, 1977). See also, *Heidegger und die praktische Philosophie*. Eds. Annemarie Gethmann-Siefert & Otto Pöggeler (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1988). See also, Carl Friedrich Gethmann, "Heideggers Konzeption des Handelns in. Sein und Zeit," in *Heidegger und die praktische Philosophie*, eds. Annemarie Gethmann-Siefert & Otto Pöggeler (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1988). Franco Volpi, *Heidegger e Aristotele* (Daphne, Padova, 1984). Against the more explicitly neo-pragmatist readings of Heidegger, and especially those inspired by Hubert L. Dreyfus, it is necessary to mention the works of Joseph P. Fell, "The Familiar and the Strange: On the Limits of Praxis in the Early Heidegger" in *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 28 (1990): 23-41. William McNeill, *The Glance of the Eye: Heidegger, Aristotle, and the Ends of Theory* (SUNY Press, 1999). And Walter Brogan, *Heidegger and Aristotle: The Twofoldness of Being* (SUNY Press, 2005).

<sup>2</sup> See Mark Okrent, *Heidegger's Pragmatism: Understanding, Being, and the Critique of Metaphysics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988). Hubert L. Dreyfus, *Being-in-the-World: A Commentary on Heidegger's 'Being and Time,' Division I* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991). John Haugeland, *Dasein Disclosed* (Cambridge & London: Harvard University Press, 2013).

<sup>3</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1957), 146. *Being and Time*, translated by J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson (New York: Harper, 1979), 86.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 99/69.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Platon: Sophistes* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1992), 53. *Plato's Sophist* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 37.

<sup>7</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 356/408. (From here on in, when referring to translations from the original, I will first refer to the original page number, followed by the page number of the official translation).

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 357/409.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 364/415.

pragmatic readings make clear, one of Heidegger's goals is to show how the theoretical attitude is founded on practical forms of experience.

What I wish to establish is how such practical comportment is itself underpinned by Dasein's constitutive care-structure and by the phenomenon of world.<sup>10</sup> On my reading, the primacy of readiness-to-hand (*Zuhandenheit*) over present-at-hand (*Vorhandenheit*), of practical knowing over its theoretical counterpart, is a preparatory step, though not a basis for his fundamental ontology being read as a form of practical philosophy tout court. In this way, I follow Joseph Fell's interpretation which states that "the interpreter of *Being and Time* must be careful not to conflate what is "first and for the most part" [*zunächst und zumeist*] with what is 'fundamental' or 'primordial' (*ursprünglich*),"<sup>11</sup> arguing that the phenomenon of world, as primordial, should be understood as the enabling space for practical knowing. My claim is that Heidegger's transcendental phenomenological concerns of the late 1920s, becoming even more pronounced after *Being and Time*, are focused on the enabling site of the phenomenon of world as the medium through which practices and plans can be brought into being, without such practices and plans accounting for world pure and simple. The principal claim then is not that the neo-pragmatist readers of Heidegger get him wrong, but instead that understanding what Heidegger means by the world is key to understanding the development of his thought as he struggles to unpack and rephrase what he means by the phenomenon of world and how it both belongs to Dasein's mode of being and is distinct from it.

However, the difference between two types of knowing, theoretical and practical, is obviously quite important. As Heidegger reminds us, the proposition typical of the theoretical attitude does not refer to the context that shapes it, whereas the proposition that issues from the practical attitude can only be understood from within the context itself. There is hence no idealizing tendency in the propositions that belong to practical knowing, tending as they do towards what can be otherwise. Practical knowing is thus action-directed, and not directed towards ascertaining the truth or falsity of a proposition.

The distinction Heidegger seems to be asking us to entertain is that between theoretical and practical knowing and the discrete forms of experience that pertain to both. More than this, however, he is also asking us to entertain the possibility that the theoretical attitude is itself founded on the practical and that the theoretical-propositional attitude has its roots in non-propositional and non-cognitive forms of practical orientation. It is thus that one can understand Heidegger when he refers to how a child is taught that something *is* something. Heidegger writes:

The child's question, 'What is this thing?', is thus answered by stating what it is used for, defining what one finds in terms of what one does with it. This definition and interpretation at the same time make reference to in-being, to preoccupation with the thing under consideration. And with such an interpretation, this thing only now actually enters the environing world as something present and understandable, even though only provisionally, for it is truly understood only when one has entered into the standing [*Bewandtnis*] which the environmental thing has.<sup>12</sup>

In other words, one does not begin by first teaching the child that this thing, here, is an 'object' and this type of 'object' should be understood thusly. Rather, one starts by explaining to the child what it is good for, showing them how it is used properly, and how it belongs to a worldly context. It is thus necessary to understand that circumspective seeing (*Umsicht*) already involves familiarity with the "referential context" (*Verweisungszusammenhang*) or "involvement context" (*Bewandtniszusammenhang*) that makes the world "meaningful"<sup>13</sup> for us. It is in such a referential context of involvements that the

---

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 193/238.

<sup>11</sup> Joseph P. Fell, "The Familiar and the Strange: On the Limits of Praxis in the Early Heidegger" in *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 28 (1990): 25.

<sup>12</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Prolegomena zur Geschichte des Zeitbegriffs* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1979), 359-360. *History of the Concept of Time* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 260-261.

<sup>13</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 129/167.

practical understanding of, say, a utensil consists not in some private mental acquisition of some ‘object-concept’ and its specific application to a given region of use. It is rather knowing how to use it correctly, how it differs from other utensils, and how it belongs to a world of utensil-use more broadly. Read thusly, Mark Okrent claims that “the only consistent metaphysics to be derived from the program of *Being and Time* is a pragmatic one.”<sup>14</sup> However, what needs further stressing is that such contextualized practical knowing is embedded in our “structural functional account of understanding” as being-in-the-world, which is, I will argue, more far-reaching than simply asserting the primacy of practical knowing over theoretical cognition.<sup>15</sup>

In contrast, Hubert Dreyfus has long insisted that Heidegger’s notion of world is definable as “the relational whole of in-order-to and for-the-sake-of-whichs in which entities and activities that involve equipment have a point.”<sup>16</sup> And he goes on to describe the “everyday coping skills” of Dasein as “mindless.”<sup>17</sup> And even if critical of what he terms “the myth of the mental,”<sup>18</sup> he opts to retain the language of ‘mind’ while simultaneously emphasizing the primacy of the practical attitude over the theoretical one, i.e., non-cognitive practical know-how over theoretical forms of knowing-that. And there is obviously some reason for this interpretation, with Heidegger for instance writing, “that which is understood gets articulated when the entity to be understood is brought close interpretatively by taking ‘something as something’; and this articulation lies before our making any thematic assertion about it.”<sup>19</sup> Yet Dreyfus’s interpretations are highly selective and often tend to go well beyond what Heidegger is claiming. For instance, they fail to acknowledge that while the practical does ground the theoretical, both practical and theoretical knowing are themselves founded on Dasein’s mode of being in the world as disclosive. And they fail to recognize that the phenomenon of world is always in excess of this or that uncovering and as always already there and always already having-been open. As Felix Ó Murchadha aptly puts it, “While the failure of the tool discloses the worldliness (*Weltmässigkeit*) of the handy things (cf. BT, § 16), angst reveals Dasein in its worldhood (*Weltlichkeit*) and as having an order prior to that of handiness. (cf. BT, § 40)”<sup>20</sup>

Yet Dreyfus’s neo-pragmatic interpretation sees worldly understanding as a non-conceptual form of existentially engaged tool-orientation. Read in this way, entities are initially identified through their use in a practical context and assertions can be made about them only subsequently. However, while Dreyfus is right to claim that Heidegger is intent on showing that theoretical knowledge is founded on context-embedded existence, he stops short of offering an account of the transcendental source of our ability to use things in practical contexts, and thus fails to acknowledge the twin elements of Dasein transcendence and the phenomenon of world as such a source. Instead, and in the name of an utterly praxicentric analysis, the world, for Dreyfus, is understood as a non-conceptual web of intelligible use-relations and practices through which things are given meaning and on the basis of which propositions can be made. Yet the neglect of a more well-rounded interpretation, taking the transcendental dimension of world into account, means that the phenomenon of world is suppressed, with Dreyfus focusing exclusively on “existence as the self-interpreting way of being in our practices.”<sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> Mark Okrent, *Heidegger’s Pragmatism*, 217.

<sup>15</sup> See Mark Wrathall, “Heidegger on Human Understanding,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger’s Being and Time* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 187-188.

<sup>16</sup> Hubert L. Dreyfus, *Being-in-the-World*, 223.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>18</sup> Hubert L. Dreyfus, “Overcoming the Myth of the Mental: How Philosophers Can Profit from the Phenomenology of Everyday Expertise,” *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 79, no. 2 (2005): 47–65.

<sup>19</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 149/190.

<sup>20</sup> Felix Ó Murchadha, *The Time of Revolution: Kairos and Chronos in Heidegger* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 63.

<sup>21</sup> Hubert L. Dreyfus, *Being-in-the-World*, 22.

The point is that Heidegger is not simply affirming that our understanding of the world is a tacit “kind of knowing-how rather than a knowing-that”<sup>22</sup> and that “understanding is skillful mastery.”<sup>23</sup> Delimiting the more neo-pragmatic reading, the early Heidegger’s main focus is not on the centrality of practice, tools, coping skills, and existential know-how, but on the primacy of finding oneself within contexts of openness and meaning encounter, some of which are practical, and on the general contextualization of meaningful presence. And his analysis is carried out against the horizon of world as a pre-given open whole, announcing itself “in darkness” as “always already there,”<sup>24</sup> making contexts of encounter and circumspection possible. What Heidegger is offering, in addition to the necessary propaedeutic analysis of equipmentality and our practical orientation in the world, is a phenomenological analysis of the pre-given space of meaning manifestation, namely the world, in which skillful coping can show up as meaningful in the first place.

## II

In his 1925-26 Marburg lecture course, *Logic: The Question of Truth*, Heidegger gives the example of a “chalkboard” to illustrate and qualify his point, drawing attention to how things primarily give themselves to us in experience. He writes that,

Our knowledge and understanding, which is first and always directed to the world, lives in and draws upon ‘sense experience.’ Although our knowledge remains (within certain limits) constantly related to its firsthand lived world, we mostly do not have things present ‘bodily’ (*leibhaftig*). In the precise moment that I write on the chalkboard something I am saying, I certainly do sense the resistance of the board, and the board is bodily given to me. However, in a strict sense, the board is not bodily present to me as I write. Rather, I am present to the words I am writing and their meaning . . . Whereas when someone who has absolutely nothing to do with the room walks in and sees it there, the board is not present to him *as what it is*.<sup>25</sup>

The above hypothetical individual, who may know little of chalkboards or the activity of writing on them, will obviously encounter it as a sensible object, and can of course attempt to use the chalkboard in a variety of ways, though not necessarily in accord with its proper context-based meaning. Therefore, the hypothetical individual is apt to use the thing without understanding the being of this thing in its referential context. In the case of such an individual, the chalkboard is not “disclosed in its proper sense.”<sup>26</sup> For instance, even if I am intimately familiar with the world of educational technology, say, if I use a chalkboard to hide behind when I am being pursued by a student whose essay I have just failed, then I am most definitely ‘using’ the chalkboard, and it is most certainly “bodily present”<sup>27</sup> to me, though it is not being used *as* a chalkboard. Its meaningfulness *as* ‘good for writing on,’ as opposed to ‘good for protecting myself with,’ is not understood in its categorial sense. What the chalkboard example brings out is that one does not “see” the thing “*as what it is*” (*was sie ist*),<sup>28</sup> and by extension does not comprehend its meaningfulness within a boarder framework of context-based presence.

Importantly, the failure to comprehend its meaningfulness is not a failure to comprehend something in terms of the incorrect contents of consciousness. It is not the failure to apprehend the essence of the thing that inheres in the thing itself. It is rather the failure to understand the possible availability of something within a worldly context of interrelated involvements and appropriate inter-related

---

<sup>22</sup> Hubert L. Dreyfus, *Background Practices: Essays on the Understanding of Being*, Mark A. Wrathall (ed.) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 177.

<sup>23</sup> John Haugeland, *Dasein Disclosed*, 23.

<sup>24</sup> See Felix O’Murchadha, *The Time of Revolution: Kairos and Chronos in Heidegger* (Bloomsbury, 2012), 59-61.

<sup>25</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Logik. Die Frage nach der Wahrheit* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1976), 103-104. *Logic: The Question of Truth* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2010), 86.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 104/86.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

meanings. In this sense, the neo-pragmatic reading is persuasive. Yet, to refer to the being of something is not just to indicate the horizon of usability of something within a web of interrelated somethings, but also the context-embeddedness of meaning as made possible by a world that is always already open, making possible different forms of presence. Heidegger is here attacking a particular view of sense experience which already takes it as some sort of datum prior to our active worldly engagement, though he is quite clear that the world-directedness of our knowing and understanding “lives in and draws upon ‘sense experience.’”<sup>29</sup> For Heidegger, the thing comes first, and not some sort of sense datum from which the thing is constructed. And this is not to say that the experiential dimension is irrelevant, only that we need to rethink the nature of the experiential as something opened and facilitated by the world.

Accordingly, Heidegger’s language of “disclosedness,” “being open” and “clearing” (*Lichtung*), both in *Being and Time* and subsequently,<sup>30</sup> should be interpreted as indicating something having become cleared to be part of the experienceable world, understood as belonging to a web of open and opened meaning, both something we are immersed in and yet exposed by.<sup>31</sup> That said, Heidegger is not trying to reduce all that *is* to practical projects or tasks, and he states as much, writing: “It never occurred to me ... to try and claim or prove ... that the essence of man consists in the fact that he knows how to handle knives and forks or use the tram.”<sup>32</sup> And he continues, “the phenomenon of world really requires a very broad and wide-ranging perspective.”<sup>33</sup> With this claim Heidegger is obviously challenging an understanding of the world as a barrage of stimuli in need of cognitive ordering. And yet he is not simply doing so in the name of a neo-pragmatist theory of meaning. He is focused instead on the experience of world as both pre-given, always already having-been, and uncovered. This is the two-fold ambiguity of world having a “peculiarly universal character and yet a character essentially related to human *Da-sein*.”<sup>34</sup>

While being human is bound up constitutively in context-embedded meaning that should not be reduced to private mental states that are subsequently externalized and communicated, it does not follow that Heidegger is simply offering a structural functional account of meaning establishment by way of engaged activity in practical tasks. For Heidegger, the priority lies in the engaged context of worldly encounter, and his phenomenological re-appropriation of *praxis* is intent on retrieving pre-theoretical worldly experience as context-embedded understanding and interpreting that responds to the always already or pre-given openness of the world.

### III

One needs to be careful, then, not to understand Heidegger’s critique of the so-called theoretical bias and the subsequent affirmation of practical knowing as aligning neatly with more neo-pragmatic approaches that understand the world as a network of practical context relations and existential projects.<sup>35</sup> As outlined above, his interpretative strategy is a propaedeutic to a deeper existential-ontological analysis of the world, which cannot be reduced to the aggregate of inner-worldly meaning or to the totality of use relations or plans. What I mean is that reality, or what it is for something to be, should not be understood as something humans generate through the acquisition of practical skills. It should instead be understood as the unfolding of an intelligible order of things to which human activity is responsive. Heidegger clarifies as much, writing:

---

<sup>29</sup> Ibid. 103/85.

<sup>30</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 133/171. *Zollikoner Seminare* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 2006), 283. *Zollikon Seminars: Protocols—Conversations—Letters* (Evanston IL: Northwestern University Press, 2001), 225.

<sup>31</sup> See Lawrence J. Hatab, “Redescribing the *Zuhanden-Vorhanden* Relation,” in *Gatherings: The Heidegger Circle Annual* 8 (2018): 8-9.

<sup>32</sup> *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 177.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Martin Heidegger, *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic*, 176.

<sup>35</sup> John Haugeland, *Dasein Disclosed*, 92-93.

We cannot understand world as the ontical context of useful items, the things of historical culture, in contradistinction to nature and the things of nature. Yet the analysis of useful items and their context nevertheless provides an approach and the means for first making visible the phenomenon of world. World is therefore not beings qua tools, as that with which humans have to deal, as if being-in-the-world meant to move among cultural items. Nor is world a multiplicity of human beings. Rather all these belong to what we call intra-worldly beings, yet they are not the world itself.<sup>36</sup>

From the above passage we can see quite clearly that Heidegger does not want to reduce world and meaning solely to human interests, skills, and general know-how. What Heidegger is attempting to do is to think together world as a pre-given open whole and world as a web of interrelated significance held open by the human being. Put otherwise, Dasein's projective holding open of the world in understanding always points back to itself as an already thrown projection. It is the task of the transcendental phenomenologist to think together world as both a pre-given dynamic structure that allows things to appear, and world as held open by the human being as the locus of its meaningful appearance *as* world. As such, any attempt to interpret Heidegger as a "transcendental pragmatist,"<sup>37</sup> à la Mark Okrent, is restrictive, and needs some re-evaluating.

That said, Okrent rightly identifies the anti-essentialist and anti-representationalist bent in Heidegger's work and demonstrates how Dasein's mode of being, as practical and world-disclosing, is the necessary condition of any theoretical or propositional attitude. Yet because Okrent focuses on forms of practical understanding alone, he ends up reading Heidegger's transcendental commitments as metaphysical-pragmatist ones. That is, he views Heidegger's early work through a more epistemological lens, focused more on purpose-oriented and practical forms of knowing. In this way, he circumvents the more robust transcendental phenomenological dimension of world mentioned above, claiming that world, for Heidegger, is "the functionality contexture of all functionality contextures."<sup>38</sup>

On the other side, John Haugeland argues for what he calls "Heidegger's Transcendental Existentialism," which takes Heidegger's analysis of the "ontological disclosedness" of Dasein as a condition for the possibility of understanding entities as useful and available.<sup>39</sup> While this, too, offers an original appraisal of Heidegger's existential-ontology, Haugeland to my mind still views the phenomenon of world in too narrowly existential-epistemological terms, namely through the dual aspects of 1) the fundamental structure of Dasein's way of being that makes our knowledge of objects possible, and 2) world as "the *totality of intraworldly* entities."<sup>40</sup> While he is not altogether wrong to put forward such an interpretation, he ends up downplaying the phenomenon of world as entailing both the transcendence of Dasein, as overstepping the world, and world transcendence understood as "beings as a whole" (*das Seiende im Ganzen*),<sup>41</sup> i.e., the world as always more than what is uncovered and yet belonging essentially to Dasein. This is the two-fold ambiguity that Heidegger wants to bring to the fore, rather than systematically explain away by means of an existential-anthropological account of

---

<sup>36</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Metaphysische Anfangsgründe der Logik im Ausgang von Leibniz* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1978), 223. *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 181.

<sup>37</sup> Mark Okrent, *Heidegger's Pragmatism*, 261.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>39</sup> John Haugeland, *Dasein Disclosed*, 201-202.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 117. The most holistic account of world that Haugeland offers is the following: "It is important to appreciate, for instance, that the everyday world is a concrete whole that is richly dynamic and meaningfully structured. Thus it includes not just the kinds of tasks and projects that there are or might have been but also all the various particular tasks and projects that there in fact are, in all their nitty-gritty interrelationships, complexities, and gory details, and also all the tools, materials, by-products, and whatever else has a role or is available for a role in any of those tasks and projects. Moreover, even at a given moment, it is not just these in an instantaneous 'time-slice' but rather includes all their relevant histories and prospects. Tasks and projects, by their very nature, always have a pertinent past and future, and these belong essentially to what they are" (John Haugeland, *Dasein Disclosed*, 119).

<sup>41</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Einleitung in die Philosophie*, 240.

understanding, planning, or projecting.<sup>42</sup> The interpretative challenge then is to ascertain how the phenomenon of world, which “exists” and has “Dasein’s mode of being,”<sup>43</sup> the world as “Dasein-ish,”<sup>44</sup> is nonetheless not simply a product of human action, anthropologically understood, not the “sum of extant entities,” and not “extant at all.”<sup>45</sup>

One way of holding onto this ambiguity is to look at how the human being, as discloser of the world, is simultaneously confronted with the open, affective, and dynamic structure of worldliness, giving meaning to its own existence in this confrontation. This giving meaning to its own existence, existence questioning itself in confronting the world, certainly has an impact on world as an open whole. This is the case insofar as the inconspicuous domain of worldliness is “lit up,”<sup>46</sup> becoming thinkable, though not as an empty horizon containing objects. Yet Heidegger is clear that, before we experience things as sensibly extant, the world has always already been given, or cleared, as the presupposed site of entity manifestation and meaning.<sup>47</sup>

This is arguably one of Heidegger’s deepest concerns in the lecture courses after *Being and Time*, where he claims that the world, as “a transcendental concept in the strictest sense of the term,”<sup>48</sup> has been “skipped over” (*übersprungen*)<sup>49</sup> or “not yet been recognized”<sup>50</sup> in the history of philosophy. And it is patent that after *Being and Time* Heidegger struggles to reclaim the ‘world’ phenomenologically as constitutively bound up with Dasein’s mode of being. Accordingly, while Dasein remains the access point, worldliness is indexed fundamentally to the “manifestness of beings as such as a whole” (*Offenbarkeit von Seiendem als solchem im Ganzen*),<sup>51</sup> i.e., the open that has always already been cleared so that the Dasein can become such an access point. This marks a shift in Heidegger’s position, with Dasein conceived as “*das Übersteigende*” and world, what is transcended and to which Dasein belongs, conceived as “*das Seiende im Ganzen*,”<sup>52</sup> or as “the how of beings as a whole” (*das Wie des Seienden im Ganzen*).<sup>53</sup>

What all this entails is that world is no longer seen as issuing from Dasein’s mode of being, pure and simple, and yet the transcendental co-relation between Dasein and world is nonetheless upheld. What does not fit with the neo-pragmatic interpretation is that world, after *Being and Time*, is defined as “the wholeness of the constitution of being” (*das Ganze der Seinsverfassung*), indicating that the transcendence that constitutes Dasein must be read in tandem with the distinct element of “beings as a whole” (*das Seiende im Ganzen*). It is only when these corresponding moments are taken together, in an alliance in distinctness, that one can understand what Heidegger terms “the inner organization of the

---

<sup>42</sup> Ibid. 303-304.

<sup>43</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Die Grundprobleme der Phänomenologie*, 237/166

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Martin Heidegger *Sein und Zeit*, 75–76/105-107.

<sup>47</sup> In this paper I am trying to counter and yet extend what I see as a one-side interpretation of Heidegger’s account of ‘world’ as something disclosed in terms of utility significance or webs of means to ends tool relations. As such, my claim is that the activity of the human being is not understandable in terms of products or projects, and hence the being of the environment, call it the world of instruments, tools, and products, cannot be reduced to worldhood or the phenomenon of world. I do not want to claim that Heidegger is uninterested in the practical sense of world disclosure and uncovering, I just want to check a reading that overlooks (or at best downplays) the excessive dimension of the phenomenon of world with respect to the human being. I would not, however, support a recent claim by Richard Capobianco that “for Heidegger, ‘world’ is primarily and primordially the Heraclitean kosmos (as Being itself) and not that which is projected by the human being and thereby dependent upon the human being.” See Richard Capobianco, *Heidegger’s Being: The Shimmering Unfolding* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2022), 21.

<sup>48</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Metaphysische Anfangsgründe der Logik im Ausgang von Leibniz*, 218/170.

<sup>49</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 65/95.

<sup>50</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Die Grundprobleme der Phänomenologie*, 234/165.

<sup>51</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Die Grundbegriffe der Metaphysik*, 412/284.

<sup>52</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Einleitung in die Philosophie*, 309.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 240.

wholeness of being” (*die innere Organisation dieser Seinsganzheit*).<sup>54</sup> What emerges here is a concept of the human coming into its humanity by being opened by the world, pulled out and into itself by a world which is always already there, and in the process confronted by “beings as a whole.”<sup>55</sup>

Once again it is correct to say that Dasein’s disclosive manner of being, which is so central to Haugeland’s and Okrent’s readings, is constitutive of world, or that world is the basis on which inner-worldly entities can be encountered as meaningful. Yet world appears to have a plus character, especially after *Being and Time*, which allows Dasein to be pulled into meaning and into meaning establishment. What the neo-pragmatist interpreters ignore is the “surpassive” (*übertrifftig*) character of world as a “counter-hold” (*Widerhalt*) to Dasein’s transcendence, distinct from inner-worldly beings and their functional context.<sup>56</sup> It is because of the surpassiveness of world that Heidegger can claim that “being-in-the-world” is the “necessary a priori constitution [*Verfassung*] of Dasein,”<sup>57</sup> indicating that Dasein’s disclosive mode of being is not exhaustive of the being of the world and its distinct form of existence.<sup>58</sup>

Consequently, while Heidegger defines understanding as a form of caring for the world, dealing with it, as opposed to taking it as a thematizable object of apprehension, what also needs to be borne in mind is that the originality of his analysis of world is not simply to be found in a practical understanding of things as *pragmata*. His analysis is focused on how things become *pragmata* in the first place, and how they can be encountered as meaningful. What I mean by this is that he is attempting to show that *pragmata* can be encountered only insofar as they belong necessarily to a totality of interdependent meaning references that constitute the world as our world. Therefore, *pragmata* do not make up the world but are uncovered as the surpassive condition of their inter-referential manifestation. The world itself is not therefore the sum of well or poorly functioning things or contexts, but rather the condition of their manifestation. Such a reading is supported by Søren Overgaard’s insightful critique of Dreyfus’s take on Heidegger, writing, “There must be something that makes encounters with entities possible, something *that is not itself an encounter with an entity*.”<sup>59</sup> Following this more transcendental phenomenological line of interpretation, the phenomenon of world is not simply definable as our non-thematic relation to entities, or background practices, as they appear to us, change into other entities, or vanish altogether. It is not simply “the totality of interconnected [non-conceptual] solicitations that attract or repulse us.”<sup>60</sup> It is rather what Heidegger calls the *nihil originarium* of world as the structural condition of such solicitations coming to appearance, passing out of appearance, and mattering to us.

Objects of experience are of course understandable only in terms of their worldly involvement and, as Heidegger submits, conceiving of “‘an’ item of equipment is ontologically impossible.”<sup>61</sup> But with this he wants to indicate that it is only because one lives within a totality of meaning references that one can pick out objects of use and that such use-objects can manifest themselves as what they are. Yet such meaning references are themselves framed by the phenomenon of world. Therefore, it is the world, qua structural openness of the whole, that makes it possible to encounter, understand, and use *pragmata*. Before this or that individual thing is experienced in its usefulness or in its sensible discreteness, a pre-given and cleared unity of references has already been presupposed in terms of the use of the thing.<sup>62</sup> As such, something can appear *as* something only because of this pre-thematic givenness which is the a priori structural openness that Heidegger defines as “worldhood.”<sup>63</sup> What he means by this is that the being of the world is not a static container of context-based meaning relations, nor is it simply definable

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 309.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 328.

<sup>56</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Metaphysische Anfangsgründe der Logik im Ausgang von Leibniz*, 233/181.

<sup>57</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 77/53.

<sup>58</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Die Grundprobleme der Phänomenologie*, 234-235/165.

<sup>59</sup> Søren Overgaard, *Husserl and Heidegger on Being in the World* (Dordrecht, Boston and London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2004), 71.

<sup>60</sup> Hubert L. Dreyfus, “The Return of the Myth of the Mental,” *Inquiry* 50/4 (2007): 357.

<sup>61</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 353/404.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 69/98.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 64-65/92-93.



as a totality of meaningful references. More originally, the world is an open frame of sense that belongs together with the continual emergence, expansion, and possible disappearance of such meaning relations.

In addition to this open frame of sense, which is the ontological (no-thing) structure of world, there must be a being to whom something can appear and enter the sphere of intelligibility, one that is concerned with its own being and with world-directed meaning-emergence. What this understanding amounts to is not, however, a theoretical apprehension, but is instead a form of context-embedded knowing one's way around the world, involving skills and abilities within various practical contexts. In this sense, William Blattner rightly argues that human understanding is definable in terms of our tacitly "engaged abilities, our skills and capacities" and that "to understand something is to be able to do or manage or master it."<sup>64</sup> However, he also correctly identifies the tendency to "over-pragmatize" Heidegger and thereby to neglect his "existential bent," arguing that "what I *can be* is not what I *can do*"<sup>65</sup> and that the "(temporal) structure of pragmatic action cannot fit the deeper level of description of Dasein's existence."<sup>66</sup>

Yet the point I want to emphasize is that world is the open site of possibility, a pre-given and affective sphere of possibility actualization. While always indexed to the human being and as mattering to us essentially, world in its fullest sense is not simply a totality of interrelated things with which we familiarize ourselves, primarily usable and only derivatively useless. More precisely, world is a presupposed horizon of possibility actualization and the condition of its intelligibility. Therefore, our encounter with meaning could not appear without an open and dynamic horizon of world, which is held open by the one for whom meaningfulness and its actualization matters, namely Dasein and its unique mode of existing understandingly. It is for this reason, following Haugeland and others, that one can rightly call Heidegger's analysis of the world a concrete holistic one.<sup>67</sup> This signifies that things show up as meaningful due to the existential background dimension of world-sustaining *praxis*, or Dasein's essential mode of "disclosedness" or "openness" (*Aufgeschlossenheit*) to the world.<sup>68</sup>

However, unlike the neo-pragmatist reading, things show up as meaningful not only because of Dasein's disclosedness or openness, but also thanks to the opening or unlocking phenomenon of world, which always already is, as the space of possibility actualization. The point, then, is not simply to contest what such interpreters are claiming Heidegger to be saying, but rather to broaden the framework so as to see the world *as* a dynamic and surpassive context of intelligibility, both always already open and held-open by Dasein's mode of being. This means that while world, thought in terms of the dynamic referential totality, is related constitutively to the activity of human understanding as disclosive, the phenomenon of the world comes to take on a living reality, always partially veiled in darkness, which is always more than any disclosure. More than Dasein establishing the world, the world is the site in which Dasein can come into itself or lose itself. As such the world is more aptly defined as "the how of beings as a whole", which is that towards which Dasein can transcend, or what Dasein is pulled out towards.<sup>69</sup>

Such a surpassive dimension of world is in fact what is already revealed in *Being and Time* in the fundamental attunement of anxiety, in which the meaningfulness of inner-worldly things no longer has purchase on me. In this interruptive and revealing moment, what "obtrudes" (*aufdrängt*) is the "world in its worldhood,"<sup>70</sup> as the condition of the possibility of things and their meaningfulness showing up.

---

<sup>64</sup> William Blattner, *Heidegger's "Being and Time": A Reader's Guide* (London: Bloomsbury, 2006), 94.

<sup>65</sup> William Blattner, "Existential Temporality in *Being and Time* (Why Heidegger is not a Pragmatist)," in *Heidegger: A Critical Reader* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1992), 105–106.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 122.

<sup>67</sup> John Haugeland, *Dasein Disclosed*, 23.

<sup>68</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 75/105-106.

<sup>69</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Einleitung in die Philosophie*, 240.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 187/231.

Moreover, world as this open and possibilizing whole has a form of “presence” (*Präsenz*) all its own.<sup>71</sup> The referential frame sets the terms in which meaning can show up, but Dasein is a participant in and recipient of what is given. Hence the world gives meaning to Dasein more than Dasein gives meaning to the world. And it is because of the modification of perspective, triggered by the fundamental attunement of anxiety, that the unique mode of givenness of such a condition is indicated (though not “conceptualized”<sup>72</sup>) as a “*pale and inconspicuous presence*.”<sup>73</sup>

What Heidegger brings to the fore is world as a conditioning whole that allows practical and theoretical attitudes to emerge. The phenomenon of world hence needs be interpreted phenomenologically as the enabling mode of “beings as a whole,” which is of a piece with the disclosive character of Dasein’s transcendence, allowing things to be what they are in various regions of experience.<sup>74</sup> For Heidegger, the world has a “peculiarly universal character,”<sup>75</sup> yet he does not understand this “universal character” to mean the totality of useful “objects” or possible projects. Rather, world is a possibility site, the framing “condition” [*Zustand*] of all things in their “belonging-to” one another, though as essentially tied to Dasein’s disclosive movement of transcendence.<sup>76</sup> In this sense, the constitutive openness of Dasein mirrors the openness of the world, without one being reduced to the other.

When one understands something, one does not do so by attending to it reflectively, independent of the referential context of the world. One does so because of one’s ability to transcend this or that thing, what Heidegger calls the “projection of the world,”<sup>77</sup> looking beyond the particular and towards the “categorical whole”<sup>78</sup> that makes both theory and practice possible. Significantly, however, this means that understanding something in the context of its world involvement and application is possible because the world has already made it “available” to us.<sup>79</sup> In this sense, worldhood is a genuinely transcendental a priori theme. Things do not simply get their meaning from nondeliberate and nonintentional human activity, but rather from the referential wholeness to which it belongs as disclosed by the human being’s reciprocal participation. The world is thus not ‘something’ that first subsists and into which we step. It is, rather, an inconspicuous “no-thing,” “the *nihil originarium*”<sup>80</sup> that enables things to come to appearance, hanging together only within a web of meaningful references.<sup>81</sup> The world is consequently both a dynamic a priori medium through which the unity of references emerges and obtains, as well as a sphere disclosed by Dasein’s transcendence, displaying what Heidegger calls the “character of inconspicuous familiarity.”<sup>82</sup> It is because of this continually presupposed open whole, which is no entity, that the world can become thinkable and that referential totalities of meaning can emerge. Therefore, for Heidegger, neither Dasein’s understanding, allowing the openness to unfold, nor the existent thing, understood practically, ‘exist’ before or outside of the openness of the world as a mirroring of Dasein’s openness to the world.

#### IV

While Heidegger does characterize world as “a characteristic of Dasein itself,”<sup>83</sup> it would be wrong to claim that it is simply reducible to Dasein’s mode of being. Heidegger himself rejects such an

---

<sup>71</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Prolegomena zur Geschichte des Zeitbegriffs*, 254/188.

<sup>72</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 187/232.

<sup>73</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Prolegomena zur Geschichte des Zeitbegriffs*, 256/189.

<sup>74</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Metaphysische Anfangsgründe der Logik im Ausgang von Leibniz*, 219-220/171.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 221/172.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 220/171.

<sup>77</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Wegmarken* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1976), 165-170. *Pathmarks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 127-131.

<sup>78</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 144-145/184.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 364/415.

<sup>80</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Metaphysische Anfangsgründe der Logik im Ausgang von Leibniz*, 272/210.

<sup>81</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 76/107.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 104/137.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 64/92.

interpretation as a failure “to grasp the decisive problem” of world.<sup>84</sup> What he means is that Dasein always finds itself thrown into a world that is already open, and because of this, the world is to be seen neither as a product of human activity, pure and simple, nor as a complex of circumstantial and use-oriented practices established by human understanding. What he is alive to is the structural relation between the horizon of world and the appearance of meaning. Therefore, the world is more fully understood as interrelated ways of being with myself and with others in actualizing possibilities that the world, the open “*manifestness of beings as such as a whole*,”<sup>85</sup> already facilitates an encounter with.

It is certainly the case that the previously mentioned referential totality of meaning is disclosed through Dasein’s manner of being, and that “only Dasein can be meaningful.”<sup>86</sup> But again it does not follow that meaning is disclosed starting from Dasein and only because of it. Key here is that while the world can show up as meaningful only to a being that can understand and engage with it, it would be incorrect to claim that the being of the world is dependent on the being of Dasein. Without the human being, there would be in a certain sense no appearing *to*. But appearing, as the structural articulation belonging to the world, is not under the sway of the human being and is most certainly not reducible to it. Heidegger makes it clear in *Being and Time* that “letting something be” what it *is* does not mean producing something. Instead, it means “that something which is already an ‘entity’ must be discovered in its readiness-to-hand, and that one must thus let the entity which has this kind of being be encountered.”<sup>87</sup> More than just something Dasein discloses, something handy in a web of interrelated functions and references, the world is an open and unfolding site of possibility encounter, freeing things up to come into their own and to be the things they always already are. The world is an open and unfolding site of possibility encounter, yet in its unfolding it conceals itself as such a freeing element, which Heidegger will later parse in terms of “world” as the “self-opening openness” (*sich öffnende Offenheit*).<sup>88</sup>

However, the non-primacy of theory is understood by Heidegger’s neo-pragmatist readers to imply the primacy of practice, whereas, in fact, Heidegger takes the underpinning of theory by practice to be itself underpinned by Dasein’s temporal structure as openness to the world that is always already open, and such a structure is neither theoretical nor practical. So, if the founding and founded distinction is still operative in Heidegger’s analysis, it is a primacy of possibility over actuality that truly matters, where ‘actuality’ includes both theoretical and practical actuality. As such, there is only the primacy of practice over theory in a very qualified sense, with practical knowing founded on something which is itself not practical. Throughout the late 1920s Heidegger returns to the phenomenon of world, irreducible as it is to traditional forms of idealism and realism,<sup>89</sup> insisting that his goal is to reconceive the nature of subjectivity as transcendence in tandem with reconceiving what it means to experience the world as an enabling possibility site that both mirrors and draws out Dasein’s mode of being as possibility. In this sense, thrownness (*Geworfenheit*) and facticity are not simply indicative of how one always already finds oneself exposed to a world of “determinacy,” or how Dasein is “delivered over to itself” or “stuck with itself.”<sup>90</sup> It also points to the affective openness of the world as surpassive of each disclosure. It

---

<sup>84</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Die Grundbegriffe der Metaphysik: Welt, Endlichkeit, Einsamkeit* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1983), 413. *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 285.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 414/286.

<sup>86</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 151/193.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 85/117.

<sup>88</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Holzwege* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1977), 37. *Off the Beaten Track* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 26. Even more radically, Heidegger’s 1936 retrospective comments on *Being and Time* make it clear that “world” should not be defined as a “phenomenon” (*Phänomen*) whatsoever, or even understood as a “human” (*menschlich*) world. See Martin Heidegger, *Zu eigenen Veröffentlichungen* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 2018), 66. See also, “World is grasped only through art as given to the originary event (*Ereignis*); not first in the basis of knowledge (thinking) or action (deed).” Martin Heidegger, *Überlegungen II-VI, Schwarze Hefie 1931-1938*, ed. Peter Trawny, Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 2014), 216. *Ponderings II-VI. Black Notebooks 1931-1938* (Indiana University Press, 2016), 158.

<sup>89</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Die Grundprobleme der Phänomenologie*, 249/175.

<sup>90</sup> John Haugeland, *Dasein Disclosed*, 143-144.

points to a prior thrownness from which Dasein necessarily takes its bearings, a thrownness that calls for and underwrites projective understanding. And it calls for an analysis of worldly existence which is focused on more than a totality of inner-worldly beings, projects, and practical relations.

The challenge, however, is to ascertain how the world, which “exists” and has “Dasein’s mode of being,”<sup>91</sup> is neither a mere product of the human being’s disclosive activity nor a collection of bare entities. One way of addressing this challenge is to look at how the human being, as world-discloser, is simultaneously confronted with the dynamic structure of worldhood, giving meaning to its own existence in this confrontation.<sup>92</sup> Now this giving meaning to its own existence certainly has an impact on the dynamic of world-openness as encounter with the world. This is the case insofar as the inconspicuous domain of transcendental world-openness is thematized, becoming thinkable, though neither as an object nor as an empty horizon containing objects.

The fundamental point Heidegger is driving at is that meaning does not dwell in the interiority of consciousness, but instead unfolds in the world as the pre-given and enabling space of intelligibility-actualization towards which Dasein both projects itself and is drawn. This means that the totality of possible *praxes* hinges on the openness that the world affords, and to which human capacities respond. The world is hence taken not as an empty container that receives its orderliness from consciousness, nor is it taken as a totality of sensibly given bare things laid out before consciousness, existing independently. It is rather conceived as a continually unfolding site replete with meaning towards which the human being is drawn and to which it responds. Meaningfulness is thus “a categorial determination of the world”<sup>93</sup> and world is the openness through which meanings are brought to light and lived in, becoming available and practically knowable. Accordingly, human existence is defined as “‘subjective’ *a priori* being-in-the-world”<sup>94</sup> because being-in-the-world means living *towards* the openness of sense, actualizing possibilities via the whole pre-given and historical web of referential meaning, which is a constitutive aspect of the world, though not reducible to the phenomenon of world tout court.

Accordingly, the openness of the world, as a transcendental no-thing, is always in excess of our *praxis*-oriented disclosure of meaning as the whole through which action and orientation become possible. The tension in Heidegger’s account of the phenomenon of world is therefore that meaning appears to be both “the world’s primary ontological characteristic”<sup>95</sup> and the primary mode of our “encounter”<sup>96</sup> with it, functioning as the space through which meaning can manifest itself. It is thus not encountered as an assemblage of use objects, but rather as both a referential context, disclosed by Dasein’s mode of being, i.e., transcendence, as well as the ontological unfolding of “beings as a whole” (*das Seiende im Ganzen*)<sup>97</sup> that permits the dynamic emergence of such contexts. The phenomenon of world, as the open whole making meaning emergence possible, is thus Heidegger’s way of addressing what is given in experience, things in their practical referential context, and what makes the experience of such things both possible and accessible. It is the relational tension between these two existential-ontological structures, Dasein’s mode of being, and that towards which Dasein transcends, which needs to be held in view when analyzing the phenomenon of world, and this gets lost when world is viewed in terms of what Dasein does or plans to do.

One thus encounters things as given, but only insofar as they have already been collocated into an integrated whole, showing up as meaningful against a holistic backdrop which is both correlated to Dasein’s mode of being and yet distinct from it. However, such a backdrop of wholeness should not be

---

<sup>91</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Die Grundprobleme der Phänomenologie*, 237/166.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 237-238/166-167.

<sup>93</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Phänomenologische Interpretationen zu Aristoteles. Einführung in die phänomenologische Forschung* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1985), 90. *Phenomenological Interpretations of Aristotle: Initiation into Phenomenological Research* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 68.

<sup>94</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 110/144.

<sup>95</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Der Begriff der Zeit* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 2004), 24. *The Concept of Time* (London: Bloomsbury, 2011), 17.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 25/19.

<sup>97</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Einleitung in die Philosophie*, 240.

reduced to an understanding of background in terms of a set of pervasive activities, habits, or skills, which would fall prey to an anthropological understanding of Dasein as an agent of existential planning.<sup>98</sup> In this sense, and spotting the anthropological tendencies in the neo-pragmatist reading of Heidegger, Dieter Thomä rightly claims that “If he [Heidegger] had to distinguish himself from a pragmatism of John Dewey’s sort [...], he would say: the world is not utterly exhausted in the experiences that human life has in its dealings with it.”<sup>99</sup>

Thomä is quite correct to claim that, for Heidegger, one can relate to certain plans or practices only because one finds oneself in a world towards which one can transcend and, in this sense, world is relation enabling, world “is the name for the ‘space’ (physical or otherwise) through which [...] relations stream.”<sup>100</sup> Following Andrew Mitchell, possibilities become noticeable only because I am already opened by the world and can enter into relations because of this. Given my argument throughout, it should be clear that Heidegger’s early transcendental phenomenological orientation is doing more than accounting for modes of non-cognitive practical understanding within pre-established contexts, world as “the in-which and out-onto-which”<sup>101</sup> of understanding, or world as “an institutional framework of norms and roles.”<sup>102</sup>

## V

I started out by referring to Heidegger’s rehabilitation of practical knowing and acting, linking it to his critique of the so-called theoretical and propositional bias. As previously stated, by placing the accent on practical knowing and world as a referential context of meaning, Heidegger’s thought bears an uncanny resemblance to certain strands of pragmatism. This resemblance has caused some to claim that “the philosophy of *Being and Time* is the first conceptualization of pragmatism in the German language,”<sup>103</sup> with Anglo-American philosophers such as John Haugeland, Mark Okrent, Hubert Dreyfus, and Mark Wrathall following suit, endorsing variants of such a pragmatist reading.

It is certainly true that our concrete embeddedness in the world is central to *Being and Time*, which is of a piece with his transcendental emphasis, examining issues such as the enabling open whole discussed hitherto. It has been shown, however, that reading Heidegger as emphasizing the practical over the theoretical does not fully account for the phenomenon of world that Heidegger is at pains to analyze and explicate. The transcendental character of the world, what Heidegger terms “a transcendental concept in the strictest sense of the term,”<sup>104</sup> needs to be examined with respect to the ontological priority of the open whole of embedded meaning over the utility of things, practices, and plans. What needs to be accentuated is that the ontological priority, for Heidegger, lies not in the practical context of use, pure and simple, but in the transcendental horizon he defines as the phenomenon of world. The phenomenon of world indicates the open site of possibility that has been cleared or given prior to Dasein’s engagement with it and yet which is to be thought as co-responding to Dasein’s way of being.<sup>105</sup>

---

<sup>98</sup> See Hubert L. Dreyfus, *Being-in-the-World*, 75.

<sup>99</sup> Dieter Thomä, “*Being and Time* in Retrospect: Heidegger’s Self-Critique” in *Heidegger’s Being and Time: Critical Essays*. Ed. by Richard Polt (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), 227.

<sup>100</sup> Andrew Mitchell, “The Appeal of Things: Ethics and Relation” in *After Heidegger?* Eds. Gregory Fried and Richard Polt (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018), 306.

<sup>101</sup> John Haugeland, *Dasein Disclosed*, 119.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>103</sup> Carl Friedrich Gethmann, “Heideggers Konzeption des Handelns in Sein und Zeit,” *Heidegger und die praktische Philosophie*. Eds. Annemarie Gethmann-Siefert & Otto Pöggeler (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1988), 143.

<sup>104</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Metaphysische Anfangsgründe der Logik im Ausgang von Leibniz*, 218/170.

<sup>105</sup> Or as François Raffoul puts it, “The world is not the totality of intraworldly entities (categorical sense), or of beings as a whole, but the event of an opening. The world is not something present-at-hand, but rather exists. This is why what is decisive in these analyses is not so much that a priority is given to the practical over the theoretical, but rather that an access is opened to an understanding of the world as event. The world is not something present-at-hand, but rather *exists*, that is to say, *happens*. ... What is ultimately at issue in this phenomenology of things

Therefore, while Haugeland defines world as more than a realm of practical utility, as “a vital and dynamic milieu fraught with tension and tedium, fury and calm, promise and menace,”<sup>106</sup> what is nonetheless circumvented is world as an already cleared possibility site. It is a site into which we are thrown, through which things and plans can show up as meaningful, and the human being is drawn into sense-making only because of such openness. Things can enter into functional relations with other things because of this open possibilizing site of sense-making, which Heidegger in the late 1920s terms “beings as a whole” (*das Seiende im Ganzen*).<sup>107</sup> Therefore, while it can be said that Heidegger’s philosophy is challenging various modern theories of subjectivity or consciousness, and that his early thought is not concerned with the contents of consciousness, traditionally conceived, it must be emphasized that his focus is not solely on practical life, socially embedded and future oriented projects.

Fundamental to his analysis, and especially so after *Being and Time*, is the search for the wholeness of world-openness as the dynamic condition of our appearance to each other and of the appearance of things as showing up and mattering to us. Possibility actualization and sense-making point to an inconspicuous and cleared interpretative space in which things can show up as meaningful, accessible, and thinkable in the first place. Granted, for Heidegger, the being of a thing refers to its context embeddedness and to our “engaged immersion”<sup>108</sup> with it, but only insofar as this is read together with the transcendental domain of world as providing a site of encounter.

But what must be avoided, for Heidegger, is systematically explaining away the constitutive ambiguity in the mutual affinity between the open and possibilizing site of world, as already pre-cleared *nihil originarium*, and the “ontological, or transcendental perfect” structure of Dasein.<sup>109</sup> What Heidegger is seeking to do is confront the correlated distinctness between two reciprocal elements: world as bound up with Dasein as discloser, being-in-the-world as projective understanding, and world as the always already cleared site of understanding, world as “the wholeness of being in its entirety” (*die Ganzheit des ganzen Seins*),<sup>110</sup> which draws Dasein out into its possibilities, i.e., into its ‘having to be’ (*Zu-sein*) its being. I believe the aim of Heidegger’s early thought, becoming even more pronounced after *Being and Time*, is genuinely holistic in that it seeks to thematise the inner-worldly referentiality of meaning, the transcendence of Dasein, as well as the more surpassive sense of the world.

For Heidegger, “the transcendental concept of world”, “the character of wholeness [that] belongs ... to the concept of world,” definable as the whole to which Dasein surpasses, and “the concept ‘world’ as a constituent of transcendence” are “intertwined.”<sup>111</sup> Yet these are irreducible moments in his world-analysis. And he is at pains to make clear that it would be “a complete misconstrual... to think that the concept [of world] designates only extant things and, in particular, useful things”<sup>112</sup>

While the neo-pragmatist reading of Heidegger is not without its merits, it is also quite partial, insofar as being human, for Heidegger, does not simply come down to determining the meaning of an object of experience in terms of its context of usefulness as having been disclosed by understanding. More fundamentally, being human means not only disclosing the world and ourselves in the process, but also having the world disclosed *to us* in its being “surpassive [*übertrifftig*]”<sup>113</sup> and in its striking us as such. The affective dimension of world givenness, disclosed *to us* in our being-thrown and not simply *by us* in projective understanding, is frequently elided by neo-pragmatic readers and this becomes even more

---

is to provide access to the event of the world. The stress on the primordial character of readiness-to-hand had no other purpose than to manifest such event, what Heidegger calls the worldliness (*Weltlichkeit*) of the world.” François Raffoul, *Thinking the Event* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2020), 126-127.

<sup>106</sup> John Haugeland, *Dasein Disclosed*, 119.

<sup>107</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Einleitung in die Philosophie*, 240.

<sup>108</sup> Lawrence Hatab, “Redescribing the *Zuhanden-Vorhanden* Relation,” in *Gatherings: The Heidegger Circle Annual* 8 (2018): 24.

<sup>109</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 441-442.

<sup>110</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Einleitung in die Philosophie*, 309.

<sup>111</sup> Martin Heidegger, *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic*, 180-181/232.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.* 248/193.

important after *Being and Time* and into well into the 1930s when he addresses the themes of withdrawal and concealedness of the world are brought out in contrast to the earth as self-concealing.<sup>114</sup> What is missed by the neo-pragmatists, however, is how the totality of inner-worldly meaning points beyond itself towards the phenomenon of world that refuses to be brought into view as an inner-worldly being, and yet makes itself felt at the affective level by way of fundamental attunements or dispositions. As such, it seems one needs to distinguish the world, understood as “the organized totality of such relationships of offering and calling for us to move from one thing and one situation to the next”<sup>115</sup> from the phenomenon of world as the always already cleared possibility space of both theoretical and practical engagement.

Heidegger is concerned with disclosive understanding and self-understanding, as well as with the counterweight of world understood as the horizon of transcendence, as constitutively tied up with Dasein’s disclosive mode of being, world as necessarily appearing *to* Dasein, though not identical to it. He moves in this direction because he is convinced that if the being of things is connected with utility, then it is also necessary to account for how one can understand utility against the background of the event of world to which Dasein is exposed. Throughout the late 1920s, this was the fundamental question of world-openness to which Dasein’s world-openness co-responds. This openness is, he states, the “*manifestness of beings as such as a whole* [*Offenbarkeit von Seiendem als solchem im Ganzen*].”<sup>116</sup>

Therefore, while “world is the designation for human Dasein in the core of its essence,”<sup>117</sup> what this means is that the holding-open of the open is the task of Dasein in its engagement with the world as always already there for me. Yet the peculiar openness of the world, as what precedes this or that disclosure, is itself concealed, or at least as he Heidegger puts it, one “can never look upon the phenomenon of world directly.”<sup>118</sup> This means that one cannot give an account of it in straightforward terms – because, as a “no-thing” whole, as a *nihil originarium*, it accounts for everything and thus determines both the limits and conditions of phenomenology as an analysis of the essence of appearing. And yet the phenomenon of world is not just defined as a mysterious event, because it “announces itself” indirectly through the things we encounter thanks to the space provided by the no-thing of the world.

What I have been arguing is that, while such openness is constitutively related to Dasein, it is also more than Dasein as “surpassive”: separable, though not separate. Here the transcendental element is vital: I can encounter things or states of affairs as meaningful because of Dasein’s disclosiveness and because of the referential context and its historical and temporal particularity. But such a referential context has itself already been cleared to become understandable to us in our thrownness into the world.

In sum, what characterizes Heidegger’s early transcendental phenomenological position is not so much its practical bent, but rather its transcendental and holistic account of world as an open, freeing, and possibilizing site of meaningful presence. Hence meaning does not simply emerge due to practical activity or existential engagement, but needs to be set into relief, set free, against the horizon of world openness. Heidegger goes this route to break with a philosophy of subjectivity and not to refashion himself as a pragmatist intent on reducing meaning to practical application, usefulness, future-oriented projects, and non-cognitive forms of coping. Key here is the primacy of the easily circumvented whole over against the inner workings of worldly parts. Emphasizing the role of practical activity and engagement is a fundamentally important propaedeutic, for Heidegger, carried out so that the phenomenon of world can be brought into view and experienced in its possibilizing surpassiveness.

---

<sup>114</sup> See Daniel O. Dahlstrom, *Heidegger’s Concept of Truth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 427-428.

<sup>115</sup> Mark Wrathall, *Heidegger and Unconcealment: Truth, Language, History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 63.

<sup>116</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Die Grundbegriffe der Metaphysik*, 412/284.

<sup>117</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Wegmarken* (Frankfurt Am Main: Klostermann, 1976), 154. *Pathmarks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 120.

<sup>118</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Die Grundbegriffe der Metaphysik*, 431/298.

However, remaining at the level of pragmatic interpretation occludes the surpassiveness of the world precisely because it does not know what to *do* with it.