Death, Sex, and the Body: Phenomenology and Foucault Prof. Boedeker

**Handout/worksheet on *Being and Time* sections 34-38**

§34. “Da-sein and discourse: language” (this is the last section in Chapter Five, “Being-in as such”; and the last section of Sub-Chapter Five (A): “The existential constitution of the ‘(t)here’”)

Recall that around p. 159 in §33 (“Assertion as a derivative mode of interpretation”), Heidegger discusses the phenomenon of ***discourse.*** In this section, he calls it “*lógos*.” Like “assertion,” what Heidegger means by “discourse” has often been misunderstood. Again, don’t be fooled! Just as Heidegger’s term that I translate as “assertion” doesn’t *just* mean “verbal utterance”, the term translated as “**discourse**” (*Rede*) doesn’t mean “talk”. Instead, it means simply **articulation**, in a broad sense. Both terms are Heidegger’s translation of the Greek “***lógos***”. It might have been helpful to have hyphenated “dis-course,” to remind us of the Latin “*dis-currere*”, i.e., *running-apart*. (I’ve found that these hyphenations get annoying after a while, so I’ve tried to minimize them.) Heidegger uses the term *articulate* (and *discourse*) in its original sense: to cut something at its joints. Articulating something verbally is *one* kind of discourse, but not the only or the most basic kind. (“Articulate” comes from the Latin *artus*, which means a joint. An *articulated* skeleton is a skeleton mounted in the familiar way so you can see how all its joints are connected, but not fused together, which would make it impossible to move.) As Heidegger explains, all discourse involves both **putting-together** (*synthesis*) and **taking apart**: better, holding apart (*diairesis*). For example, when I interpret this hammer as for hammering, I’m *connecting* the hammer with the possibility of hammering, but still *holding them apart*, since I’m obviously not *identifying* the hammer-*thing* with the *activity* of hammering. And the same thing goes for the hammer and the nails that I’m employing it with, etc. This kind of interpretation is discursive in the same way that when a runner completes a race, he or she *connects* the starting-line with the finish-line, without identifying the two with each other.

We can see how possibilities are “discursively articulated” by situating the phenomenon of “discourse” in Dasein’s ontological structure. *First*, as Heidegger describes things in §29, we always find ourselves already “*thrown*” into the many possibilities that are “disclosed” to us in how we find ourselves “disposed” to deal with things; these are all the things that we can do or become. *Second*, as Heidegger describes in §31, whenever we encounter an entity, we do so by “*projecting*” it upon some possibilities that we understand. As Heidegger describes in §32, to do so is to “interpret” the entity: for example, to take this hammer *as* to be employed *with* these nails *at* the task of hammering *in order* to fasten these boards together. And this brings us to the *third* “moment” (or “aspect”) of our being (besides thrownness and projection): discourse. The hammer, nails, hammering, and boards are all “articulated,” in the sense that they’re related in particular ways – they “implicate” each other (as he describes in Sub-Chapter Three-A: “The analysis of environmentality and world per se” [pp. 66-88]) – but not identified with each other. Each item has a *meaning* only in the whole context of the whole local practical contexts in which we deploy them. (You can’t hammer, for example, without a hammer, and usually not without nails!) In this way, when we hammer, we “run together” these various items of equipment and practical possibilities; this “running-together” is *discourse*. Our world and our local practical environments are thus *articulated* into a complex web, or context, of practical meanings, which he also calls “implications” and “deployments.” All this is how we “make sense” of things. (See Heidegger’s definition of “sense” on p. 151 in §32: “Sense is that in which something’s comprehensibility is held. We will call ‘sense’ what’s articulable in the disclosing that understands. The *concept of sense* encompasses the formal framework of what necessarily belongs to what’s articulated by interpretation, which understands.” Hopefully this rather cryptic definition of “sense” makes some more “sense” after you’ve read the first full paragraph on p. 161.)

*Exercise 1:* Put together the three (or, as I suggest, four) aspects of assertions, as discussed on pp. 154-155 of §33, with what Heidegger says in §34 from the bottom of p. 161 to the top of p. 163, to form a complete view of how we articulate things in language. Using a particular assertion as an example, show how each of these four things is going on when you make that assertion. Also, which of these things involved in an assertion is *most basic*, or *fundamental* one? For example, is it more fundamental (1) to make something show up, or (2) to say something about it in language? Explain how some aspects of assertions presuppose other ones.

*Exercise 2*: Traditionally, philosophers have thought that what we “at first” hear are mere tones that we then somehow put together into sounds and words. This was still roughly Husserl’s view (and that’s what he tries to describe in his phenomenology of *internal* time-*consciousness*, in which we put together a continuum of individual tone-sensations to form an intention of a melody). In the last paragraph of p. 163 and the first two paragraphs of p. 164, however, Heidegger makes a perceptive observation about what it is that we *primarily* hear. What are examples of such things? How are they not mere tones?

*Exercise 3*: In the paragraph on pp. 164-165, Heidegger makes an interesting observation that someone who talks a lot can say practically nothing, whereas someone who’s silent can actually end up saying quite a bit. Try to give an example of both of these possibilities. Being with someone at their deathbed might be something to think about.

Sub-Chapter Five (B): “The everyday being of the ‘(t)here,’ and Dasein’s de-clining.”

In Sub-Chapter Five (A), we’ve seen Heidegger’s general description of Dasein’s being its ‘(t)here’ as thrownness, projection, and the discursive articulation of *distinct but related* meanings. He then turns to how we are in one of our two basic modes: an *everyday* manner. In these discussions, he uses the following terms as synonyms:

everyday Dasein = normality = how we are “by and large” = the ‘one’-self = non-selfownership = de-clining

We’ve seen most of these terms already. “Self-ownership” and “non-selfownership” will be discussed in detail in Division II of *Being and Time*. They’re ways in which we revolve around our being after having “owned up” to our mortality and radically chosen who we will (try to) become. “De-clining” is the term introduced in these sections of Division I, and summarized in §38. I hope you don’t find the hyphenation too annoying, but I translate Heidegger’s word *Verfallen* (cognate with the English “falling”) as “de-clining” to suggest that this is our “*de*fault in*clination*” to be. Normally, we don’t spend our time thinking about our death, but just take care of business and “take care” of other people (whether altruistically or selfishly, cooperatively or competitively). That is, the *only* possibilities that we normally pay any attention to are the practical possibilities of our world and the communal possibilities of what Heidegger calls the ‘one.’ And to do this is to “de-cline” away from our mortality, and toward *just* the world and the ‘one.’

In §§35-37, Heidegger describes three ways in which we de-cline: (§35) con-currence, which is the de-clining mode of the discursive articulation of meanings; (§36) con-cupiscience, which seems to be the de-clining mode of projection; and (§37) con-flation, which seems to be the de-clining mode of thrownness.

§35. Con-currence:

In the first paragraph of this section, we see why Heidegger concluded his general description of Dasein with the topic of *language* (§33 and §34). This is because much of what we gather about the world comes from how we hear other people *talking* about it. When we talk with each other, we’re sharing standardized interpretations of entities (nature, equipment, other human beings, and ourselves) with those other people who are members of the various communities to which we belong. As he explains in the paragraph on pp. 169-170, this is an *essential* aspect of Dasein’s being – one that makes it possible for us to make much sense of anything at all. After all, if it weren’t for all the things we’ve heard others say, we’d be faced with the impossible task of figuring it all out for ourselves.

Heidegger’s term for “discourse” is *Rede*, and the term I translate as “con-currence” is *Gerede*. In ordinary German, “*Gerede*” means something like “idle talk” (and this is how the first translators of *Being and Time* rendered it), but I find that this trivializes this very basic phenomenon – wrongly suggesting that this is something we could simply decide not to engage in. In order to see why I’ve chosen “con-currence,” recall what I said at the beginning of this handout on “discourse”: that it’s the disclosure of distinct but related meanings. Like “discourse,” “con-currence” comes from the Latin verb *currere*: to run. The “con-” (as in “conspirator”) in “con-currence” suggests that this is how we tend to “run together,” almost as a herd of bison. Also, of course, to “concur” with someone is to agree with him or her. So con-currence is what we’re doing when we do pretty much what everyone else tells us to do, and assume that everything is pretty much as what “they” say about it.

The phenomenon of con-currence is similar to what we mean by “bullshit.” Giving in to prejudices (racial, ethnic, gender, etc.) are prime examples of con-currence.

*Exercise 4*: Give an example of some bullshit that a lot of people “con-cur” with, and how it encourages us to behave in uncritical, thoughtless ways. Then give an example of how someone might be compelled to break away from “con-curring” with what ‘one’ says or does (or what “they” say or do).

§36. Con-cupiscence:

(If you’re really pressed for time, you can skim this section, although it is pretty interesting.)

I use the prefix “con-” here again to suggest that, like con-currence, this is a way in which we do things together with others. Heidegger makes it clear that he gets this term from St. Augustine’s discussion in his *Confessions* of giving into our desire, or “lust,” to see. The “cupiscience” in “concupiscence” is like “cupidity”: lust, as in what Cupid encourages us to do.

*Exercise 5*: In this section, Heidegger describes two phenomena that are getting increasingly familiar in our contemporary culture. In the full paragraph on p. 172, he describes something a lot like surfing the Web. How does his description apply here? Also, in the paragraph on pp. 172-173, he describes something much like Attention Deficit Disorder. How does his description apply here?

§37. Con-flation

(Again, if you’re really pressed for time, you can skim this section, although it is pretty interesting.)

Another word for “con-flation” would be “ambiguity.” One could sum up this phenomenon by saying that it’s the fact that it’s often hard to tell what’s bullshit and what’s real.

*Exercise 6*: Give a specific example of con-flation in Heidegger’s sense, and how it’s difficult to tell bullshit from what’s real. Also, how *do* you figure out what’s what?

§38. De-clining and thrownness

I’ve tried to explain what Heidegger means by “de-clining” in the handout so far. As we move on to examine the *other* basic way in which Dasein carries out its being – self-ownership – what he means by “de-clining” should get clearer.

*Exercise 7*: It’s easy to get the impression that he’s somehow suggesting that he’s claiming that we *shouldn’t* de-cline – even that it’s somehow *sinful*. Nevertheless, throughout this section (pp. 175-176, 179-180), he emphasizes that this is not the case. What sense can you make of Heidegger’s insistence that he’s not trying to give some negative (moral) evaluation of de-clining? Can it ever be a *good* thing to de-cline to the world or the ‘one’? Explain. If you choose to do this exercise, you might try briefly explaining the various characteristics that he thinks contribute to the “downward tendency” of de-clining (seduction, reassurance, alienation, getting caught up (in oneself), plummeting, and the “whirl”).