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

**Handout/worksheet on *Being and Time* sections 43-44 (the conclusion of Division I of *Being and Time*)**

§43: Dasein, worldliness, and **r**eality:

§43a: **R**eality as a problem of the being of the provability of the “external world”:

Subsection §43a concerns Heidegger’s approach to the so-called “problem of the knowledge of the external world.” Here’s a way to conceive how both this and the following subsection (§43b) are laid out. Heidegger is examining the so-called “problem” of the being of the “external world,” and whether the **r**eality of this “external world” can be proved. This involves examining three questions: (1) *Are* there entities that supposedly “transcend consciousness” at all (pp. 202-203)? (2) Can the reality of the “external world” be sufficiently *proved* (pp. 203-207)? (3) To what extent can entities making up the “external world,” if they are real, be known in their being-in-themselves (pp. 207-208)? In §43b, Heidegger considers **r**eality as an ontological problem. This involves examining question (4): What is the sense of the being of the entities that make up the “external world” – reality – supposed to mean at all?

You don’t need to get into Immanuel Kant’s (1724-1804) proposed proof (in the second edition of his *Critique of Pure Reason*) that we can know that the external ‘world’ exists, which Heidegger explicates on pp. 203-204. Instead, all you really need to know about this so-called “problem” is René Descartes’ (1596-1650) basic argument is that all I can immediately know to exist are my mind and the subjective ideas that it contains; hence I can never prove (or at least it’s very difficult to prove) that the “external,” physical ‘world’ exists. There are two basic positions taken on the so-called “problem of the knowledge of the external world”: “realism,” which maintains that the existence and nature of the physical, external world *can* be proved; and “idealism,” which maintains that at least the existence of the physical, external world *can’t* be proved (p. 207).

Now recall Heidegger’s attack, in §12, on the metaphysically dualistic, Cartesian, picture of a human being as essentially “a ‘box’ or ‘container’” (p. 60) whose only access to other entities is to bring them back into this mental container as “booty” (p. 62) by *knowing* whether they exist and, if so, what they’re like. In §12, Heidegger also attempts to demonstrate that “knowing is a mode of Dasein founded in being-in-the-world” (bottom of p. 62). The basic thrust of Heidegger’s argument in §43 is that re-thinking our knowledge of other entities along these lines makes this so-called “problem” of the knowledge of the “external” ‘world’ disappear (pp. 205-207).

*Exercise 1*: What basic faulty presuppositions about human beings does Heidegger think are responsible for the traditional “problem” of trying to prove that the “external,” physical ‘world’ is real (p. 206)?

*Exercise 2*: How is an adequate description of human beings along Heidegger’s lines supposed to bypass the so-called problem of the external world, such that the very “question as to whether a world is at all, and whether its being can be proved, makes no sense” (1st sentence of the last paragraph on p. 202)?

*Exercise 3*: Explain Heidegger’s remarkable quip that Kant was wrong to say that it was a “scandal of philosophy” that no one had yet proved that the “external,” physical world exists (p. 203), but rather that “The ‘scandal of philosophy’ doesn’t consist in the fact that up to now this proof [that the ‘external,’ physical world exists] still remains outstanding, but rather *in the fact that such proofs are expected and attempted again and again*” (p. 205).

*Exercise 4*: What aspects of *realism* does Heidegger agree with, and which does he reject (p. 207)? (“Doxographically” [p. 207] means “stated as a doctrine.”)

*Exercise 5*: What aspects of *idealism* does Heidegger agree with, and which does he reject (pp. 207-208)?

§43b concerns Wilhelm Dilthey’s theory that we encounter entities as merely present within the world by experiencing them *resisting* our efforts to move around within the world. This is a fairly traditional and still somewhat common theory (already espoused, for example, by John Locke around 1689). How does this account go, and what’s Heidegger’s basic criticism of this view (pp. 209-210)?

*Exercise 6*: What does Heidegger mean when he claims (p. 212) that being, and hence *what it is to be* a real thing, depends on Dasein, but that the existence of real things is independent of Dasein’s existence?

§44 of *Being and Time* concerns the closely-related phenomena of truth and being. The most important question to ask yourself as you read this section is this: is Heidegger committed to the problematic view known as *relativism*: the position that what’s true depends on human beings and what they happen to think or desire? Sometimes Heidegger is interpreted as a relativist in this sense, but I think this is a mistake. Such interpretations are based on Heidegger’s claim that there is truth only if Dasein exists (p. 226); and his repetition of this claim on p. 230, where he also adds that being, but not entities, depends on Dasein (something he had already said, perhaps even more clearly, in §39, in the first two sentences of the last paragraph on p. 183).

*Exercise 7*: In order to approach the issue of relativism, focus first on *truth*. Explain the very unusual way in which Heidegger uses the word “truth”: as the “un-concealment,” “dis-covering,” or “un-covering” of entities (cf. p. 219). As he mentions briefly, he gets this use of “truth” from the Greek word for “truth,” “*a-letheia*,” which he interprets as the “un-concealment” of entities: the fact that entities *show up* to us, that we *encounter* them. More ordinary words for this kind of truth would be “demonstration” or “verification” (p. 218). He explains *this* kind of truth using the example of “the true assertion: ‘The picture on the wall is crooked’” (p. 218).

*Exercise 8*: How is truth in thesense of the un-concealment of entities related to truth in the *standard* sense: the correctness of beliefs or assertions? Note that Heidegger’s definition of truth in this *standard* sense is very brief: an assertion is true if and only if it is *correct*, i.e., if and only if the entity that it’s about (i.e., its intentional object) is *identical* to, or *just as*, how it’s asserted to be (p. 218). This repeats something he had said earlier: that the kind of “correspondence” involved in truth “has the relational character of ‘just as’” (p. 216).

As you can see from these pages, Heidegger’s view of correctness as the identity of the object with what’s asserted is a *kind* of view of truth as correspondence (the so-called “correspondence theory of truth”), but Heidegger’s view of truth, which he owes to Husserl, is quite different from what’s *usually* called the correspondence theory of truth. According to this theory (which Heidegger rejects), truth-as-correctness is supposed to be the *similarity* between something in the subjective mind and an object. Early modern philosophers tended to think of ideas as mental pictures, and true ideas as pictures similar to their objects. George Berkeley had already noted in 1710, however, that “an idea can be like nothing but an idea” (*A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*, section 8); thus if truth were similarity between something in the mind and an object, it’s hard to see how we could ever have correct beliefs about things other than subjective ideas – such as physical objects. In any case, *similarity* is far too vague and general a concept to account for correctness. As the American philosopher Hilary Putnam argues: “*everything is similar to everything else in infinitely many respects*… The number of similarities one can find between *any* two objects is limited only by ingenuity and time” (*Reason, Truth and History*, 1981, pp. 64f).

*Exercise 9*: Once we make this distinction between the two senses of “truth” (as un-concealment as correctness), does Heidegger appear to endorse relativism? Explain.

Now let’s turn from the issue of *truth* to the closely-related issue of *being*.

*Exercise 10*: With the question of relativism in mind, consider Heidegger’s particular example of Newton’s laws of physical motion (pp. 226-227). Assuming that these laws are correct, does Heidegger believe that physical things *didn’t* move in accordance with these laws before Dasein appeared on planet earth, such that they began to move in these ways only after Dasein evolved and developed mathematical physics? Explain why or why not.

(I didn’t place the last three paragraphs on p. 229 in bold, since I don’t think they’re essential to the arguments Heidegger makes in §44. If you read them, however, you can see that this is an implicit criticism of Husserl’s view of transcendental consciousness – “a *fantastically idealized* subject” (p. 229) – essentially cut off from the physical world – a criticism that Heidegger makes toward the end of the readings assigned in *History of the Concept of Time*.)

*Exercise 11* (very similar to exercise 6): What’s the crucial difference between being and entities (in the first two sentences of the second paragraph on p. 230)?  (As we can see from marginal note 114 on p. 230, Heidegger, very soon after the publication of *Being and Time*, calls this the “ontological difference.”) How does this make sense of Heidegger’s claim that being, but not entities, depends on the existence of Dasein?