PHIL 341: Continental Philosophers: Heidegger  
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Exam I Review

The outline is organized according to the section (§) numbers of the text. Keep in mind that the questions I ask you to write on will not be the same kind of questions asked here. Instead, I will ask you to being such explanations into some kind of example that will serve as the basis for your explaining several different topics. Also keep in mind that the exam will ask you to explain “according to Heidegger.” Even where your opinion or the opinions of other philosophers differ, what I have to hold you responsible for on the exam is representing Heidegger’s thinking fairly and accurately.

§1. The Necessity for Explicitly Restating the Question of Being.
   1. The importance of this question is suggested by the history of the philosophical tradition itself. Explain.
   2. Include how what Plato and Aristotle “wrested from the phenomena, fragmentary and incipient though it was” turned into dogma. What is meant by dogma and what are the three reasons traditionally given to neglect the question of the meaning of being?
      a. How does Heidegger criticize the argument about the “universality” of Being?
      b. Being is indefinable; therefore, we can’t ask about its meaning. What’s wrong with this statement, according to Heidegger?
      c. “The meaning of being is self-evident.” Is this statement true or false, according to Heidegger? Explain.

§2. The Formal Structure of the Question of Being.
   1. Be able to name the various components of any inquiry and explain each of them: What is asked about, what is sought or “is to be found out in the asking,” what is questioned or “interrogated,” what or who asks?
   2. Explain the basic construction of the term Dasein as a word choice here. [The question of how Dasein is to be understood will come up in greater detail in later sections, especially §5 and §9.] [Note that Dasein is always capitalized: It’s a German noun, and that’s the rule in German—all nouns are capitalized!]
   3. “We are asking about Being and the entity that is both asking and being asked has an average, vague understanding of Being already. Thus our questioning is circular and invalid.” How much of this statement would Heidegger agree with? Explain. An explanation of the word “provisional” should be helpful here.

§3. The Ontological Priority of the Question of Being.
   1. Explain the difference between ontical and ontological, especially as they regard “sciences” here.
   2. “Being is always the Being of an entity.” How is this a clue towards understanding the relationship between the ontological and the ontical roles of sciences?
   3. Continuing from question 2, why should it be true that, according to Heidegger sciences only really move forward when they approach a crisis in their basis concepts?
§4. The Ontical Priority of the Question of Being.
1. “Dasein is ontically pre-ontological.” Why is this significant for the inquiry of the book?
2. When Heidegger says existence rather than the traditional philosophical notion of essence is what is crucial for Dasein, what does he mean? (This is discussed in §5 and again in §9).
3. What is the relationship between existence and possibility? What does “existence” mean in Heidegger’s sense, and where do these possibilities come from?
4. Why does Heidegger say that “The question of existence never gets straightened out except through existing itself”?
5. What is the difference between an existentiell understanding and an existential understanding?
6. Dasein’s third priority in the question of Being is an “ontico-ontological” priority. What is meant by this and what does it have to do with “world” (pp. 33–34; do not yet worry about the distinctions made in §§14-18).
7. This ontico-ontological aspect of Dasein was seen already by Aristotle and Aquinas, even though they didn’t call it this. How did they see it? (See their statements about the “soul.”)
8. Last two ¶¶ on pp.34-35 are a summary of all the discussion about priority and Dasein’s role in examining the question of Being. Can you explain everything in these ¶¶?

§5. The Ontological Analytic of Dasein as Laying Bare the Horizon for the Interpretation of the Meaning of Being in General.
1. “Dasein is ontically ‘closest’ to itself and ontologically farthest; but pre-ontologically it is surely no stranger” (37). Explain this claim.
2. Why is this characteristic of Dasein significant for the way we have “access” to examining Dasein about the meaning of Being?

1. “[Dasein’s] historicality…is prior to what is called “history.” Explain.
2. “It’s own past…is not something that follows along after Dasein, but something which already goes ahead of it.” Explain this claim, and its relation to what Heidegger calls Dasein’s “historicality.”
3. What is meant by saying that we have to “destroy” the history of ontology to ask the question of the meaning of Being (44)?

§7. The Phenomenological Method of Investigation.
We did not deal with this section in detail, but you should be able to give a basic definition of what Heidegger says “phenomenon” means and what “logos” means and how they are related as phenomenology: “to let that which shows itself [phainomenon] be seen from itself in the very way in which it shows itself from itself.”

§8. Design of the Treatise [SKIP].
Part I, Division I

§9. The Theme of the Analytic of Dasein.

1. What does Heidegger mean when he says “the Being of this entity (Dasein) is in each case mine.” (Keep in mind what this does not mean as well as what it does—see footnote at start of §9.)

2. “The ‘essence’ of Dasein lies in its existence.”
   a. How does this shift the traditional meaning of “essence”?
   b. How does Heidegger’s use of “existence” to describe Dasein differ from the traditional philosophical term existentia?

3. What do “authentic” and “inauthentic” mean in relation to Dasein?

4. What’s the root meaning of “category” and why does Heidegger propose an alternative in talking about Dasein? (What is the alternative he proposes?)

§10. How the Analytic of Dasein is to be Distinguished from Anthropology, Psychology, and Biology [skip].

§11. The Existential Analytic [of Dasein] and the Interpretation of Primitive Dasein [skip].

§12. A Preliminary Sketch of Being-in-the-World, in terms of an Orientation towards Being-in as such.

1. Note that the first ¶ of the section is a summary. Do you understand it?

2. Being-in-the-world “stands for a unitary phenomenon” (78). What does this mean, and how does it affect our analysis?

3. Being-in:
   a. Compare Dasein’s “Being-in” to the ‘water being “in” the glass, the clothes being “in” your closet, the bed being “in” your room.
   b. What understanding of “being-in” emerges from the word study on p. 80?

4. What does it mean to say “Dasein is absorbed in the world”?
   a. Is this the same as the water absorbed by the sponge? Why or why not?
   b. What does Heidegger mean when he says present-at-hand entities are “worldless” (81)?

5. What does facticity mean? Note that the special sense in which facticity applies to Dasein makes it mean something far more that simple factuality or “being a fact.”

6. What do having to do with something, taking care of something, using something, discussing something, questioning something, as well as neglecting something, avoiding something, taking a break, etc. have in common? That is, what are they all “modes” of? Explain, including what a “deficient mode” means here (83).

7. The ¶ that starts about a quarter of the way down p. 84 is a good summary and clarification of what has been said so far in §12. Why is “Being-in” not a property that Dasein sometimes has and sometimes does not have? [Moreover, it’s also wrong to say “’Being-in’ is a property that Dasein always has.” What’s wrong with such a claim?]

8. It seems as though Heidegger only can only make negative statements about what “Being-in” is. Is this an accurate impression? Explain.


1. What is wrong, according to Heidegger, with the traditional way of understanding the “problem of knowledge” (86-89)?
2. What is the relationship between Knowing-the-world and Being-in-the-world, according to Heidegger?

3. “The Dasein which knows remains outside and it does so as Dasein”(89). Explain.

4. Last ¶ of section (90) is a good summary of it. Do you understand everything in it?


1. Why we can’t get at “world” starting simply from entities within-the-world?

2. What are the four meanings of “world” and how are they related one to the other? Which meanings are most crucial for Heidegger’s analytic of Dasein?

3. What does “environment” have to do with the analysis of “Being-in-the-World”? (See the bottom of 84 as well as 94).


1. What is meant by our “dealings” with the world? Discuss how this is related to what Heidegger calls the environment and to circumspection (pay special attention to the relation of these terms). How are these related to my existence?

2. What’s the difference between a “thing” and “equipment.”?
   a. There’s no such thing as “an equipment.” Why not? (Answering this includes being able to use some of the vocabulary Heidegger employs, as well as terms I have used in explanations).
   b. What does assignment or reference have to do with the equipment-character of a piece of equipment?

3. Be able to explain what is meant by “readiness-to-hand.” In doing so, be able to examine various “real world” examples and include the following:
   a. concernful dealings
   b. in-order-to
   c. towards-which
   d. whereof or out-of-which
   e. the personal or public reference or assignment
   f. environing Nature
   g. circumspection

4. Is it accurate to say that, in using equipment, one knows its properties and puts them to use? Why or why not?

5. What the hammer is in itself is a hardened block of steel affixed to a handle made of wood or some appropriate synthetic material. True or false? Explain.

6. “Yet only by reason of something present-at-hand ‘is there’ anything ready-to-hand” (101); comment on this sentence.


1. How do “unusability”—conspicuousness, obtrusiveness, obstinacy—serve to light up the what constitutes equipment as equipment? Explain using examples.

2. “Pure presence-at-hand announces itself in [unusable] equipment.” What’s not quite right about this statement? Explain. (See especially 104).

3. Heidegger says that through conspicuousness and obtrusiveness or another kind of break-down of equipment, “the world announces itself.” What does this mean? Why does he say that the world was previously disclosed for Dasein even though we don’t “see it” or discover it.

§17. References and Signs.
1. Ontologically, what else does a sign do besides point to this or that entity within the world? (See 110-111).
2. In order for a sign to function as a sign, what is necessary?
3. Good summary in last ¶ on 113-114.

§18. Involvement and Significance; the Worldhood of the World.
1. What we encounter within the world has been freed for concernful circumspection. Explain. Here, what does he mean by “has been freed”?
2. References or assignments, such as the serviceability of some entity, e.g., the serviceability of the hammer for hammering, are not, if we speak carefully, properties of things. Why not? Relate this to what is meant by “involvement.”
3. “The primary ‘towards-which’ is a ‘for-the-sake-of-which.’” Explain what is distinctive about this “for-the-sake-of-which” assignment or reference.
4. There is a good summary ¶ on 117-118 [don’t worry much about the “perfect tense a priori”]. Start at the bottom of 117 with “Letting an entity be involved…” and see if you can read the rest of the paragraph with good understanding. You should be able to.
5. “To Dasein’s being an understanding of Being belongs” (118). What is the first “thing” that is understood in Dasein’s understanding of Being? How is this understanding related to the “involvements of a complex of equipment”? Explain (goes on to 119).
6. What definitions of ‘world’ and worldhood does Heidegger derive from this analysis of how assignment and understanding function? (119)
7. What is the root meaning of signify and significance? How is this related to the involvements?
8. Is it possible for Dasein to dwell in a meaningless world? Why or why not?

SKIP §§19-21

1. What does Heidegger mean by “place” as opposed to “space” and how is this conception related to readiness-to-hand?

1. What does Heidegger mean by “de-severance”?
2. “In Dasein, there lie san essential tendency towards closeness” (140). Explain this using the examples on p. 140 of how Dasein “estimates distances.”
3. We see and hear with a little “leeway” Heidegger says insofar as “our seeing and hearing always go [initially] beyond what is distantly ‘closest’” (141). Explain.
4. What is the connection of de-severance and “here” and “there” to circumspection?
5. In addition to measuring closeness and farness, Dasein is essentially “directional.” What does this mean? Where does this directionality come from?