

Heidegger's Ontological Analysis of Language

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Language occupies a central position in Heidegger's later thinking, from his controversial yet telling pronouncements that "language speaks" and "language is the house of being" to his insistence on thinking through the language of poets, sensitive to how our very access to things hangs on our words.ⁱ Much attention is thus rightly devoted to the interpretation of Heidegger's mature views of language. Yet already in *Sein und Zeit* Heidegger gives a complex and compelling if frustratingly truncated account of language. On the one hand, it is possible to see, if not the anticipation, then at least the seeds of his mature views in that account. On the other hand, the early account is abbreviated to a fault, a sure sign that his views at the time are less than full-formed. Precisely in this respect, interpretation is faced here with the familiar Herculean task of being generous, critical, and reflexive. The interpretation must find its own words to supplement Heidegger's remarks, with a view to examining the meaning of language for his thinking, both early and late. In other words, the interpretation must think and speak for itself as it attempts to say, not simply what is unsaid by Heidegger himself about language, but what he was or, better, should have been trying to say.

By no means do I have any pretensions of accomplishing this task in the following study. Its aim is simply to make a start in this direction by presenting some central themes of Heidegger's discussion of language in *Sein und Zeit*, with a requisite supplementation where necessary and with an occasional sidelong glance at the bearing of that early account on his later formal treatments of language. The first section is a sketch of Heidegger's early ontology of language, i.e., his account of language in the context of the project of fundamental ontology. The sketch is made with a view to motivating the question of what differentiates discourse from language. In the second section I look to his accounts of assertions and discursive meaning for part of an answer to that question.ⁱⁱ By way of conclusion, I briefly address two relatively underdetermined senses of "equiprimordiality" with respect to discourse, namely, the equiprimordial status of communication within the constitution of discourse and the equiprimordial status of discourse as a basic existential.ⁱⁱⁱ

1. Discourse and the use of language

In *Sein und Zeit* Heidegger famously distinguishes language (*Sprache*) from discourse (*Rede*). The distinction falls neatly into the ontological economy that he uses to navigate his existential analysis, namely, the difference between being on hand, being handy, and being-here (*Vorhanden-, Zuhanden- and Da-sein*). Discourse pertains only to being-here and vice versa; that is to say, discursiveness and being-here are not identical but they are equivalent. In Heidegger's terminology, discourse is an existential, a constitutive way of being-here that is disclosive of our being-here. To say that we exist as discursive beings is to say that, in and through our discursiveness, the meaning of being (i.e., being this or that, including ourselves) discloses itself to us, no less fundamentally than it does in the ways we find ourselves emotionally disposed in the world and in the ways we understand (project and work on) possibilities in our everyday lives. Indeed, Heidegger characterizes discourse as a basic existential, i.e., the sort of existential that, like our disposed understanding (*befindliches Verstehen*) or mindless absorption in our world (*Verfallensein*),

underlies and inflects being-in-the-world in its entirety, including its ontic comportments, i.e., its concrete, empirical ways of behaving.^{iv}

By contrast, again according to *Sein und Zeit*, language is discourse that has been voiced (*hinausgesprochen*). Language is not a way of being-here (*da-seiendes*) but something encountered within the world as ready-to-hand (*ein Zuhandenes*). It can then be broken down in turn into word-things on hand (*vorhanden*) in nature and culture, something that we find in other species and in other cultures, open for inspection like any other cultural artifacts, from ancient hieroglyphics to contemporary texting, fertile soil for sciences of language such as philology, linguistics, psycholinguistics. Whether these sciences study the remains of dead languages or the objectifiable patterns of living forms of communication, they suppose the use of language by its users. Language as used is not simply on hand but handy (*zuhanden*) and this use of language as ready-to-hand supposes discourse or, as Heidegger also puts it, flouting his own distinction, "existential language" (SZ 161).

In this way Heidegger differentiates three distinct ontological levels or aspects of language: existential language, language as use, and language as something on hand.^v To appreciate the difference between language as use and as something on hand, consider the difference between reading a poem and analyzing the language of the poem. The analysis dissects the linguistic parts of the text (juxtapositions, word-choices, grammar, and the like). By contrast, when we read or recite the text, we use those parts, configured as they are, without paying any more attention to them than we do to the page on which they are printed or the glasses on our face. To be sure, the uses of words are multifarious and highly context- and user-dependent and adults sometimes clumsily try to teach children how to use them by breaking with normal usage and calling attention to the words themselves (e.g., saying 'ball' while holding the ball in front of her or pointing to it). But the endgame, of course, is mastery of usage and children learn very early the art of adroitly moving back and forth between attending to the words themselves and simply using them (aping the behavior of other users).

There is much more to be said about this difference between language as an object or cultural artifact on hand in our environment and language as a handy means of manipulating things in that environment. Indeed, there is something uncanny about the difference since these modes of being and their phenomenologies, i.e., the ways they afford themselves to us, are so radically distinct. We experience something like a Gestalt shift when we stop to examine our use of a word, often leaving us more than a little uneasy about the success of capturing through such analysis the significance of that use. Yet this very uneasiness underscores the difference between the use of language and the analysis of it as something already used and simply on hand.

The difference between discourse and language use is not as perspicuous as that between the use of language and its objective presence in nature and culture. The former distinction is perhaps the more elusive one because both discourse and language use alike are something that we do (in contrast to something we find on hand in nature and culture). What precisely is the existential character of discourse that distinguishes it, not merely from language as something on hand, but from language as use? In other words, how are we to distinguish discourse as a fundamental way of being-here from the handiness of language?

It should be evident how much rides for Heidegger on this distinction. If discourse proves to be nothing but use of language, then the very distinctiveness of being-here, over against things on hand and handy, is called into question.^{vi} Moreover, if that distinctiveness becomes questionable, then so does the very project of fundamental ontology that the existential analysis is supposed to yield. Thus, any ontology, i.e., any examination of what it means entities to be is said to rest upon fundamental ontology, the foregoing analysis of what it means for us to be-here (*da zu sein*). Accordingly, on Heidegger's account, inasmuch as discourse is one of the basic, constitutive ways for us to be here, it both underlies and limits our ability to understand and use language as a cultural artifact. So the question becomes all the more pressing: what is it about discourse's difference from language in use that explains how it grounds that use (and thereby the objectifiable remnants of that use, the stuff of sciences such as linguistics, psycholinguistics, and linguistic anthropology)?

From one interpretive vantage point, the question of the difference between discourse and language use may seem trivial. Trivial because, on this interpretation, the difference between language use and discourse amounts simply to the difference between a description of the actual use of language and the ascription of it to its user (in this case, *Dasein*). Just as we can distinguish the practice of medicine from its practice qua ascribed to the doctor engaged in the practice, so we can distinguish the actual use of language from its use by a particular speaker or from a particular speaker's experience of using it. On this interpretation, discourse just is language insofar as it is in actual use *and attributable to Dasein, the user of the language*.

But this way of interpreting the difference between discourse and language use takes its bearings from the handiness (*Zuhandenheit*) of language, i.e., language in use or, as we might also put it, from the pragmatics of language, rather than from the allegedly existential distinctiveness of discourse. Moreover, far from understanding discourse as constitutive of *Dasein*'s manner of being, this line of interpretation takes discourse to be a tool, distinct from *Dasein*, that *Dasein* can pick up and put down at will (hence, my coupling of language use with the pragmatics of language in the previous sentence). Such an interpretation also runs the risk of smuggling into the account a substantialist ontological framework whereby *Dasein* is defined as the substance who has and uses language (zovon e[con lovgon), a theme against which Heidegger repeatedly rails in his later writings (though he gives it a positive spin in his early lecture on Aristotle's *Rhetoric*). So construed, discourse is not only conflated with language use, but in traditional terms is also reduced to an accident – not even a property – of *Dasein*, one that hardly defines what it means for *Dasein* to be.^{vii}

2. The truthfulness of discourse

There is more to discourse than the use of language precisely because the use of language presupposes the disclosiveness of discourse, i.e., the way discourse qua existential opens up *Dasein*'s world. We may use language as a tool – something ready-to-hand – to persuade others (or ourselves) of something but only because existential language, i.e., discourse – as a manner of being-here – reveals the world and our way of being in it to us. Thus, to take a plain example, we are able to use the words in the sentence "The water's rising" to convince people in a flood plain to evacuate, but the words are persuasive because they make plain the state of affairs.^{viii} In general terms then, it is the disclosiveness

or, as we might also put it, the truthfulness of discourse that distinguishes it (existential language) from the use of language, even while grounding that use. In *Sein und Zeit* Heidegger specifies this existential distinctiveness of discourse through analyses of (1) assertions as a form of discourse, (2) discursive meanings and sense, and (3) discourse's communicative dimension.

2.1 Assertions, aboutness (reference), and predication

The very theme of Heidegger's existential analysis, namely, being-in-the-world, undermines traditional modern, epistemological debates over realism and idealism. Both emotions and practical know-how, Heidegger maintains, testify to ways of relating to things in the world and not to mere mental representations of them. In similar fashion, his account of discourse as a basic existential thwarts any attempt to motivate quandaries over the referentiality of our discourse. Our being-in-the-world means, among other things, that any analysis or self-analysis must take its bearings from the fact that we are always already with things and others. The same underlying phenomenon holds for discourse generally and assertions in particular. It is not, however, as though assertions piggy-back on some foregoing phenomenon of being exposed and evolved with things within the world. Rather, as forms of discourse, assertions are themselves essential to the very fabric of our being-in-the-world, constituting at once both how we are with others and things within the world and how they are with us.^{ix} In other words, assertions are part of the existential status of discourse.

This observation helps explain the early Heidegger's confidence in the scientific and theoretical character of fundamental ontology. At least in *Sein und Zeit*, he did not think that a theoretical assertion necessarily overdetermines the ontological status of its reference, such that, by virtue of being the object of an assertion, it is something simply on hand, available for observation. Were this the case, there could be no assertions about being handy (ready-to-hand), let alone being-here (*Da-sein*).^x Yet, while he lost his confidence in the appropriateness of scientific assertions for his thinking, he arguably never surrenders the idea that language is, in the terminology of *Sein und Zeit*, fundamentally discursive. That is to say, in the terminology of his later work, that language is an essential part of the revealing ground (*Seyn*) of the relation between being and being-here, between the world and human beings. "Language is the house of being" is, after all, an assertion, an assertion that he makes because it *reveals* something *about* being.^{xi}

In the present section, I have been suggesting that the import of Heidegger's account of discourse for a philosophy of language significantly parallels the import of existential analysis for a philosophy of knowledge. Left to its own devices or taken as foundational, epistemology can generate the pseudo-problem of knowledge of the external world or the irresolvable problem of putting subject and object together, the moment it abstracts from the underlying phenomenon of being-in-the-world. Analogously, a philosophy of language can concoct hopeless riddles of reconciling meanings and references, words and things, language and the world, the moment it abstracts from discourse as a fundamental way of being-in-the-world.

Heidegger's early views of the fundamentally revelatory character of assertions is, he would be the first to acknowledge, hardly novel. He draws extensively upon Aristotle's account of assertions, signaling this source by identifying this character with the

apophantic nature of assertions.^{xii} The correspondence theory of truth, where truth is taken to be a property of an assertion, is derivative of the originally apophantic character of assertions, i.e., their capacity to enable things to reveal themselves to us for what they are (a capacity that is in turn ontologically grounded, as discussed more below). As Heidegger puts it in *Sein und Zeit*, glossing this capacity of assertion:

Asserting is a being towards a thing itself insofar as it is...The very entity that is meant shows itself *just as* it is in itself, that is to say, that *it* is in the same way as *it* is pointed out, uncovered as being in the assertion...

The assertion *is true* means: it uncovers the entity in itself. It asserts, points out, >>lets be seen<< (ajpovfansiv) the entity in its uncoveredness.^{xiii}

Assertions may mislead or even deceive, but these possibilities rest upon their fundamental function of letting something show itself from itself (*apo*), that is to say, as it is or as it presents itself on its own terms. Typically, if a friend says: "You look pale today," the friend is calling attention to your appearance, not to be confused or conflated with how you look to her specifically. Similarly, the weatherman's report "The skies are clear today" states a fact and not a belief about the skies. To be sure, very early on we learn how to manipulate such statements, justifying a certain amount of healthy skepticism about factual statements. But those manipulations (including exaggerations, tendentiousness, lies, and so on) live off that fundamentally apophantic character, namely, off the fact that assertions consist in acknowledging and calling attention to the way things present themselves for what they are.^{xiv}

At the same time, it is important to note that Heidegger places assertions squarely within understanding and interpretation. We understand, that is to say, we meaningfully employ implements as part of our understanding of our world. Interpretation elaborates this understanding, bringing the ready-to-hand implement explicitly into view. Thus, we ask what something is "for" (*Wozu?*), precisely because it is "always already" accessible in such a way that what it is taken "as" can be set in relief. This "as" character constitutes the interpretation. For example, on the basis of what wheels are for, namely, for turning the axle, we interpret them as devices for turning. Assertions build precisely on this as-structure. That is to say, they are ways of making explicit what something is taken (interpreted) as, which in turn is based upon what it is for, i.e., how it is understood. For example, the assertion "The wheels turn" is a way of making more explicit the interpretation of them *as (als)* turning, based upon the understanding that they are *for (zum)* turning.^{xv}

While assertions are forms of interpretation, they have their own distinctive structure. Assertions are about something and, by way of predication, they determine it as such-and-such, allowing us to communicate as much to one another. Heidegger discusses assertions before discourse in *Sein und Zeit*, despite the fact that assertions, particularly in view of these three functions – aboutness, predication, and communication – are essential to discourse. He stresses this same threefold character of assertions in other lectures as well. At the same time, sounding very much like Wittgenstein, Heidegger emphasizes that assertions are only one form of discourse and, in another striking similarity with the Austrian, he asserts that discourse underlies the phenomenon of assertion.

Inasmuch as predication seems to suppose aboutness, one might take Heidegger's way of listing these functions as somehow ordinal (as if aboutness were first, predication, second, communication third). But this order of priority is highly questionable. To be sure,

linguistic reference may build upon non-linguistic references, e.g., in the way that 'Look!' builds upon the gesture of pointing, but the mere exhortation 'Look!' is no more informative about its reference than pointing, without sufficient learning and cues from the context. We have to already know from the context what sorts of things are normally pointed out, what sorts of things we are normally supposed to look at, if an assertion or, in this case, an exhortation is to have any chance of success. Predication is a way of registering or calling attention to those sorts of things, by way of describing and thus classifying them. In other words, it makes explicit the ways we carve up the world for our purposes, picking out certain items over others.^{xvi} Since the capacity of an assertion to be about something, to refer to something, depends upon the descriptions embedded in predication, there is reason to think that predication is no less basic to assertions than aboutness, their function of being about something. Reference and meaning, what discourse is about and how discourse is about it, are inextricably joined, like human beings and the world they inhabit (and, just as importantly, inhabit together, so that communication is no less fundamental to assertions, despite its placement as the third function of assertions).

The foregoing interpretation of the joint importance of aboutness and predication for assertions suggests a parallel gloss on Heidegger's claim that the apophantic 'as' builds upon the hermeneutic 'as' (SZ 223). Just as predication typically co-constitutes how an assertion is about something yet also presupposes that aboutness, so the apophantic 'as' supposes but also enters into the composition of the hermeneutic 'as'. The claim that the apophantic 'as' builds upon the hermeneutic 'as' still stands inasmuch as, for example, I refer to something *as* a lever, asserting 'This is a lever' (the apophantic 'as'), because I understand-and-use it as such (the hermeneutic 'as').^{xvii} But while such instances of the apophantic 'as' suppose a use, i.e., an interpretation, of things in a certain way within a certain context, they are also co-constitutive of it. Moreover, they are co-constitutive of it in two senses, already glossed above. On the one hand, the assertion as an instance of the sentences in a particular language is no less a ready-to-hand tool than the lever is. On the other hand, the assertion is apophantic precisely because it presents things as they are, allowing us to see them as they present themselves. From this vantage point, to assert that ordinary assertions (as part of the everyday workworld) are derivative of the hermeneutic 'as' is precisely to assert their embeddedness in the disclosures, uses, and interpretations of things as such-and-such (the hermeneutic 'as').^{xviii}

On the basis of the foregoing considerations, we can conclude that assertions, like language generally, can function as something merely on hand, as something handy or ready-to-hand, or as an essential component of *Da-sein* (being-here). This last function is, to be sure, fundamental. Assertions are, after all, existential in the sense that Dasein makes assertions (asserting is something that Dasein does), disclosing its world by doing so. But there is also a sense in which assertions are tools that we use and in that respect they are handy (ready-to-hand). Once used or, better, holding their use at arm's length, assertions can also be examined as entities within the world and so become the stuff of linguistics or even logic. These latter two ontological senses of assertions, i.e., as something used and as objects of investigation, suppose the existential and thus disclosive sense of an assertion.

2.2 Discursive meaning and sense

The notion of meaning is of singular importance to Heidegger's account of discourse and, indeed, his analysis of meanings reinforces the necessity of distinguishing discourse from language. In a fashion very much akin to Grice's well-known distinction between natural and non-natural (conventional) senses of meaning, Heidegger allows for both broad and narrow construals of meaning.^{xix} As we shall see, the broad construal applies to discourse (among other things), the narrow sense only to language. At the same time, Heidegger grounds meaning, under any construal, in Dasein's being-in-the-world and foregoing disclosure of its worldliness. Dasein's self-disclosiveness makes possible a meaningful engagement with implements as something handy (*Zuhandenes*). By virtue of this engagement, implements generally have meaning, broadly construed, and words as well as other linguistic complexes, too, come to have meaning as implements themselves (meaning narrowly construed). Meaning in the broad sense is meaning-in-use, of which "discursive meaning" is a prime example; meaning in the narrow sense is the meaning of a word or word-complex, taken "out of circulation" but with a view to capturing or cataloguing that circulating significance lexically.

For Heidegger, as noted above, both discursive meanings and linguistic meanings are grounded in being-in-the-world as a meaningful whole. To explain this grounding of meanings generally, Heidegger exploits notions of relevance and referredness, key features of the ready-to-hand. The pivotal distinction in this regard is the distinction between the *lateral relevance* of implements to one another and their *ultimate relevance* to Dasein's being-in-the-world. The ontological make-up of implements, i.e., their handiness, rests upon their lateral relevance, i.e., their referredness to one another. A tool's lateral relevance is what it respectively is for (*Wozu*), relative to one or more other implements. The entire set of such relevances cannot be itself relevant in that lateral sense, i.e., there is nothing handy that these implements altogether are for. But that set of relevances, taken in its entirety, is in place for the sake of and because of Dasein. Hence, their ultimate relevance is their relevance to Dasein's being-in-the-world.^{xx} For example, a paved road is for vehicles, roads and vehicles are for transporting people and goods, and the entire set of implements included in processes of transportation are for the sake of our being-here (*Dasein*). The relevance of the parts of the transportation system, moreover, is based upon its "suitedness to the world" (*Weltmäßigkeit*) which in turn supposes Dasein's self-disclosure, i.e., its "understanding of the world, towards which Dasein as an entity always already comports itself" (SZ 86). Consider, for example, cases where ferries are better suited than bridges as elements of transportation or descriptions are better suited than exhortations as elements of communication. The respective suitability is relative to Dasein's understanding of its world.^{xxi}

Heidegger introduces the verb "mean" (i.e., *X means Y*) to characterize implements' lateral significance, i.e., the way that they relate and refer to one another. Thus, a paved road *means* vehicles, just as housing *means* shelter. Such lateral relevance stands in the service of an ultimate relevance, i.e., its relevance (meaning) for Dasein. But beyond any such relevance, there is a further way of construing meaning, a way that applies to Dasein itself. "In the trust-and-familiarity with these [relevant] relations, Dasein >>means<< [something] to or for itself, it primordially gives itself its being and its potential-to-be to understand with respect to its being-in-the-world" (SZ 87). Here the meaning is not simply the lateral relevance of one implement to another, nor is it the relevance of the system of complexes to Dasein. Instead, the meaning is existential in the sense that Dasein

gives itself meaning, not in an explicit or self-conscious way, but precisely in the way that it is at home with referential relations, lateral and ultimate, among the implements that make-up its world.

Tools, implements, and the systems and complexes they form are meaningful by virtue of being for the sake of Dasein's being-in-the-world. Only on the basis of this ultimate relevance (meaning) are implements laterally relevant (*Um-zu*) to another. At the same time, *Dasein's* existential meaning, as described above, is distinct from an implement's lateral and ultimate relevance. In this way, these three meanings – the lateral and ultimate meaning of what is ready-to-hand as well as the existential meaning of being-here – are intimately linked to one another, constituting a meaningful whole. On the basis of this analysis of meanings, broadly construed, Heidegger speaks of Dasein's meaningfulness (*Bedeutsamkeit*) and “the relational whole of this meaning” (*das Bezugsganze dieses Bedeutens*) (SZ 87).

Note that the three sorts of meaning unpacked here – lateral, ultimate, and existential – are all meanings broadly construed, grounded in the meaningfulness of Dasein and its being-in-the-world. But, then, how does this broad construal of meaning relate to meaning in the context of discourse and language, i.e., to the previous distinction between discursive and linguistic meanings? In making that distinction, I suggested that discursive meaning, in contrast to linguistic meaning, is an example of meaning broadly construed. While Heidegger's account is exasperatingly short on details in this connection, he contends that the meaningfulness of being-in-the-world discloses meanings that make “word and language” possible.

The meaningfulness itself, however, with which Dasein is in each case already deeply familiar [*vertraut*], contains in itself the ontological condition of the possibility for the fact that Dasein, in its interpretive understanding, can disclose something like ‘meanings’ that for their part in turn found the possible being of word and language. (SZ 87)

One straightforward way of glossing this founding relation or, better, Heidegger's understanding of it is by enlisting his initial introduction of the notion of meaning in the context of elaborating the meanings (lateral and ultimate relevance) of implements. Our engagement with implements rests upon a foregoing disclosure of the meaningfulness of our being-in-the-world, i.e., the existential meaning glossed earlier. That same meaningfulness underlies the lateral and ultimate meanings of implements, also described above. Implements have meaning, in the broad sense of the term. Discourse supposes and contributes to these meanings. We talk about and specify things in terms of meanings with which we are already acquainted, meanings that have taken shape (laterally, ultimately, or existentially) in the course of our being-in-the-world. Discourse, not to be confused with language, contributes to the constitution of this meaningful whole (existential meaning) since discourse is no less basic an existential than understanding or disposedness.^{xxii} Meanings narrowly construed, i.e., the lexical (linguistic) meanings of words, take shape in the meaning-in-use (discursive meaning) that is co-extensive with an interpretative understanding of the meaningful whole.

Given this reconstruction of Heidegger's account of meaning and how it relates to linguistic meaning, discursive meaning turns out to have a peculiarly amphibious character, straddling the sorts of non-linguistic meaning unpacked above. That is to say, precisely as meaning-in-use, discursive meaning can be understood, on the one hand, as the lateral or

ultimate significance of an implement and, on the other, as the existential meaning of Dasein. In other words, the prima facie paradoxical conclusion of my interpretation is that, while discourse itself is an existential, discursive meanings can be used and re-used as well as self-disclosively enacted and re-enacted. While I do not think that this air of paradox can be easily dispelled (if it can be dispelled at all), it mirrors the distinction between existential and existentiell, two co-incident but distinguishable ways of being-here. (It also suggests a way of understanding Heidegger's own use of language in *Sein und Zeit*, where discursive meanings are both *used* and *disclosed*, i.e., both *handy* and *existential*).

Like the concept of meaning, the concept of sense (*Sinn*) plays an important role in Heidegger's conception of discourse. Moreover, he construes sense – again like meaning – differently in different contexts, only one of which concerns language directly. But just as Heidegger ties straightforwardly linguistic meanings to non-linguistic meanings, so, too, it is possible to identify a basic connection between the contexts in which he finds it necessary to speak of and, indeed, address the significance of 'sense.' Though Heidegger tells his readers from the beginning of *Sein und Zeit* that the work's theme is the question of the sense of being (*Seinssinn*), he first introduces the notion of sense as such in his discussion of understanding and interpretation (SZ §32). We "understand" things, in Heidegger's distinctive sense of skillfully manipulating them, by projecting them onto an entire complex of meaningfulness (*ein Ganzes der Bedeutsamkeit*). This complex of meaningfulness encompasses the sets of referential relations – their lateral and ultimate relevance, discussed above, in which Dasein as being-in-the-world establishes itself from the outset. As noted earlier, we interpret something as something on the basis of these relevancies, i.e., what they respectively are for.

Following this gloss of understanding, Heidegger introduces his first thematic discussion of *sense*. It is noteworthy that he immediately flags the fact that he uses the term in a more restrictive way than it is normally used. Thus, if something within the world comes to be understood, i.e., if it is discovered by Dasein, then we say that "it makes *sense*" (*es hat Sinn*). Heidegger adds (translated loosely):

But what is understood, taken strictly, is not the sense but the entity or even being. Sense is that within which the intelligibility of something maintains itself. What can be articulated in the disclosing, by way of understanding, we call sense. The *concept of sense* encompasses the formal framework of what necessarily belongs to what the interpretation, in understanding, articulates. [For every projection, there is something upon which it projects itself.] That '*upon-which*' the projection projects is structured by what Dasein in advance has before it, by its preview of that, and by its preconception of that. Sense is that '*upon-which*' the projection, so structured, projects, on the basis of which something becomes intelligible as something (SZ 151).

Hence, as Heidegger uses the term, 'sense' does not apply to entities or even being; it is rather what the understanding projects the entities or being upon, such that their intelligibility is sustained. Heidegger invokes precisely this meaning of 'sense' in making his case that time is the sense of being. Sense is thus, in a certain respect, the tacit 'as' or the unthematized backdrop for any interpretation that takes something explicitly as this or that. As Heidegger puts it, he understands sense as the "existential phenomenon in which the formal framework of what is disclosable in understanding and articulable in interpretation becomes visible."^{xxiii}

Yet, while tacit or unthematized at one level, sense neither is without structure nor does it defy articulation. Its structure is the so-called "circle-structure" of interpretive understanding that is the expression of the "forestructure" of Dasein itself (SZ 153). The interpretation moves within the ambit of what is already understood, albeit in an undeveloped way. Sense thus at once makes possible and sets limits to any interpretation. Or, to put this thought more paradoxically, in a certain respect, the sense of any interpretation – and its meaning – always lies necessarily beyond it.^{xxiv}

Heidegger invokes this account of sense at the outset of his discussion of discourse. After characterizing discourse as "the articulation of intelligibility," he recalls that what can be articulated in interpretation, more primordially in discourse, is "what we called the sense" (SZ 161). He refers to what is sorted out in the discursive articulation as a "whole of meaning" (*Bedeutungsganze*) that can in turn be resolved or analyzed into meanings. If we take these statements quite literally, then sense is a whole of meaning, i.e., a meaningful context capable of being broken down into meanings. While there is presumably no meaning without a sense, meanings, discursively articulated, are our means of access to sense. Sense is the context of meaning, the horizon out of which meaning takes shape, albeit not without the interpreter.^{xxv}

Conclusion

After relating that he regards disposedness and understanding as "equiprimordially constitutive manners of being-here," Heidegger adds that these two fundamental existentials are "equiprimordially determined by discourse."^{xxvi} This claim underscores the central role he accords it in the constitution of our being-here. By identifying it as "equiprimordial," he means to call attention to, among other things, the fact that the everyday intelligibility of things for us is always already sorted out ("gegliedert"). Just as we always already find ourselves in a situation, disposed in various ways to ourselves and others (others like and unlike ourselves), and just as we are always already projecting ourselves onto some possibility or another, so we are always already speaking with ourselves or others, articulating the intelligibility of our dispositions-and-projections. Stressing this equiprimordial character, Heidegger adds that discourse, precisely as the articulation of that intelligibility, underlies interpretation and assertion.

In this respect the communicative dimension of discourse can no longer be suppressed. The ways we find ourselves in the world together and thereby project our being-in-the-world constitute in a determinate way the intelligibility of our existence and our world, sorting out various determinations. Discourse articulates this sorting out. By virtue of growing up in a specific language, we are thrown into a sorting out that we re-enact, more or less creatively, in communicating. So viewed, communication is no less primordial an aspect of discourse than its capacity to be about something and specify it (the aboutness and predication discussed in 2.1 above). Indeed, as Jeffrey Powell aptly observes, communication fails in a certain sense when it becomes focused solely on its reference, on what it is about. Rather, in communicating, one maintains "the site or space of the openness toward the other with whom one speaks, and in speaking one shares a world," all the while keeping open the possibility of a relation to what emerges in the world, things."^{xxvii}

It is important to emphasize that, as glossed in the foregoing paragraphs, the equiprimordially of communication within discourse and the equiprimordially of

discourse itself (relative to other basic existentials) are existential, not existentiell. Heidegger is not claiming that there are no ontic instances of communicating nonsense or speaking without communicating. Nor is he claiming that there is no ontic instance of disposedness or understanding, for example, no fear or no exercise of know-how that is wordless. The equiprimordiality of discourse signifies that it is no less fundamental than our dispositions and understanding, not that some explicit verbalization enters into each concrete form, i.e., each ontic expression or manifestation of disposed understanding. If I fear, it is because, existentially, I find myself in this mood in light of some understanding and *can* say so (regardless of whether I ontically do so). Both the ways that I am disposed to things or others and the possibilities that I am projecting are determined by my capacity to make sense of all these phenomena and articulate their meanings in words.

ⁱ *Unterwegs zur Sprache* (Pfullingen: Neske, 1959), 32f: "Die Sprache spricht"; 191ff (paraphrasing Stefan Georg): "Kein Ding ist, wo das Wort fehlt"; see, too, 196 and 216; *Erläuterungen zu Hölderlins Dichtung*, vierte, erweiterte Auflage (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1971), 38: "Nur wo Sprache, da ist Welt..."; "Brief über den Humanismus" in *Wegmarken*, zweite, erweiterte Auflage (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1978), 357. I am grateful to Bryan Norwood for his comments on an earlier version of this paper.

ⁱⁱ But these considerations, if valid, provide only a part of the answer. My interpretation provisionally sets aside a further element of discourse as basic as its "aboutness" (or, in the case of assertions, their referential and predicative character), namely, the communicative dimension of discourse. A full *Auseinandersetzung* with Heidegger's account must come to terms with the significance of this communicative dimension, integrating it with the others. Heidegger places discussions of the communicative dimension *after* discussions of aboutness, even as he insists on the unity of both themes; see SZ 155 and 162. Not surprisingly, he endorses a sense of that communicative dimension that coincides with the referentiality and, indeed, the existential truth of discourse. In this regard, see his explanation for his appropriation of the pre-modern sense of hermeneutics as communicating (*Mitteilen*) in *Ontologie (Hermeneutik der Faktizität)*, Gesamtausgabe, Band 63, hrsg. von Käte Bröcker-Oltmanns (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1988), 9f, 15-20 as well as his interpretation of *lovgoV* in connection with speaking, being-with-one-another, and *ajgaqovn* in *Grundbegriffe der aristotelischen Philosophie*, Gesamtausgabe, Band 18, hrsg. Mark Michalski (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 2002), 50, 55-64.

ⁱⁱⁱ Heidegger's placement of discourse on a par with the disposedness and understanding by no means entails, I argue, that Dasein's every mood or exhibition of know-how is an instance of language use.

^{iv} Thomas Sheehan, "Heidegger's New Aspect: On *In-Sein*, *Zeitlichkeit*, and *The Genesis of Being and Time*," *Research in Phenomenology* 25 (1995): 211f.

^v We might regard these three aspects as three ways for language to be, as long as this way of speaking does not mislead us into thinking that language *is* in some determinable sense apart from them.

^{vi} The issue here is obviously but nonetheless tellingly reflexive; if *Sein und Zeit* itself exemplifies only language in use, that is to say, if *Sein und Zeit* is not discourse (existential language), then its language is rhetorical rather than hermeneutical.

vii My use of 'property' here follows the traditional Scholastic renditions of property as a distinct predicable that – in contrast to an accident – is *omni, soli, et semper* predicated of a species.

viii SZ 32: "LovgoV as discourse says ... as much as dhlou:n, making apparent that of which thehci offenbar machen das, wovon in der Rede »die Rede« ist. *Aristoteles* hat diese Funktion der Rede schärfer expliziert als ajpofaivnesqai. Der lovgoV läßt etwas sehen (faivnesqai), nämlich das, worüber die Rede ist"; see, too, GA 18: 19f. For a discussion of *Rede* as "a worldly phenomenon" (charged with the power of manifesting the world) and its relation to self-showing, see Jeffrey Powell, "Heidegger and the Communicative World," *Research in Phenomenology* 40 (2010): 55-71, esp. 60-63.

ix These considerations help explain why some scholars see Heidegger's views dovetailing with Wittgenstein's insistence on the inexpressibility of semantics, i.e., the futility of appeals to metalanguage, given the assumption that the relation between words and things can only be shown and not said. According to Hintikka, this convergence can be traced to the fact that Wittgenstein and Heidegger alike view language as a universal medium and not merely as a tool or calculus. See Martin Kusch, *Language as Calculus vs. Language as Universal Medium: A Study In Husserl, Heidegger and Gadamer* (Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Press, 1989) and Jaakko Hintikka, *Lingua Universalis vs. Calculus Ratiocinator: An Ultimate Presupposition of Twentieth-Century Philosophy* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1997), 162-190.

x Heidegger himself calls attention to his own assertions; see, for example, SZ 221: "*Dasein ist >>in der Wahrheit<<*. Diese Aussage hat ontologischen Sinn"; see, too, Heidegger's remark that "faktisch unsere Verhaltungen durchgängig von Aussagen durchgesetzt sind" in *Prolegomena zur Geschichte des Zeitbegriffs*, Gesamtausgabe, Band 20, hrsg. Petra Jaeger, zweite, durchgesehene Auflage (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1988), 75.

xi See n. 1 above.

xii See in §§ 7 and 44 of *Sein und Zeit* (on lovgoV and truth respectively) as well as in his study of deception (yeu:doV) in the first Marburg lectures (GA 17) and in his lectures on Aristotle's *Rhetoric* (GA 18) the following semester.

xiii SZ 218. In the entire passage Heidegger himself links up referring with knowing and he does so by explicitly acknowledging the Husserlian legacy of this approach; see SZ 218n1.

xiv Martin Heidegger, *Einführung in die phänomenologische Forschung*, Gesamtausgabe, Band 17, hrsg. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1994), 19: "Der lovgoV ist nicht in der Weise eines Werkzeugs, sondern historisch und erwächst aus freien Stücken, d.h. einem jeweiligen Stande der Sachentdeckung." See, too, *ibid.*, 21: "Der lovgoV ajpofantikovV ist ein solches Reden mit der Welt, durch das die daseiende Welt als daseiende aufgezeigt wird." See, too, n. 9 above.

xv Should we infer from this embeddedness of the as-structure in the for-structure, i.e., the fact that what we take something as is based upon what we take it for, that discourse is pragmatic or rhetorical *all the way down*, as we might put it? This inference is compelling if we limit the for-structure (what things, beings are for) to what, as part of our designs and intentions, they are for. But just as our being-here is not something we designed or intended, so not every sense of what entities are for, i.e., how they are to be interpreted, is reducible to those designs or intentions.

^{xvi} GA 20: 75: "Faktisch ist es auch so, daß unsere schlichtesten Wahrnehmungen und Verfassungen schon *ausgedrückte*, mehr noch, in bestimmter Weise *interpretierte* sind. Wir sehen nicht so sehr primär und ursprünglich die Gegenstände und Dinge, sondern zunächst sprechen wir darüber, genauer sprechen wir nicht das aus, was wir sehen, sondern umgekehrt, wir sehen, was man über die Sache spricht."

^{xvii} Heidegger actually works with four levels of 'as' constructions: existentiell and existential forms of the hermeneutic 'as' and the apophantic 'as' respectively. When I take something as a lever (existentiell hermeneutic 'as'), I also take it as being handy or ready-to-hand (existential hermeneutic 'as'). Derivatively, I assert "it is a lever" (existentiell apophantic 'as') or "it is handy" (existential apophantic 'as'); see my *Heidegger's Concept of Truth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 195.

^{xviii} This claim holds *mutatis mutandis* for exhortations ('Pull the lever') and questions ('Is that the lever?').

^{xix} Paul Grice, "Meaning" in *Studies in the Way of Words* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 214f.

^{xx} SZ 84: "Das primäre >>Wozu<< ist ein Worum-willen. Das >>Um-willen<< betrifft aber immer das Sein des *Daseins*,..."

^{xxi} At the same time, insofar as this worldliness is part of Dasein's essential make-up (its being-in-the-world), Dasein in each case already refers to and understands itself as in this world. By no means requiring some sort of theoretical transparency, this self-referential understanding is a primordial sense of trust-and-familiarity (*Vertrautheit*), and it is precisely in view of Dasein's primordial trust in that world and familiarity with it that implements can be encountered for what they are, namely, relevant, referring to one another and that Dasein in *Angst* can experience their utter irrelevance.

^{xxii} My reconstruction of the ways in which Heidegger uses and construes meanings is derived from his account of meanings generally. He does not present such an explicit account himself. Note, however, that he takes issue with restricting *Bedeutung* to the ideal content of a judgment or with the "categories of meaning" of a linguistic science, oriented to assertions and grounded in an ontology of the present-at-hand; see SZ 156 and 165f. See also his remark about the rootedness of *Bedeutungslehre* in the ontology of Dasein (SZ 166), see the following claim: "Aus der Zeitlichkeit der Rede, das heißt des Daseins überhaupt, kann erst die >>Entstehung<< der >>Bedeutung<< aufgeklärt...werden" (SZ 349); see, too, my forthcoming essay, "Husserl and Heidegger on Meaning," *Heidegger Jahrbuch* 6 (2010).

^{xxiii} SZ 156; see, too, SZ 324. Because sense is an existential, Heidegger notes that only Dasein can make sense (*sinnvoll*) or be senseless (*sinnlos*) and that all other sorts of entities are, strictly speaking, non-sensical (*unsinnig*) or even – as in the case of natural catastrophes – sense-defying (*widersinnig*). SZ 151: "Sinn >>hat<< nur das Dasein, sofern die Erschlossenheit des In-der-Welt-seins durch das in ihr entdeckbare Seiende >>erfüllbar<< ist."

^{xxiv} Inasmuch as assertions are grounded in an interpretation, they have a sense, not to be confused with meaning; see SZ 153f and 156.

^{xxv} There is, in Heidegger's account of sense, a kind of verificationism since sense and existential truth coincide. But here several qualifications are in order. This coincidence is not to be confused with an identity since the sense that coincides with truth is also always

partly false. Nor is Heidegger supposing that the senses or even the meanings of assertions or words as handy or on hand coincide with *their* truth, i.e., correspondence with other things. Moreover, what we mean by what we say – even where what he mean is the sense of our being or existential truth – is only one factor in the constitution of that meaning. The coincidence of sense and existential truth anticipates Heidegger's later characterization of truth as "*Lichtung des Seyns*" and "*Grund...für die Gründung des schaffenden Da-seins*"; see *Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis)*, Gesamtausgabe, Band 65 (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1989), 327, 331.

^{xxvi} SZ 133; see also SZ 161. Heidegger is even more emphatic about the determining role of language in his lectures on Aristotle's *Rhetoric*; see GA 18: 18: "*Das In-der-Welt-sein des Menschen ist im Grunde bestimmt durch das Sprechen*" (Heidegger's italics). For a gloss on Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann's discussion of the structural difference between discourse and other basic existentials, see Jeffrey Powell, "Heidegger and the Communicative World," 67-69.

^{xxvii} Jeffrey Powell, "Heidegger and the Communicative World," 69. Powell's emphasis on communication's equiprimordial role in constituting the phenomenon of discourses is richly corroborated by new theories of usage-base language acquisition that emphasize the social and cognitive skills children gain from communication prior to learning a symbolic language. See, for example, Michael Tomasello, *Constructing a Language: A Usage-Based Theory of Language Acquisition* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003; for a review of the significance of these theories in the context of contemporary philosophy of language, see my forthcoming "The Explanation of Language," *Philosophy and Language*, Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association, Volume 84 (2010).