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Wittgenstein reads Heidegger, Heidegger reads Wittgenstein:

Thinking Language Bounding World

This is a tale of two readings, and of a non-encounter, the missed encounter between two philosophers whose legacy, as has been noted, might jointly define the scope of problems and questions left open, in the wake of the twentieth century, for philosophy today. In particular, I will discuss today two remarks, one by Wittgenstein on Heidegger, and the other by Heidegger on Wittgenstein; as far as I know, the first is the *only* recorded remark by Wittgenstein about Heidegger, and the second is one of only two by Heidegger about Wittgenstein.¹ As readings, both remarks that I shall discuss are, at best, partial, elliptical, and glancing. Interestingly, as I shall argue, each is actually a suggestive *misreading* of the one philosopher by the other. By considering these two misreadings, I shall argue, we can understand better the relationship between the two great twentieth century investigators of the obscure linkages among being, language and truth. And we can gain some insight into some of the many questions still left open by the many failed encounters of twentieth century philosophy, up to and including what might be considered the most definitive encounter that is still routinely missed, miscarried, or misunderstood, the encounter between the “traditions” of “analytic” and “continental” philosophy, which are still widely supposed to be disjoint.

¹ As Lee Braver has pointed out to me, in addition to the remark from Heidegger’s Le Thor seminar of 1969 that I will discuss below, Heidegger makes a brief mention of an analogy that he attributes to Wittgenstein in the seminar on Heraclitus (held jointly with Eugen Fink) of 1966-1967. See Heidegger and Fink, *Heraclitus Seminar*, transl. by Charles H. Seibert (Evanston, IL: Northwestern U. Press, 1993), p. 17.

I

I begin with the sole recorded remark (as far as I know) by Wittgenstein on Heidegger. It comes in the course of a series of discussions between Wittgenstein and members of the Vienna Circle held in the homes of Friedrich Waissmann and Moritz Schlick and later collected under the title *Wittgenstein and the Vienna Circle*. The remark dated December 30, 1929, reads:

On Heidegger:

I can very well think what Heidegger meant about Being and Angst. Man has the drive to run up against the boundaries of language. Think, for instance, of the astonishment that anything exists. This astonishment cannot be expressed in the form of a question, and there is also no answer to it. All that we can say can only, *a priori*, be nonsense. Nevertheless we run up against the boundaries of language. Kierkegaard also saw this running-up and similarly pointed it out (as running up against the paradox). This running up against the boundaries of language is *Ethics*. I hold it certainly to be very important that one makes an end to all the chatter about ethics – whether there can be knowledge in ethics, whether there are values, whether the Good can be defined, etc. In ethics one always makes the attempt to say something which cannot concern and never concerns the essence of the matter. It is *a priori* certain: whatever one may give as a definition of the Good – it is always only a misunderstanding to suppose that the expression corresponds to what one actually means (Moore). But the tendency to run up against *shows something*. The holy Augustine already knew this when he said: “What, you scoundrel, you would speak no nonsense? Go ahead and speak nonsense – it doesn’t matter!”²

² "Zu Heidegger: Ich kann mir wohl denken, was Heidegger mit Sein und Angst meint. Der Mensch hat den Trieb, gegen die Grenzen der Sprache anzurennen. Denken Sie z.B. an das Erstaunen, dass etwas existiert. *Das Erstaunen kann nicht in Form einer Frage ausgedrückt werden*, und es gibt auch gar keine Antwort. Alles, was wir sagen mögen, kann a priori nur Unsinn sein. Trotzdem rennen wir gegen die Grenze der Sprache an. Dieses Anrennen hat auch Kierkegaard gesehen und es sogar ganz ähnlich (als Anrennen gegen das Paradoxon) bezeichnet. Dieses Anrennen gegen die Grenze der Sprache ist die *Ethik*. Ich halte es für sicher wichtig, dass man all dem Geschwätz über Ethik - ob es eine Erkenntnis gebe, ob es Werte gebe, ob sich das Gute definieren lasse etc. - ein Ende macht. In der Ethik macht man immer den Versuch, etwas zu sagen, was das Wesen der Sache nicht betrifft und nie betreffen kann. Es ist a priori gewiss: Was immer man für eine Definition zum Guten geben mag - es ist immer nur ein Missverständnis, das Eigentliche, was man in Wirklichkeit meint, entspreche sich im Ausdruck (Moore). Aber die Tendenz, das Anrennen, *deutet auf etwas hin*. Das hat schon, der heilige Augustin gewusst, wenn er sagt: Was,

The remark, which has since become somewhat notorious, was first published in the January, 1965 issue of the *Philosophical Review*, both in the original German and in an English translation by Max Black. For reasons that have not been clarified, in both the German and English texts, Waismann's title, the first sentence, and the last sentence were there omitted, so that the remark as a whole appeared to make no reference either to Heidegger or to Augustine.³ (You can come to your own conclusions about why this might have been, and what it might show about the extent and nature of the analytic/continental divide, at least at that time).

In any case, the remark shows that Wittgenstein had some knowledge of the contents of *Being and Time* (which had appeared just two years earlier) and that he held its author at least in some esteem. The comparison with Kierkegaard, whom Wittgenstein also greatly respected, shows that he recognized and approved of the marked "existentialist" undertone of *Being and Time*, and understood the deep Kierkegaardian influence on Heidegger's conception there of *Angst*, or anxiety, as essentially linked to the possibility of a disclosure of the world as such. Indeed, in *Being and Time*, Heidegger describes *Angst* as a "distinctive way in which Dasein is disclosed" and as essentially connected to the revealing of the structure of being-in-the-world which is, in turn, one of the most essential structures of Dasein. Thus, for Heidegger, it is *Angst* which first discloses the joint structure of Dasein and being-in-the-world as such.⁴ Since *Angst* is not fear before an individual or individuals, but a kind of discomfort toward the world as a whole, "the world as such is that in the face of which one has *Angst*," according to Heidegger, and this is evidently, thus, close to the experience that Wittgenstein calls "astonishment that anything exists."

du Mistviech, du willst keinen Unsinn reden? Rede nur einen Unsinn, es macht nichts!" *Ludwig Wittgenstein und der Wiener Kreis. Gespräche*, aufgezeichnet von Friedrich Waismann (Suhrkamp, 2001), p. 68. (Translated as *Ludwig Wittgenstein and the Vienna Circle: Conversations Recorded by Friedrich Waismann*, transl. by Brian McGuinness and Joachim Schulte (New York: Barnes and Noble Books, 1979)).

³ Murray, Michael, "A Note on Wittgenstein and Heidegger," *The Philosophical Review*, Vol. 83, No. 4 (Oct., 1974), pp. 501-503. The originally published text is Waismann, Friedrich, "Notes on Talks with Wittgenstein," *The Philosophical Review*, Vol. 74, No. 1 (Jan., 1965), pp. 12-16

⁴ *Sein und Zeit*, 19te Auflage (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 2006) (translated as *Being and Time: A Translation of Sein und Zeit*, by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (San Francisco: Harper, 1962)), p. 186.

It is an index of the extraordinary diversity of Wittgenstein's philosophical influences (as well as evidence against the often-heard claim that he either did not read the history of philosophy or did not care about it) that he manages in this very compressed remark, to mention approvingly, in addition to Heidegger and Kierkegaard, two philosophers whose historical contexts and philosophical methods could hardly be more different: G.E. Moore and St. Augustine. The concern that links Augustine, Kierkegaard, Moore and Heidegger, across centuries of philosophical history and despite obviously deep differences is something that Wittgenstein does not hesitate to call "Ethics," although his own elliptical discussions of the status of ethics and its theory are certainly anything but traditional. Some years earlier, in the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein had described "ethics" very briefly and elliptically as "transcendental," holding simply that "it is impossible for there to be propositions of ethics" and that "ethics cannot be put into words."⁵ The position expressed in this brief passage is, however, further spelled out in the brief "Lecture on Ethics" that Wittgenstein had delivered to the "Heretics Society" in Cambridge just six weeks before the remark on Heidegger, on November 17, 1929.⁶ In the "Lecture," Wittgenstein considers the status of what he calls "absolute judgments of value," judgments that something simply is valuable, obligatory or good in itself, without reference to anything else that it is valuable for. His thesis is that "no statement of fact can ever be, or imply, a judgment of absolute value." (p. 39). This is because all facts are, in themselves, on the same level, and no fact is inherently more valuable than any other. It follows that there can be no science of Ethics, for "nothing we could ever think or say should be *the* thing."

Nevertheless there remains a *temptation* to use expressions such as "absolute value" and "absolute good." (p. 40). What, then, is at the root of this inherent temptation, and what does it actually express? Speaking now in the first person, Wittgenstein describes "the idea of one particular experience" which "presents itself" to him when he is tempted to use these expressions. This experience, is, Wittgenstein says, his experience "par excellence" associated with the attempt to fix the mind on the meaning of absolute value:

⁵ Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (henceforth: TLP), transl. by D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness (London and New York: Routledge, 1974), 6.41-6.42.

⁶ "A Lecture on Ethics," in *Philosophical Occasions 1912-1951*, ed. by James Klagge and Alfred Nordmann (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993), pp. 36-44.

I believe the best way of describing it is to say that when I have it I wonder at the existence of the world. And I am then inclined to use such phrases as ‘how extraordinary that anything should exist’ or ‘how extraordinary that the world should exist.’ (p. 41)

The paradigmatic experience of ethics for Wittgenstein is thus the experience that one might attempt to express by saying one wonders at the existence of the world; nevertheless, as Wittgenstein immediately points out, the expression necessarily fails in that it yields only nonsense. For although it makes sense to wonder about something’s being the case that might not have been, or might have been otherwise, it makes no sense to wonder about the world’s existing at all. It is thus excluded at the outset that what one is tempted to describe as the “experience” of such wonder can be meaningfully expressed, and it is a kind of paradox that any factual or psychological experience should even so much as *seem* to have this significance. And if someone were to object that the existence of an experience of absolute value might indeed be just a fact among others, for which we have as yet not found the proper analysis, Wittgenstein suggests that it would be possible to respond with a kind of immediate universal insight that, “as it were in a flash of light,” illuminates the essential connection of this experience to the reality of language itself, which shows up in the failure of any attempt to express it.

Returning to the remark of December 30, Wittgenstein’s remarkable suggestion here is, then, that all of the philosophers he mentions (Moore, Augustine, and Kierkegaard as much as Heidegger) can be read, in different ways, as having *understood* this impossibility for ethics or ethical propositions to come to expression. The theory of ethics itself may be futile, in that the attempt to establish ethics as a positive knowledge or science, to determine the existence and nature of values, or even, as Moore had suggested, to define the Good itself, can yield only the “chatter” of a continually renewed nonsense that perennially fails to recognize itself as such. At the same time, however, it is in this essential failure to be expressed or expressible that Wittgenstein suggests (echoing the central distinction of the *Tractatus* between all that can be said and what, beyond the boundaries of language, can only be shown) the real and valuable insight of all attempts at ethical thought might ultimately be found. This is because of the link between the “tendency to run up against the boundaries of language,” and what we should like to call the

radical experiences of our relation to the world as such, including even the feeling of astonishment that anything exists at all.

Something very similar is again suggested by Heidegger's notorious discussion of Being and the Nothing in the Freiburg inaugural lecture "What is Metaphysics?", given on July 24, 1929.⁷ Here, the experience of the Nothing by means of which it is first possible for us to "find ourselves among beings as a whole" thereby allows "beings as a whole" to be revealed, even if "comprehending the whole of beings in themselves" is nevertheless "impossible in principle" (pp. 99-100). In the moods or attunements of boredom and anxiety we are brought "face to face with beings as a whole" and in the very unease we feel in these moods towards being as a whole also brings us a "fundamental attunement" that is "also the basic occurrence of our Dasein," as exhibited in an experience of Nothing and nihilating in which "Dasein is all that is still there." (p. 101). This experience also gestures toward a kind of dysfunction of speech and *logos*: "Anxiety robs us of speech" (p. 101) and "in the face of anxiety all utterance of the 'is' falls silent." (p. 101). And notoriously, Heidegger holds that in the encounter with "the nothing," logical thinking itself must give way to a more fundamental experience: "If the power of the intellect in the field of inquiry into the nothing and into Being is thus shattered, then the destiny of the reign of 'logic' in philosophy is thereby decided. The idea of 'logic' itself disintegrates in the turbulence of a more original questioning." (p. 105).

It would not be amiss to see Wittgenstein's invocation of this sense of wonder at existence, in both the remark on Heidegger and in the "Lecture on Ethics," as suggesting far-ranging parallels to the thought of the philosopher whose signature is the question of Being and the disclosure of its fundamental structures, including the basic "experiences," such as that of Angst, in which the being of the world as such – here, the totality of beings -- may be disclosed. Yet as a reading of Heidegger's actual position in *Being and Time*, the main suggestion of the passage – that these experiences are to be found by "running up against" the boundaries of *language* -- is nevertheless a rather massive misreading, in a fairly obvious and direct sense. For *Being and Time* contains no detailed or even very explicit theory of language as such, let alone the

⁷ "What is Metaphysics?" transl. by D. F. Krell in D. F. Krell, ed., *Martin Heidegger: Basic Writings*, revised and expanded edition (Harper San Francisco: 1993), pp. 89-110.

possibility of running up against its boundaries or limits. And insofar as *Being and Time* discusses language (*die Sprache*), the discussion is wholly subordinated to the discussion of *Rede* or concretely practiced discourse, something which does not obviously have boundaries at all.

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger's brief and elliptical discussion of language emphasizes its secondary, derivative status as founded in discourse and the fundamental ontological possibility of a transformation from one to the other. Thus, "The existential-ontological foundation of language is discourse." (p. 160) Language is "the way discourse gets expressed." (p. 161). Discourse is itself the "articulation of intelligibility." (p. 161) and as such an articulation, is always separable into isolated "significations" or "meanings" [*Bedeutungen*]. Nevertheless the "worldly" character of discourse as an "articulation of the intelligibility of the 'there'" means that it yields a "totality-of-significations" [*Bedeutungsganze*] which can then be "put into words" or can "come to word" (*kommt zu Wort*). Language can then be defined as a totality of (spoken or written) words; in this totality "discourse has a 'worldly' Being of its own" (p. 161). It thus may subsequently happen that language, the totality of words, becomes something in the world which we can "come across as ready-to-hand" [*Zuhanden*] or indeed break up analytically into objectively present "world-things which are present-at-hand." (p. 161) Language's specific way of manifesting being-in-the-world, or of disclosing the worldly character of the beings that we ourselves are, is to appear in the world as a totality of words ambiguously experienced as tools of use or objective "word-things." Discourse itself, Heidegger goes on to say, supports the ever-present possibilities of "hearing" or "keeping silent." These possibilities, as possibilities of discursive speech, disclose "for the first time" "the constitutive function of discourse for the existentiality of existence." (p. 161). But they are not in any direct way connected to the structure of language itself, which must, Heidegger says, still be worked out.

Whatever else it may be, the story of the existential significance of words in *Being and Time* is not, therefore, the document of an inherent human tendency to "run up against the boundaries of language" that ultimately, even in being frustrated, can yield a transformative demonstration of the boundaries of the world as such. The worldly character of language is, here, not a matter of its actual or possible correlation to the totality of facts or situations in the world, but rather of its tendency to *appear* within the world as an objectively present totality of signs or of "word-

things,” abstracted and broken up with respect to the original sources of their meaning in the lived fluidity of discourse. This is not, then, a subjective “running-up against the boundaries of language” but something more like a *falling* of meaning into the world in the form of its capture by objective presence. There are, to be sure, distinctive dangers here – Heidegger will go on, in fact, to suggest that it is in this tendency to interpret language as an objectively present being that the traditional and still dominant conception of *logos* remains rooted, a conception that yields an insufficiently radical understanding of meaning and truth, one which the present, more penetrating, existential analytic must deconstruct. But there is no suggestion that any part of this analysis involves recognizing the boundaries of language as such, or considering the sources of the tendency to speak beyond them that issues in nonsense. Moreover, although the possibility of keeping silent does indeed bear, for Heidegger, a primary disclosive significance, what it tends to disclose is not the limits of the world beyond which it is impossible to speak, but rather, quite to the contrary, the inherent positive structure of Dasein’s capability to make the world articulate and intelligible. This is not the obligatory silence, which concludes the *Tractatus*, beyond the bounds of language where nothing can be said, but rather the contingent silence that results from a “reticence” of which Dasein is always capable, and which is indeed at the root of Dasein’s strictly correlative capability of “having something to say.”⁸

What, then, should we make of this striking misreading by Wittgenstein of Heidegger? An obvious suggestion is that the distortingly projective reading, which here imposes the problematic of the limits of language on a text that does not in fact bear it, is an effect of Wittgenstein’s adherence, and Heidegger’s failure to adhere, at least in *Being and Time*, to the “linguistic turn” which considers all issues of epistemology, ontology, and metaphysics to be issues for the “philosophy of language,” in a suitably broad sense. The conception of such a “turn”, itself determinative and characteristic of the analytic tradition in some general sense, is indeed helpful and relevant, but it does not by itself determine what kind of thing language is

⁸ “Keeping silent authentically is possible only in genuine discoursing. To be able to keep silent, Dasein must have something to say – that is, it must have at its disposal an authentic and rich disclosedness of itself. In that case one’s reticence [Verschwiegenheit] makes something manifest, and does away with ‘idle talk’ [“Gerede”]. As a mode of discoursing, reticence articulates the intelligibility of Dasein in so primordial a manner that it gives rise to a potentiality-for-hearing which is genuine, and to a Being-with-one-another which is transparent.” (S&Z, p. 165)

taken to be by those who adhere to it, or what is specifically at stake in the difference between those twentieth-century philosophers who take it and those who do not.⁹ Moving closer to the case, then, we might be tempted to suggest that Wittgenstein's misreading of Heidegger represents his imposition on the latter of the specific conception of a *logically structured* language that underlies the whole *Tractatus* picture of meaning and the world, a conception according to which facts and propositions are structurally linked by the ineffable, crystalline mirror of logical form, which pervades language and the world and so sets their common limit. The evident difference from Heidegger would then be that Heidegger never held such a conception of language as sharing with the world a logical form or structure, rejecting from an early phase any "correspondence" theory of the truth of propositions, and constantly privileging the fluid, diachronic vitality of spoken discourse in context over the temporally decontextualized and fixed logical structure of sentences and proposition.

However, even if this suggestion clarifies somewhat the formal thinking behind what was indeed one of the founding projects of the analytic tradition, it would be seriously misleading simply to identify the rigid *Tractatus* conception of ineffable logical structure with the problematic of the limits of language and the world that Wittgenstein discusses in both the "Lecture on Ethics" and the remarks on Heidegger. For one thing, the "transitional" Wittgenstein of 1929 who authored both of these texts had already clearly come to see deep problems with the *Tractatus* assumption of a unified, transcendent logical structure linking language and world. This Wittgenstein is already well on the way to the inherently contextual "language games" and "forms of life" of the *Philosophical Investigations*, where the problem of the tendency to "run up against the forms of language" remains a central object of philosophy's diagnosis and investigation. Here as well, Wittgenstein's insistence upon a level of "bedrock" at which "my spade is turned" and "explanations must run out" also bears witness to the continuing significance of the *problem* of what remains beyond language and linguistic explanation. In the *Investigations*, the therapeutic work of philosophy itself depends on the "uncovering of one or another piece of plain nonsense and bumps that the understanding has got by running its head up against the limits of

⁹ For such a conception, see, e.g., Michael Dummett, *Origins of Analytical Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard U. Press, 1993), especially chapter 2.

language.”¹⁰ Nor does Wittgenstein hesitate, here as well, to identify in the analysis of this ever-frustrated inclination to run up against language the very value of philosophical clarification itself: “These bumps make us see the value of the discovery.”

Heidegger’s remarks on the Nothing and anxiety in “What is Metaphysics?” were famously the basis for Carnap’s mocking rejection, in the 1932 article “The Overcoming of Metaphysics through the Logical Analysis of Language” of Heidegger’s whole project as “metaphysical” and as violating the very conditions for the meaningfulness of any possible language. Part of what motivated Carnap in his ire was, doubtless, Heidegger’s visible contempt for the attempt to structure language logically; in the inaugural address, as we have seen, he describes the experience of the Nothing as leading to a “disintegration” of logic, and the remarks on language in *Being and Time* are dedicated to a “task of *liberating* grammar from logic” (p. 165). From the perspective of Carnap’s logical empiricist project, which was dedicated to the elimination of dangerous and idle metaphysics by means of a clarification of the underlying logical structure of meaningful language as such, these suggestions could only seem to represent the most misleading kind of obscurantism. Yet as recent scholarship has emphasized, it would be a grave mistake simply to identify Wittgenstein’s conception of logical structure with that of Carnap, for whom Wittgenstein also had little sympathy. For whereas the point of identifying the bounds of language for Carnap is consolidation of science and objectivity by means of the identification and elimination of the “pseudo-sentences” that lie beyond them, the point is for Wittgenstein just about directly the opposite. As Wittgenstein famously wrote later, the whole point of the *Tractatus* was “ethical,” presumably in the sense that it was to bring us to a self-conscious experience, precisely, of those limits beyond which we cannot speak: here was not, then, the excessive “beyond” of meaninglessness but the very possibility of a “mystical” or “aesthetic” vision of the world, the vision *sub specie aeterni* of the world “as a limited whole.”

So although it would certainly be wrong to say that the problem of the limits of language stands or falls with the rigid, deterministic conception of the structure of language that Carnap and the early Wittgenstein shared, there is, it seems, between Wittgenstein and Heidegger a significantly broader and more general question of the relationship of language and world that remains open,

¹⁰ *Philosophical Investigations*, 3rd edition, transl. by G.E.M. Anscombe (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2001), sect. 119.

and probably remains with us even today. This can be put as the question: What does *the very existence of language* have to do with the *nature of the world* it seems to bound? And what does it mean that the structure of language, which seems to set the very boundaries of the possibilities for speaking of facts and objects and hence determine what we can understand as the world, can again be thought (whether logically, grammatically, or historically) and even experienced *within* the world so bounded? Without overstatement, it would be possible to say that this is the question that links twentieth-century linguistic philosophy, in its specificity, to all that has formerly been thought under the heading of transcendence and the mystical; and though it is not obvious where solutions may lie, it seems that this question remains very much with us today.

II

Heidegger's remark on Wittgenstein comes almost forty-two years later, in one of Heidegger's very last seminars, the last of three seminars the aging philosopher held in Le Thor, France.¹¹ The transcript of the first seminar session, for September 2, 1969, reads in part as follows:

So we pose the question: what does the 'question of being' mean? For, as a question, the question of being already offers numerous possibilities for misunderstanding – something confirmed by the continual failure to understand the book *Being and Time*.

What does 'the question of being' mean? One says 'being' and from the outset one understands the word metaphysically, i.e. from out of metaphysics. However, in metaphysics and its tradition, 'being' means: that which determines a being insofar as it is a being. As a result, metaphysically the question of being means: the question concerning the being as a being, or otherwise put: the question concerning the ground of a being.

¹¹ "Seminar in Le Thor 1969," in Andrew Mitchell and Francois Raffoul, transl., *Four Seminars*. (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana U. Press, 2006). Translation of "Seminar in Le Thor 1969" in Heidegger, *Seminare* (GA 15) (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1986).

To this question, the history of metaphysics has given a series of answers. As an example: *energeia*. Here reference is made to the Aristotelian answer to the question, “What is the being as a being?” – an answer which runs *energeia*, and not some *hypokeimenon*. For its part, the *hypokeimenon* is an interpretation of beings and by no means an interpretation of being. In the most concrete terms, *hypokeimenon* is the presencing of an island or of a mountain, and when one is in Greece such a presencing leaps into view. *Hypokeimenon* is in fact the being as it lets itself be seen, and this means: that which is there before the eyes, as it brings itself forth from itself. Thus the mountain lies on the land and the island in the sea.

Such is the Greek experience of beings.

For us, being as a whole – *ta onta* – is only an empty word. For us, there is no longer that experience of beings in the Greek sense. On the contrary, as in Wittgenstein, “the real is what is the case” (“*Wirklich ist, was der Fall ist*”) (which means: that which falls under a determination, lets itself be established, the determinable), actually an eerie (*gespenstischer*) statement.

For the Greeks, on the contrary, this experience of beings is so rich, so concrete and touches the Greeks to such an extent that there are significant synonyms (Aristotle, *Metaphysics A*): *ta phainomena*, *ta alethea*. For this reason, it gets us nowhere to translate *ta onta* literally as “the beings.” In so doing, there is no understanding of what is being for the Greeks. It is authentically: *ta alethea*, what is revealed in unconcealment, what postpones concealment for a time; it is *ta phainomena*, what here shows itself from itself. (p. 35)

As he often does at this late stage in his career, Heidegger couches his remarks as a kind of retrospective of his own work, giving a prominent place to the “question of Being” raised by *Being and Time* while complaining, as he often did, of that book’s failure ultimately to communicate the sense and significance of this question. In fact, however, the relevant “question of Being” here is not the one formulated in *Being and Time*, which concerns the “meaning” or “sense” of Being, but rather (by way of a decisive shift) the question of the

“ground of Being,” of what it means to think the “being of beings,” or the character of beings as a whole. This question, according to Heidegger, receives a series of answers in the metaphysical tradition, but all of these answers are ways of determining the character of being from out of its posited ground. Whereas Aristotle thinks the ultimate ground of being as *energeia*, or as active, actual occurrence, this replaces an earlier Greek experience of the ground as *hypokeimenon*, the substantial substrate or basis in solidity and presence. According to this earlier experience, Heidegger says, the being of a being is its “let[ting] itself be seen,” which is to say its presencing and being revealed in truth. This “experience of beings in the Greek sense” permits and is permitted by, Heidegger suggests, an experience of “what ... being is” for the Greeks, namely presencing and disclosure, the truth of what shows itself from itself as it itself is. Such an experience of beings not only remains faithful to their underlying character as it shows itself but is also, Heidegger says, “so rich” and “so concrete” that its synonyms in Greek connect it to the underlying meanings of truth (*aletheia*, or unconcealment) and indeed to the very meaning of what it is to be a *phenomenon* at all. This is the occasion for Heidegger’s mention of the modern conception that he attributes to Wittgenstein, according to which all that exists is the real in the sense of the “determinable” or “determined” and there is no possibility any longer of anything like a comparable insight into the character of the *ta onta*, what determines beings as a whole.

Heidegger’s reading of Wittgenstein is a misreading in an even more direct and obvious sense than is Wittgenstein’s reading of Heidegger, forty-two years earlier. For the sentence that Heidegger here attributes to Wittgenstein is a direct misquotation. The first sentence of the *Tractatus* reads, “The world is all that is the case” (*Die Welt ist Alles, was der Fall ist.*) Heidegger misquotes this as “The *real* is what is the case” (*Wirklich ist, was der Fall ist*). This is, in fact, no innocent substitution, but in fact points to some of the deepest and most interesting issues still open between the two philosophers. We can begin to see why by considering the gloss that Heidegger immediately gives on what he takes the position that he attributes to Wittgenstein to imply. That all and only what is real (*Wirklich*) for Wittgenstein is all and only what “is the case” means, according to Heidegger’s gloss, that all that is the case, all that exists as an actual fact or real state of affairs, is what “falls under a determination, lets itself be established” or is “determinable.” This gloss is almost certainly Heidegger’s interpretation of the very next proposition of the *Tractatus*, 1.1., which holds that “The world is the totality of facts,

not of things.” In its proper context, this proposition has the effect of denying that it is possible to consider the world as a whole simply as a collection or totality (however vast) of individual things or (in the Heideggerian jargon) entities, without the further structure given by their logical articulation and formation into facts and states of affairs. For, according to Wittgenstein, “the world divides” not into things or beings but into “facts” (1.2) and “the facts in logical space are the world.” (1.13). Facts, moreover, are not individual objects but “combinations” thereof, essentially structured in such a way that they are apt to be expressed by full assertoric sentences rather than individual names.¹²

Synthesizing all of this, then, it is clear that Heidegger takes it that, for Wittgenstein, for anything to be real at all is for it to be determined or determinable as a fact, to “stand under a determination” or to “let itself be established” as the case. This is the “determination” of a subject by a predicate, or an individual by a “universal,” which is (according to the ancient tradition of logic since Aristotle although *not*, importantly, within the new Fregean logic that Wittgenstein employs) the underlying grammatical basis of the possibility of any assertoric sentence. To say that something *is the case* is then, according to Wittgenstein as Heidegger reads him, quite simply to say that an object or entity allows itself to be determined as such, to have the characteristic asserted to hold of it by a true proposition, or to allow such a proposition to be established and asserted as the truth.

Although this is again not obviously correct as an interpretation of the *Tractatus*, it goes to the heart of that book’s conception of ineffable “logical form” as the shared structure of linguistic

¹² At TLP 2.063, Wittgenstein identifies the world with “Die gesamte Wirklichkeit” or the “sum-total of reality”, and at 2.06 he says that “The existence and non-existence of states of affairs is reality” (“Das Bestehen und Nichtbestehen von Sachverhalten ist die Wirklichkeit”); along similar lines, TLP 2.04 identifies the world with the “totality of existing states of affairs” (Die Gesamtheit der Bestehenden Sachverhalte...). It is thus *possible* (though not seemingly likely, from the context) that Heidegger’s substitution of “Wirklich” for “Die Welt” in his attribution to Wittgenstein is intended as, at least in part, a gloss on these later remarks (or a combination of one or both of them with remarks 1 and/or 1.1). Even if this is so, however, there remains an important gap between the claim that the world, in the sense of all that is the case (or of the obtaining and non-obtaining of states of affairs, as in 2.06), is identifiable with “reality” (Wirklichkeit) as a *whole* and the different claim, which Heidegger effectively attributes to Wittgenstein, that the *criterion* for something’s being real (Wirklich) is its being *determinable* as a fact. I am indebted to Conrad Baetzel for pointing out the possible relevance of the remarks at TLP 2.04, 2.06, 2.063 to Heidegger’s reading of Wittgenstein here.

propositions and worldly facts that first makes possible anything like meaning and truth. On this conception, it is only by sharing a determinate logical form with a possible state of affairs that a sentence has meaning at all, and it is only by sharing the logical form of an actual obtaining state of affairs, a fact, that a proposition becomes true. It is therefore highly interesting that, a page after the remark on Wittgenstein we have just considered, Heidegger echoes a critique of the assumption of the primacy of the proposition that has very deep roots in Heidegger's own thought, extending back to *Being and Time* or before, and playing an essential role in his own very different conception of truth:

Here it is crucial to make a fundamental distinction in regard to speaking, namely by distinguishing pure nomination (*onomazein*) from the making of proposition (*legein ti kata tinous*).

In simple nomination, I let what is present be what is. Without a doubt naming includes the one who names – but what is proper to naming is precisely that the one who names intervenes only to step into the background before the being. The being then is pure phenomenon.

With a proposition, on the contrary, the one making the proposition takes part. He inserts himself into it – and he inserts himself into it as the one who ranges over the being in order to speak about it. As soon as that occurs, the being can now only be understood as *hypokeimenon* and the name only as a residue of the *apophansis*.

Today, when all language is from the outset understood as proposition, it is very difficult for us to experience naming as pure nomination, outside of all *kataphasis* and in such a way that it lets the being presence as pure phenomenon. (p. 36)

Given what has come before, this passage reads as a direct critique of Wittgenstein's position in the *Tractatus*, for which "all language" is indeed, in a certain sense at least, "from the outset understood as proposition." Heidegger opposes to this understanding and its implications for the meaning of what is said the power of a "simple nomination" that "lets what is present be what is." Here the being is not yet determined, either by the predication of a concept or by the "one making the proposition." In "what is proper to naming," the giver of the name, or the subject

capable of language and expression, “steps into the background before the being” and thus allows the being to be “pure phenomenon,” simply what appears. By contrast, in forming a proposition that asserts that something is or is the case, the user of language has always already “inserted itself into it” “as the one who ranges over the being in order to speak of it.” Here, what is to blame for the violence of a metaphysical positioning that reduces phenomena to objects and robs beings of their pure power of presencing, their capability simply to be, is nothing other than the logical structure of the proposition itself, which is on Wittgenstein’s telling, by stark contrast, formally the very basis for any conceivable possibility of meaning and truth.

Heidegger’s gloss on the remark he attributes to Wittgenstein thus allows him to oppose a logical doctrine of the proposition and its primacy to the alternative account of the disclosure and appearance of beings that he would like to preserve, an account which in its ambition to “let beings simply be” and appear in their purity, remains deeply phenomenological. What, though, about the substitution that makes Heidegger’s quotation a misquotation of the *Tractatus*, the substitution of “the real” for “the world”? Clearly, coming as it does right in the midst of a passage devoted to discussing the historical possibilities for taking into account the nature of the whole – *ta onta* or everything that is, in Heidegger’s terms, “beings as a whole” – this substitution is far from innocent and bears *directly* on the question of totality that is at issue in a different way, as we saw above, between Wittgenstein and Heidegger already in 1927-29. The German word “*Wirklich*” that Heidegger substitutes for “*Welt*” (world) here indeed means “real” and “actual,” but also has important connotations of effectivity and efficiency; what is “*Wirklich*” is not only what is real or is in being in the sense of simply existing, but also what is productive, energetic, or pro-active. Elsewhere, Heidegger had read the progressive historical determination of the nature of beings in terms of a series of transitions in the interpretation of the nature of beings as such, beginning with the ancient Greeks and culminating in modern times. The last stage in this progression, which Heidegger identifies with Nietzsche’s metaphysics of the will to power and absolute, self-positing subjectivity, indeed culminates, according to Heidegger, with the determination of beings in general as “real” in the sense of *Wirklichkeit* and effectiveness, a kind of technological regime of general, leveled effectiveness that treats all beings only in terms of their capacity instrumentally to cause and bring about determinate effects. This is nothing other, of course, than the universal reign of the thought and practice

arising from the dominance of what he calls *Gestell* or enframing, the essence of modern technology.

The substitution of “real” for “world” in Heidegger’s reading thus allows Heidegger to perform, with respect to Wittgenstein, two significant operations, both of which again preclude any real encounter between the two philosophers from taking place, but both of which also reveal what remains substantively at stake between them. The first operation is to assimilate Wittgenstein’s logical conception of truth and meaning to the outcome of what is, for Heidegger, a vast and complex *historical* process of logical and technological enframing and determination. This process already begins in a certain way with the ancient determination of the *logos* as the logic of the proposition, but does not reach its completion until the advanced stage at which all beings are understood only in terms of their effectiveness and productivity. At this stage, it is no longer possible, according to Heidegger, to have a distinctive understanding of the character of the whole of beings as such. The second operation, linked to the first, is to allow Heidegger to pass over without significant comment what is in fact Wittgenstein’s positive conception at the time of the *Tractatus* of the totality of whatever is as such, his conception of the “world” as the totality of *facts* rather than *things*. This allows Heidegger to pass over, here, the interesting question of the similarities and differences of this conception of “world” as the totality of facts to Heidegger’s own massive, complex, and changing set of references to this term, from the structural “being-in-the-world” definitive of Dasein in *Being and Time* to the epochal “strife of earth and world” in “The Origin of the Work of Art” to the late Heidegger’s critique of the “world-destroying” powers of modern technology.

What would be the result, if we did attempt to think together these two very different conceptions of world and its meaning? This is a bigger question than we have time for at present, but one preliminary thing to say is that both philosophers do indeed, as we saw in the first section above, understand the question of the totality of the world as one that is deeply and profoundly linked to the question of the expressive powers of language. To the extent that Heidegger’s standing diagnosis of “metaphysics” is that it results from the failure to respect the ontological difference between beings and Being and hence yields a series of determinations of Being as one or another individual being, we can see indeed this diagnosis as structurally similar

to Wittgenstein's diagnosis of the tendency to attempt to speak "outside language," or (in the early-Wittgenstein jargon) to mistake the "mystical" level of what can only be shown for a fact that can readily be asserted. We might indeed be tempted to extend the analogy, and suggest that, for the early Wittgenstein at least, "logical form" plays a pre-conditioning role similar to that of the interpretation of Being in terms of beings that is, for Heidegger, the essence of metaphysics. Just as, for the early Wittgenstein, it is necessary in order for anything to be said at all that it be said by means of a logically formed and structured proposition, for Heidegger the appearance of any being as such depends on the prevailing interpretation of Being that determines its epoch. Beyond these conditions, there would again be a tantalizing parallel between Wittgenstein's quasi-mystical notion of "showing" and Heidegger's phenomenologically based historical description of the changing conditions for the possibility of appearance, or for phenomena, as such. Both accounts then would seem to bear problematic witness to the possibility of a level of appearance or manifestation, beyond all facts and beings, that gives rise to the very sense with which all facts and worldly beings are endowed, the sense of the world as such.

Does this mean, then, that Wittgenstein might possibly, had he known of it, have accepted Heidegger's historical "grand narrative" of the successive transformation of the prevailing interpretations of the ground of being? In fact it does not. In the passage that refers to Wittgenstein, Heidegger describes a Greek experience of *ta onta*, an experience to which, he says, we do not have access today. Nevertheless we can still contemplate the Greek experience of the *ta onta*, which once allowed beings to show themselves "from themselves" as the pure beings that they are. This experience is an experience of wonder that connects the existence of individual beings with the experience of the whole, an experience of the conditions of presence that make it possible for any being to be. Recalling the earlier discussion, we might indeed call this an "experience of wonder" at the existence of the world, just the kind of experience that Wittgenstein discussed, both in the brief passage on Heidegger and in the "Lecture on Ethics." But it was, of course, the whole point of Wittgenstein's consideration of ethics to deny that the content of such an experience could ever successfully be expressed. For the attempt to express wonder at the existence of the world yields rather, according to Wittgenstein, only the sudden insight that there is no fact and no collection of facts whose truth – nothing, then, *within* the

world – can suffice to capture the reality of the conditions that precede all facts and all truths. But at the same time, there is no position *outside* the world either, from which what one tries to express by means of an expression of wonder at the existence of the world – or what, we may add, one might try to express by a description of the historical determination of being as presence, even the determination of the being of beings as such – could indeed be known and asserted.

III

I have argued, then, that looking at the ways both Heidegger and Wittgenstein misunderstood each other can reveal the existence of foundational problems that are still open today. There are, in particular, two interrelated problems here that I would like to emphasize as important and still lacking any obvious solution. The first is the ancient problem of the nature and structure and meaning of the *logos*, which subsumes both the more local twentieth-century philosophical inquiry into language and the methods of formal and symbolic logic that have simultaneously defined many twentieth-century approaches. The second, as we have repeatedly seen, is the problem of the totality: the problem of our access (if such there be) to the totality of the world or the being of all that is, or to whatever sets its limits or determines its extent. These problems might both perhaps be put as problems of *finitude*, although the very differences between the sense they get in both cases also serve to demonstrate how little is really determined by saying this; what might be better to say, in each case, is that the problems of the temporality of language – whether thought as the infinity of the possible repetition of a proposition, as in Wittgenstein, or as the historical and shifting meaning of key terms, as in Heidegger – serves to define the terms in which a properly finite being gains whatever problematic access it can have to the potentially infinite sense of the world.

Insofar as these entangled problems define the relationship of the two philosophers who epitomize, respectively, the analytic and continental traditions, they very much remain *our* problems, today, at least if we wish in the twenty-first century to receive the legacy of twentieth-century philosophy in anything like a unified way. However, they can be missed, and in fact are

routinely missed by contemporary interpretations. As witness to this unfortunate possibility, I wish to conclude by considering briefly an influential interpretation of the relationship between the two philosophers given by Richard Rorty in the 1989 article “Wittgenstein, Heidegger, and the reification of language.”¹³

In the article, Rorty opposes the tendency to “reify” or “hypostatize” language to his own “pragmatist” inclinations, which involve emphasizing instead the contingency of all languages and their thorough embedding in historically situated practices. This opposition produces a reading according to which Wittgenstein and Heidegger “passed each other in mid-career, going in opposite directions.” (p. 52). In particular, the story of the transition from the early to the late Wittgenstein is one of an “advance” in the direction of pragmatism which also implies, Rorty suggests, growing and eventually pervasive doubts about the very possibility of philosophy as form of positive theory, and hence the replacement of any “theory”-based conception of philosophy with the “therapy” of the later work. By contrast, on Rorty’s reading, Heidegger will have regressed from an early pragmatism that subordinates language to practices (what Rorty supposes to be the position of *Being and Time*) to a later mysticism marked by the grand being-historical narrative of the totality and closure of “Western metaphysics,” of which Rorty himself is suspicious.

Now, it is difficult to tell what specifically is involved in the “reification of language” for Rorty, but in what is more than simply an exemplary reference for him, Rorty cites and celebrates the corpus of Davidson’s investigations into meaning and radical interpretation as thoroughly dedicated to “avoiding” such “reification” by insisting:

...that we not think either of language in general or a particular language (say, English or German) as something which has edges, something which forms a bounded whole and can thus become a distinct object of study or of philosophical theorizing. (p. 58)

The attempt to theoretically trace the boundaries of language is in fact, according to Rorty, definitive of the “linguistic turn” as such, which was from the beginning rooted in an attempt to

¹³ “Wittgenstein, Heidegger, and the Reification of Language,” in *Essays on Heidegger and Others: Philosophical Papers, Volume 2* (Cambridge: Cambridge U. Press, 1991), pp. 50-65.

preserve the “purity” of philosophy relative to other disciplines and must now be considered to be definitively superseded:

What Gustav Bergmann christened ‘the linguistic turn’ was a rather desperate attempt to keep philosophy an armchair discipline. The idea was to mark off a space for *a priori* knowledge into which neither sociology nor history nor art nor natural science could intrude. It was an attempt to find a substitute for Kant’s ‘transcendental standpoint.’ The replacement of ‘mind’ or ‘experience’ by ‘meaning’ was supposed to insure the purity and autonomy of philosophy by providing it with nonempirical subject matter.

Linguistic philosophy was, however, too honest to survive. When, with the later Wittgenstein, this kind of philosophy turned its attention to the question of how such a “pure” study of language as possible, it realized that it was *not* possible – that semantics had to be naturalized if it were to be, in Donald Davidson’s phrase, ‘preserved as a serious subject.’ (p. 50)

One might easily be surprised, initially at least, at the extent to which Rorty seems here to prejudice the question of the “empirical” status of philosophy, as if there were evidently, and despite the marked critiques of empiricism and naturalism that figure prominently for both Wittgenstein and Heidegger, early and late, just nothing to be said anymore for any conception of linguistic philosophy other than the one that makes it a branch of empirical science through the project of “naturalizing” semantics.

However this might be, though, Rorty’s aim is not simply to criticize the tendency to “reify” language but to suggest that a pragmatist picture such as his own can avoid this reification and offer a better, more progressive and “liberated” perspective on the nature of language. This is the movement that Wittgenstein himself is supposed to have made from the early to the later work:

The later Wittgenstein dropped the notion of ‘seeing to the edge of language.’ He also dropped the whole idea of ‘language’ as a bounded whole which had conditions at its outer edges, as well as the project of transcendental semantics – of finding nonempirical conditions for the possibility of linguistic description. He became reconciled to the idea

that whether a sentence had sense did indeed depend upon whether another sentence was true – a sentence about the social practices of the people who used the marks and made the noises which were the components of the sentence. He thereby became reconciled to the notion that there was nothing ineffable, and that philosophy, like language, was just a set of indefinitely expansible social practices... (pp. 56-57)

I have argued, to the contrary, that we cannot really understand the position of the late Wittgenstein without considering the problems and issues involved in considering language as such, and that these problems remain connected in interesting and important ways to the questions of totality and meaning that we can take up by considering the open issue of the sense of the world. On Rorty's reading, these questions vanish in what is for him the positive transition to the late Wittgenstein's conception of multiple, situated language games, or in the early Heidegger's anti-theoretical attitude in *Being and Time*, both of which Rorty sees as essentially committed to the claim that language essentially consists in empirically tractable intersubjective social practices.

Now, in certain circles the belief that the late Wittgenstein at least indeed held such a conception of language as a social practice has become a kind of dogma of exegesis; I don't have enough time to criticize it in detail today, but perhaps it's enough simply to raise what I think is the very open and interesting question of what constitutes a "practice" for Wittgenstein at all. This is the question what it means to engage in the regularity of a kind of behavior that we may see as "our way of doing things", and how (if at all) we can assure the distinction between what counts as a regular, recognizable practice and what does not; and I think we may see this question itself as very much the crux of Wittgenstein's radical inquiry into the meaning of rules and their following. If this is indeed the deep question that I think it is for Wittgenstein, he could not have, as Rorty supposes, replaced an older conception of language as a structurally unified and bounded whole with a later conception of it as a set of "indefinitely extensible" social practices, for the question of how a social practice (or, for that matter, the use of a term) *is* extensible, under what conditions, and to what end, is more or less the most essential open question of the *Philosophical Investigations*.

This question of the extensibility of “practices” is, again, closely related to the Wittgensteinian or Heideggerian (or Davidsonian or Quinean) question of the linguistic bounds of worlds; it is, again, a question of the enigmatic conditions of our being able to “find our feet” with another, our being able (or not) to inhabit a shared community, an understanding of what is important, a sense of how to move forward. Stanley Cavell has given an apt sense of these conditions and the difficulties with which they are inherently beset in his work *The Claim of Reason*: here, Cavell emphasizes not only the universality and necessity of the mutual “attunement” which we must be able to find in our practices if they are to have meaning for us, but also the deep and startling fragility of this “attunement,” their inability to be supported in the final instance by any unproblematic theory of uniformity or regularity, and their openness at every point to the radically posed question of their possible continuance. If these questions (whether treated as questions of aesthetics, politics, technology or ethics) are indeed real ones, they remain very much questions of the problematic attempt to think the boundaries of the world in the forms of language. But these are nothing other than problems of the ever-renewed pursuit of a linguistic human life, which appears fated to take up its own future only by considering the present forms of a language whose structures define the possibilities of a human life as such, but whose being remains elusive to the theoretical attitude that would attempt to grasp them as a whole.¹⁴

¹⁴ I would like to thank Iain Thomson, Lee Braver, and the audience at the First Annual Southwest Seminar in Continental Philosophy (May 2010) for helpful comments on earlier drafts of this paper.