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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 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 the two misreadings, I shall argue, we can understand better the relationship between the two great twentieth century investigators of the still 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, 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 (1967), 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 [*das etwas existiert*]. *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 [*ob es Werte gebe*], 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

The remark 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. In that version, in both the German and English texts, Waissmann’s title, the first sentence, and the last sentence were there

² Wittgenstein (1930), p. 68.

omitted, so that the remark as a whole appeared to make no reference either to Heidegger or to Augustine.³

Whatever this might indicate about the analytic/continental divide at the time of that publication, the remark itself shows that Wittgenstein had some knowledge of the contents of *Being and Time* (which had appeared just two years before he made it) 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.”

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

³ Murray (1974). The originally published text is Waismann (1965).

⁴ Heidegger (1927) (henceforth: *S&Z*), p. 186.

had described “ethics” very briefly and elliptically as “transcendental,” holding 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 further spelled out, though, in the brief “Lecture on Ethics” that Wittgenstein had delivered to the “Heretics Society” in Cambridge on November 17, 1929, six weeks before the remark on Heidegger.⁶ In the “Lecture,” Wittgenstein considers the status of what he calls, partially following Moore, “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.”⁷ This is because all facts are, in themselves, on the same level, and no fact is inherently more valuable than any other (cf. *TLP* 6.4). In a book written by an omniscient author and containing descriptions of all bodies and their movements as well as all human states of mind and thus containing “the whole description of the world,” there would nevertheless be no *ethical* judgments, or anything implying one, for even statements of relative value or descriptions of human states of mind would themselves simply be descriptions of facts. It follows that there can be no science of Ethics, for “nothing we could ever think or say should be *the* thing.”⁸

Nevertheless there remains a *temptation* to use expressions such as “absolute value” and “absolute good.”⁹ 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:

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.’¹⁰

⁵ Wittgenstein (1921) (henceforth: *TLP*), 6.41-6.42.

⁶ Wittgenstein (1929), pp. 36-44.

⁷ Wittgenstein (1929), p. 39.

⁸ Wittgenstein (1929), p. 40.

⁹ Wittgenstein (1929), p. 40.

¹⁰ Wittgenstein (1929), p. 41.

A 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 see "as it were in a flash of light," that every *possible* attempt to describe absolute value would yield only nonsense, rooted in the desire "*to go beyond* the world and that is to say beyond significant language."¹¹

What is nevertheless expressed in metaphors such as these – metaphors such as that of the vast structural correspondence of language and world, the coming into existence or creation of the world itself, or (as Wittgenstein also suggests in the "Lecture"), the "great and elaborate allegory" which represents God as seeing everything, but also as "a human being of great power whose grace we try to win"¹² As Wittgenstein notes in the "Lecture," the curious peculiarity of metaphors of this type is that, while metaphors more generally are metaphors *for* something, these cannot be replaced with the "literal" description of the facts they are metaphors for, since there are no such facts.¹³ That they nevertheless arise at the point of the temptation which also yields the incoherent attempt to mark the place of *absolute* value might then be thought to indicate that their attempt is also the one that thought makes in trying to touch a point of the absolute, the real corresponding to the totality of the world or its grasping as a whole from a point beyond it, the point at which the value of the world – if it has value – *could* be assayed.¹⁴ The price of this attempt, however, is the admission of its necessary failure, the impossibility of anchoring thought at such a point of the real without contradiction, paradox, or the nonsense of

¹¹ Wittgenstein (1929), p. 44.

¹² Wittgenstein (1929), p. 42.

¹³ Wittgenstein (1929), pp. 42-43.

¹⁴ Cf. *TLP* 6.41.

metaphors that cannot be cashed in for their literal meaning, since what they stand for is, literally, nothing.

Returning to the remark of December 30, Wittgenstein's suggestion here is, then, that all of the philosophers he mentions (Moore, Augustine, and Kierkegaard as much as Heidegger) can in fact be read, in different ways, as having *understood* this impossibility for ethics or ethical propositions to come to expression. The theory of ethics is 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 yield 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 that we may express as our astonishment that anything exists at all.

Something very similar is indeed suggested by Heidegger's notorious discussion of being and nothingness in the Freiburg inaugural lecture "What is Metaphysics?", delivered on July 24, 1929.¹⁵ Here, the experience of "the Nothing" [*das Nichts*] 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."¹⁶ 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."¹⁷ This experience also gestures toward a kind of dysfunction of speech and *logos*:

¹⁵ Heidegger (1929).

¹⁶ Heidegger (1929), pp. 99-100.

¹⁷ Heidegger (1929), p. 101.

“Anxiety robs us of speech” and “in the face of anxiety all utterance of the ‘is’ falls silent.”¹⁸ 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.¹⁹

It would thus 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 significant 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 essentially a misreading. For *Being and Time* contains no detailed or even very explicit theory of language as such, let alone the possibility of running up against its boundaries or limits. And insofar as *Being and Time* discusses language (*die Sprache*), the discussion is almost wholly subordinated to the discussion of *Rede* or concretely practiced discourse, something which does not obviously have boundaries at all.²⁰

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 [*die Rede*].”²¹ Language is “the way discourse gets expressed.”²² Discourse is itself the “articulation of intelligibility” and as such an articulation, is always separable into isolated “significations” or “meanings” [*Bedeutungen*].²³ Nevertheless the “worldly” character of discourse as an “articulation of the intelligibility of the ‘there’” means

¹⁸ Heidegger (1929), p. 101.

¹⁹ Heidegger (1929), p. 105.

²⁰ S&Z, section 34.

²¹ S&Z, p. 160.

²² S&Z, p. 161.

²³ S&Z, p. 161.

that it yields a “totality-of-significations” [*Bedeutungsganze*] which can then be “put into words” or can “come to word” (*kommt zu Wort*).²⁴ Language can then be defined as a totality of (spoken or written) words; in this totality “discourse has a ‘worldly’ Being of its own.”²⁵ 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.”²⁶ 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.”²⁷ These possibilities, as possibilities of discursive speech, disclose “for the first time” “the constitutive function of discourse for the existentiality of existence.”²⁸ But they are not in any direct way connected to the ontological structure of language itself, which must, Heidegger says, still be worked out.²⁹

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 indication of the limits 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 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

²⁴ S&Z, p. 161.

²⁵ S&Z, p. 161.

²⁶ S&Z, p. 161.

²⁷ S&Z, pp. 163-64.

²⁸ S&Z, p. 161.

²⁹ S&Z, p. 166.

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 how the tendency to speak beyond them 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."³⁰

Heidegger's remarks on the Nothing and anxiety in "What is Metaphysics?" were famously the basis for Carnap's dismissive 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.³¹ 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."³² 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 mistake simply to identify Wittgenstein's conception of logical structure with that of Carnap, for

³⁰ "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)

³¹ Carnap (1932).

³² S&Z, p. 165.

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 of those limits beyond which we cannot speak: here was not, then, the excessive “beyond” of meaninglessness grounded in the violation of fixed logical rules but the very possibility of a “mystical” or “aesthetic” vision of the world, the vision *sub specie aeternae* of the world “as a limited whole.”³³

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 imposed in his critical remarks on Heidegger, 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, 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 thus 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 transcendental; and though it is not obvious where solutions may lie, it seems that this question remains very much with us today.

³³ *TLP* 6.421; 6.45. Partisans of the so-called “resolute” interpretation of the *Tractatus* typically oppose the claim that there is a *substantive* vision of the world that is mentioned or gestured at here, holding rather that the ethical sense of these remarks is exhausted by their use in exposing to critique our temptations to attempt to speak “metaphysically” of the world as a whole from beyond its boundaries. I do not take a position in the dispute between “resolute” and other more traditional interpretations here (but for some discussion of the issues, see e.g. Livingston (2008), chapter 3 and Livingston (2012), chapter 5.

II

Heidegger's remark on Wittgenstein comes almost forty years later, in one of Heidegger's very last seminars, the last of three seminars the aging philosopher held in Le Thor, France.³⁴ The seminar as a whole is ostensibly directed to the elucidatory discussion of Kant's pre-critical work "The Sole Possible Proof for a Demonstration of the Existence of God", and more specifically to its first chapter, on "existence as a whole" (*Vom Dasein Überhaupt*), though there is in fact little explicit discussion of Kant anywhere in the seminar.³⁵ The mention of Wittgenstein, however, comes early in the course of the first seminar session, on September 2, 1969:

So we pose the question: what does the 'question of being' mean? [*was besagt "Frage nach dem Sein"?*] 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? If one says 'being', 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 [*was das Seiende bestimmt, sofern es Seiendes ist*]. 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 [*die Frage nach dem Grund des Seienden*].

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?" [*Was ist das Seiende als Seiendes?*] – 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 [*die Auslegung des Seienden und keineswegs des Seins*]. In the most concrete terms, *hypokeimenon* is the presencing [*das Anwesen*] 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

³⁴ Heidegger (1969).

³⁵ Kant (1763).

[*das Seiende in seiner Lage, so wie es sich sehen läßt*], and this means: that which is there before the eyes, as it brings itself forth from itself [*das, was da ist, vor den Augen, wie es da von sich selbst her sich hinzieht*]. 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 [*das Seiende im Ganzen*] – *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” [*bei Wittgenstein heißt es: “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” [*das Seiende*]. In so doing, there is no understanding of what is being for the Greeks [*hat man kein Verständnis für das eröffnet, was für den Griechen das Seiende ist*]. It is authentically: *ta alethea*, what is revealed in unconcealment [*das Offenbare in der Unverborgenheit*], what postpones concealment for a time; it is *ta phainomena*, what here shows itself from itself [*was sich von sich selbst her zeigt*].³⁶

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, though, as Heidegger clarifies, the relevant “question of Being” here is not simply 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 various bases that determine, in *each* of the various conceptions or *epochs* that comprise the history of metaphysics, beings *as such and*

³⁶ Heidegger (1969), pp. 35-36.

as a whole.³⁷ The problem, as Heidegger explains elsewhere, is now one of thinking what *variously* determines the ways – now in the plural – that beings as such and as a whole can be thought and experienced, and thinking this determining instance now, no longer itself in terms of beings but only in terms of being itself. This is the question of the historical *truth* of being, or of how being itself gives or grants itself in or as its event of *Ereignis*, by grounding – in *various* and historically variable ways -- the possibility of conceiving of and experiencing beings in their totality. From the initial Platonic understanding of beings as determined by the “being-ness” of the *idea*, through the Medieval conception of God as the *summa ens* and the modern metaphysics of subjectivity and up to the contemporary regime of dominant technology, this question of grounding, according to Heidegger, receives a series of different answers in the metaphysical tradition.³⁸ But all of these answers are ways of determining the character of *beings as a whole* by opening or projecting their sense.

How, though, does Heidegger here understand *sense*? The conception of sense as a projective *grounding* of entities as a whole is continuous with *Being and Time*'s definition, and consideration, of sense as projective comportment toward entities on the ground of possibilities.³⁹ In *Being and Time*, this projective comportment is itself intimately related to Dasein's capacity or structure of world-disclosure, and to the way in which this structure allows entities to appear as unconcealed or in truth.⁴⁰ With the “turn” from *Being and Time*'s analytic of Dasein to the later, “being-historical” project, truth, world-disclosure, and projective sense are no longer grounded simply or exclusively in Dasein, but rather in the *prior* structure of a “clearing” or “open” which is *itself* a precondition for Dasein as well.⁴¹ The structure of this clearing, and its relation to Being itself – now understood primarily not as “the being of beings” but rather in *independence* of entities – allows for the clearing and grounding relation that

³⁷ Cf., e.g., Heidegger's opening discussion of the transition from the “guiding question” of the being of beings to the “grounding question” of the truth of being in the *Beiträge zur Philosophie* (Heidegger 1938, pp. 6-8). For the language of “beings as such and as a whole,” see, e.g., (Heidegger 1969b, p. 67.)

³⁸ In the 1957 lecture “The Onto-Theo-Logical Constitution of Metaphysics,” Heidegger discusses the “historical stampings” [*geschicklichen Prägungen*] of being as “*phusis, logos, hen, idea, energeia*, substantiality [Substantialität], objectivity, subjectivity, will, will to power, will to will.” (Heidegger 1969b, p. 134). For a helpful discussion, see also Thomson (2005), esp. chapter 1.

³⁹ S&Z, p. 151.

⁴⁰ S&Z, sect. 44.

⁴¹ E.g. Heidegger (1938), pp. 75-77.

multiply determines, over the course of the epochal determinations of metaphysical thought and practice, the character of beings as a whole.

In particular (returning to the 1969 passage), whereas Aristotle thinks the ultimate *ground* of beings as a whole as *energeia*, or as active, actual occurrence, a being or entity itself is here thought as *hypokeimenon*, or as substance. The experience of the *hypokeimenon*, as it is thought and undergone by the Greeks, is one of the being of a being is its “let[ting] itself be seen,” its basic 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.

At the same time, however, understanding the individual being or entity as *hypokeimonon* already essentially involves understanding it in relation to the structure of a *logos*: in particular, the *hypokeimonon* is *something about which* we speak, what is named in the grammatical subject of a sentence. For Aristotle and the Greeks more generally, the definitive character of individual entities is thus understood *on the logical basis* of the structure of the assertoric sentence, the *legein ti kata tinon* (i.e. a saying of something about something). This understanding already portrays the character of the being – here, the substantial bearer of the reference of the grammatical subject – as that which is logically or linguistically determinable by means of a predicative sentence that ascribes to it properties or determinations. This is the occasion for Heidegger’s reference to the contemporary conception that he attributes to Wittgenstein, according to which all that exists is the real in the sense of the logically and predicatively “determinable” or “determined” and there is, he suggests, accordingly no possibility any longer of anything like a comparable insight into the character of the *ta onta*, what opens or grounds beings as a whole.

However this may be, Heidegger’s reading of Wittgenstein is nevertheless a misreading, in an even more direct way than is Wittgenstein’s earlier reading of Heidegger. 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*]. And this is, in fact, no innocent substitution. 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 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) beings (or 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.⁴²

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, an individual by a “universal,” or an object by a concept, which is

⁴² 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.

(variously thought) 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 in such a way, 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.

What, though, is involved in this determination or determinability, or in the submission of the nature of entities in general to their ability to serve as substrates or objects for predication in an assertoric sentence? Heidegger here echoes a critique of the assumption of the primacy of the assertion that has deep roots in his own thought, extending back the historical investigations into the original constitution and meaning of sentential logic that he undertook already in the series of lecture courses immediately preceding the writing and publication of *Being and Time*:

Here it is important to make a fundamental distinction in regard to speaking, namely to distinguish pure naming (*onomazein*) from the assertion [*Aussage*] (*legein ti kata tinou*).

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

With the assertion, on the contrary, the one asserting takes part in that 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 from out of the assertion [*von der Aussage her*], 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.⁴³

As Heidegger goes on to suggest, the determination of the being or phenomenon – what it is for something to appear in presence – in terms of the assertion and its logical structure of “saying

⁴³ Heidegger (1969), p. 36 (translation slightly modified).

something about something” is already on the way to the representational distinction between subject and object that is introduced explicitly by Descartes and reaches the highest point of its development in Kant and Hegel. Whereas, for the Greeks, “things appear,” for Kant, “things appear to me;” this is the ultimate consequence of Descartes’ identification of an absolute ground in subjective consciousness and his placement of the human “in his position as *representer*.”⁴⁴ After Kant, Hegel then furthers the articulation of the distinction between subject and object by insisting on the subjective as mediation and thus as the essential dialectical “core” of objectivity. The whole development involves an ever-greater distancing from the original “Greek experience of being as phenomenon,” insofar as it means that the subject of consciousness is, in an ever more thorough way, placed at the basis of the representative presentation of objects, and the simple experience of beings presencing of themselves is thereby rendered more and more inaccessible. But the ultimate historical basis for this is to be found in the original conception whereby the beings are, as such, thought as determinable on the basis of the logical structure of the assertoric sentence itself, which is on the early Wittgenstein’s telling, by stark contrast, formally the very basis for any conceivable possibility of meaning and truth.

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 1929. In particular, 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

⁴⁴ Heidegger (1969), pp. 36-37.

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.⁴⁵

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. Within this dominance, it is no longer possible, Heidegger goes on to assert, to experience the “overabundance” or “excess” of what presences that the Greeks saw in the “coming-forth-out-of-concealment” characteristic for them of *phusis* and definitive of the phenomenal character of the phenomenon. Rather, “In extreme opposition to this [Greek overabundance], one can say that when the astronauts set foot on the moon, the moon *as* moon disappeared. It no longer rose or set. It is now only a calculable parameter for the technological enterprise of humans.”⁴⁶

However, *is* Wittgenstein’s understanding of the way the structure and form of the world is determined by the logical structure of the sentence – the *Tractatus* conception of the world as the totality of articulate facts – in fact an example of an “enframing” attitude in this sense, a positioning of the subject or its will as the ultimate agency of effective representational control, calculation, and production? There are many reasons to doubt it. To begin with, Wittgenstein’s concern in the *Tractatus* is not primarily with the *assertion* [*Aussage*] in the sense of the subjective or agentive *act* of asserting something about something, but rather with the structure of the “assertoric” *sentence* [*Satz*], which itself and independently of any *specific* agent says *that* something is the case. Sentences are connected to the worldly states of affairs they describe not

⁴⁵ See, e.g., Heidegger (1941, p. 445 (transl. slightly modified)): “The precedence of what is real [*der Vorrang des Wirklichen*] furthers the oblivion of Being [*betreibt die Vergessenheit des Seins*]. Through this precedence, the essential relation to Being which is to be sought in properly conceived thinking is buried. In being claimed by beings [*in der Beanspruchung durch das Seiende*], man takes on the role of the authoritative [*maßgebende*] being. As the relation to beings, that knowing suffices [*genügt das Erkennen*] which, according to the essential manner of beings [*Wensensart des Seienden*] in the sense of the planned and secured real [*des planbar gesicherten Wirklichen*] must issue into objectification and thus to calculation [*in der Vergegenständlichung aufgehen und so zum Rechnen werden muß*]. The sign of the degradation of thinking [*Herabsetzung des Denkens*] is the elevation of logistics [*Hinaufsetzung der Logistik*] to the rank of the true logic. Logistics is the calculable [*rechenhafte*] organization of the unconditional lack of knowledge [*der unbedingten Unwissenheit*] about the essence of thinking, provided that thinking, essentially thought, is that projecting knowledge which issues from Being in the preservation of truth’s essence [*das in der Bewahrung des Wesens der Wahrheit aus dem Sein aufgeht*].”

⁴⁶ Heidegger (1969), p. 38.

by means of any kind of subjective act of asserting, positing, or the like, but by their correspondence in logical form with the possible situations they describe. The possibilities of this correspondence or non-correspondence, though they are not dependent in any obvious way on subjective decision, activity, or willful determination, nevertheless give the sentence its sense (4.2). “The subject” enters as such only very differently from this, as the transcendental “limit of the world” (5.632) and as what is manifest in the fact that “the world is my world” and “the limits of language (of that language which alone I understand) mean the limits of *my* world” (5.62). In this sense, “There is no such thing as the subject that thinks or entertains ideas.” (5.631). Moreover, since all facts are contingencies and there is thus no *logical* necessity to the determination of the result of a willed action, the attempt to produce the good by controlling and calculating effective outcomes must be futile as well: “The world is independent of my will.” (6.373).

For all of these reasons, Heidegger’s suggestion that Wittgenstein’s conception of sentential articulation involves a criterion or structure of *determination* that itself is one of subjective agency appears misplaced, and his seeming assimilation of 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 accordingly misleading. What, though, of the contrast that Heidegger draws *between* the articulate structure of the sentence or assertion – the structure of the *legein ti kata tinon* or the “saying of something about something” – and the simple and direct naming, which by contrast (for Heidegger) “lets the being be” in its direct and immediate presence? One might certainly see parallels between Heidegger’s underscoring of the distinction and the two levels of connection between language and the world that the *Tractatus*’ official theory of truth and reference maintains, those of names on the one hand and descriptive sentences on the other. Here, in particular, it is necessary for the sense of the sentence, and especially for its ability in general to be true *or* false, that it be ultimately composed of simple names that are, by contrast, directly correlated to objects and that these objects accordingly *must* exist in order for sense to be possible at all.⁴⁷ 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

⁴⁷ TLP 2.02-2.0212; 3.142; 3.203-3.23.

and worldly beings are endowed. Nevertheless, the *Tractatus*' posing of the *requirement* for the objects correspondent to simple names or namings, far from simply "letting beings be," immediately raises the question of the basis for the institution of the names of things, the problem of the ground of the necessity of their presence, what appears in the *Tractatus* as the basis of the very substance of the world.⁴⁸

This is, however, one of the central problems that is taken up in a renewed fashion, alongside the critical interrogation of the necessitating *force* of logic and of the efficacy of rules in the determination of their instances, in the *Philosophical Investigations*. Here, the later Wittgenstein's critique of the metaphysical picture of the *Tractatus* takes the initial form of an interrogation of the assumption of what "has" to exist on the level of the bearers of simple names, and a correspondent investigation of the idea that the speaking or understanding of a language consists in the operation of a calculus according to definite rules.⁴⁹ The two skeins of critical interrogation that define the main argumentative movement of the *Investigations*, the so-called "private language argument" and the "rule-following considerations", develop these lines of inquiry in a more general and broadly indicative way, critically investigating and raising deep problems, respectively, for the assumption of a privileged site for the naming of being in the subjective presence of self to self, and that of a guarantee of the unitary sense of a word in the effective repeatability of the rule as a self-identical structure unto infinity. If the critical investigation of these problems necessarily displaces the theoretical tendency to assume in advance that there must be only *one* essence of language or one way of characterizing or understanding the structure of the determination of sense in the instances of our lives, it is nevertheless possible to see both lines of critique as embodying complementary challenges to the unitary configuration of assumptions broadly characteristic of a form of life that is, today, recognizably "ours". This is the configuration of, on the one hand, the capable subject of lived experience which makes the possibility of representational experiencing the criterion for the actuality of any object, and on the other, the effectiveness of regular and rule-defined processes

⁴⁸ TLP 2.021, 2.026.

⁴⁹ Wittgenstein (1953), sect. 50, 81.

of calculation, regulation, modification and control in handling, producing, and economizing beings.⁵⁰

What, then, finally is the force and effectivity of logic in relation to the relevant actions and events of this life? This problem is not only the one that led Frege somewhat problematically to introduce into his strictly logical vocabulary for the expression of inferential relations among contents a distinct symbolism for the separate operation of (assertoric) force or judgment.⁵¹

More broadly and in terms of the significance that both Heidegger and Wittgenstein ultimately see it as having, it is also the problem of the effectivity of systematic, mechanical, formal or calculative rules in general in determining the totality of their instances and ensuring the smooth functioning of the techniques, institutions, practices, and systems governed by them.

Correspondent to this figure of the effective functioning of rules on the level of the subject is the figure of the human speaker of language as their capable agent. But if the role of practices in our life were to be thought beyond the figure of human capacity – if, in other words, the possibilities of our world or life, as we meet them in the language that we speak and grasp them in the kind of being that we are, were determined otherwise than on the basis of the subjective capacities of an effective human agent, to what kind of domain for reflective consideration might this lead?

In closing the seminar session of September 2, 1969, Heidegger again looks back at the problematic of *Being and Time*. In that book, Heidegger says, the question of being is already posed primarily not as the question “What is a being?” but rather as “What is this ‘is’?” The question, thus posed, immediately runs into the “difficulty” that “if the ‘is’ *is*, then it is a being;” whereas if it *is* not, then it appears to be “bare and empty,” even perhaps (Heidegger suggests) to be nothing more than the “empty copula of a judgment.” It was in order to “come out of this aporia,” Heidegger suggests, that *Being and Time* posed the question of the “is” “from the perspective of the *sense* of Being,” understanding “sense” specifically as a “project” of “understanding.” But this way of formulating the question was, Heidegger now says, “inappropriate” in that it made it “all too possible to understand the ‘project’ as a human performance” and as a “structure of subjectivity” – this is indeed specifically, Heidegger

⁵⁰ Cf. Livingston (2003).

⁵¹ See, e.g., Frege (1915) for the problem of the separation of assertoric force from content.

suggests, how Sartre understands it in his own philosophy, which bases itself (he suggests), in this respect, upon Descartes. Nevertheless, beyond or before the assumption of such a constitutive subject of sense, it is possible, Heidegger suggests, to take up the problem of the “is” rather as a problem of *truth*, here understood as the pre- or non-subjective structural *basis* for opening and grounding disclosure of being:

In order to counter this mistaken conception [of the “project” as subjective -PL] and to retain the meaning of “project” as it is to be taken (that of the opening disclosure), the thinking after *Being and Time* replaced the expression “meaning of being” with “truth of being.” And in order to avoid any falsification of the sense of truth, in order to exclude its being understood as correctness, “truth of being” was explained by “location of being” [*Ortschaft*] – truth as locality [*Örtlichkeit*] of being. This already presupposes, however, an understanding of the place-being of place. Hence the expression *topology of be-ing* [*Topologie des Seyns*]...

The problematic of the topology of being to which Heidegger here gestures is, then, nothing other than the consideration of the structure through which being grants the sense and truth of beings, or (in other terms) how it grants the possibility of a world.

III

I have suggested that the missed encounter between Wittgenstein and Heidegger conceals foundational problems about logic, sense, meaning and the totality of the world that are still substantially unsolved today. One of these is the ancient problem of the nature and force 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. Here, as we have seen, there is co-implicit a broad problem of *force*: what is the basis and status of the force of logical rules and laws, or of their actual effectiveness in relation to the activities, techniques, and practices that increasingly characterize life on the planet today? Another, closely related problem, as we have repeatedly seen, is the problem of the *totality*: the problem of our relation (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. Without diminishing the difficulty of the issues involved in the formulation, both of these problems might also be put, it seems, as problems of *finitude*: that is, as problems about how a properly finite being has whatever problematic relationship it can have, whether in thought or in action, to what we might understand as the “infinite” dimension of sense, up to and including the sense of the world.⁵²

Seen in this way, the problematic of the logic and sense of the world is, to begin with, a problem of limits. How is a being *in* the world nevertheless capable of grasping something *of* the world as a whole in which it exists, if it is capable of doing so at all? That both Heidegger and Wittgenstein see the question of the totality of the world as one that is linked to the question of the expressive or descriptive powers of language suggests, as we have seen, that it is to be addressed only by means of a renewed reflection on language’s forms, and on the historical and contemporary structures in which they allow themselves to be thought or presented. But that both also mark the problem as one in which language positively confronts its own limits in the necessary inexpressibility of whatever lies beyond the world suggests that we may draw from both philosophers the indication of a necessary complication, inherent to the problematic of sense, in the topology or limitology that is thereby invoked. In particular, that “being itself is not a being,” and that “whereof we cannot speak, there we must be silent” might then be the problematic claims through which, if it follows the suggestions made by both Heidegger and

⁵² At *TLP* 6.41, Wittgenstein uses the phrase “the sense of the world,” saying specifically that it “must lie outside the world.” What does he mean by it? The paragraph goes on to deny that there is value (“Wert”) *in* the world, since “in the world everything is as it is, and everything happens as it does happen,” and moreover “all that happens and is the case is accidental.” In terms of the *Tractatus*’ structure of logical importance, the remark is moreover directly subordinate to 6.4, which states simply that “All propositions are of equal value.” [*Alle Sätze sind gleichwertig.*] Sense, value, and the non-accidental are, here, all closely aligned with one another, and jointly opposed to the totality of the world, understood as the totality of what can be described in (contingent) propositions. The “sense of the world” is thus, it is reasonable to assume, connected with the *source* of whatever value the world has, and it may not be amiss to understand this source as the “metaphysical subject” which “does not belong to the world” but is rather “a limit of the world” (5.632), and is thus to be sharply distinguished from the “subject that thinks or entertains ideas” [*das denkende, Vorstellende, Subjekt*] (which itself, according to 5.631, does not exist) (On the other hand, it may also not be incorrect to understand “the sense of the world” in terms of the characterization of “sense” suggested (e.g.) at 3.11-3.12, according to which a proposition is a sign “in its projective relation to the world” and the “method of projection” is “to think of” the proposition’s sense. Synthesizing all of this, then, the “sense of the world” might be taken to be what is (as it were) projected in a thinking of the sense of the *totality* of propositions – or of propositions as such -- from the “perspective” of the “metaphysical subject.” But this would again be sharply distinguished from anything that is or could be thought or represented by the (actually non-existent) *innerworldly* “subject that thinks” or represents.

Wittgenstein, a future inquiry might pursue the question of the ultimate dispensation of sense as we meet with it in the forms of our lives.

But *is* there a world, for us, today? If, as I have suggested, both Wittgenstein and Heidegger point to the question of the force of *logos* and logic in relation to the totality of the world, then the single question that is formulated by both may be put as the question of *realism* about the world as such a totality. This question bears close connections to the broader questions of realism and anti-realism that many contemporary and recent analytic and continental figures have discussed from different perspectives, and using various definitions of the terms. But because its topic is the world as a whole, it is distinct from the question of realism about any kind of entity or entities in any of their aspects (even “as they are in themselves”) or in general. It is also not primarily to be posed as the question of how or whether specific entities are conditioned by our epistemic “access” to them or (as we have seen) as that of the dependence of being or truth on our specifically *human* constitution or capacities (unless this just means the capacities that can be possessed by a being that can speak and *understand* language, and hence grasp sense, at all). In particular, if the twentieth-century linguistic turn, in both its “analytic” and “continental” variants, already witnesses a decisive turn away from the idea of epistemology as “first” philosophy and toward a variety of practices of philosophical analysis and reflection grounded in the consideration of linguistic structure and sense, then it is plausibly no longer adequate in its wake to pose the question of realism about the world as one of the limits of our knowledge or epistemic access, or about the conditions under which a “subject” can have knowledge of “objects”. Rather, the question here to be formulated is, precisely, about *sense*: about if and how the world is meaningfully “given” as an intelligible whole to understanding or reasoning, or about whether the *idea* of such a whole, as what provides the broadest and most possible condition for the sense of things, is even so much as coherent.⁵³

⁵³ It is here we can see the specific limitation, with respect to the current problematic, of Quentin Meillassoux’s recent realist challenge to what he calls “correlationism,” understood as a broad label for any position that holds that “we can only ever have access to the correlation between thinking and being, and never to either term considered apart from the other” and hence that (as he puts it) it is impossible “to consider the realms of subjectivity and objectivity independently of one another” (Meillassoux (2008), p. 5). This is reasonable as a characterization of some Kantian and post-Kantian idealist philosophy, but when Meillassoux goes on to attribute such a “correlationism” to both Heidegger and Wittgenstein (pp. 41-42), he misses the essential way in which the question of sense articulates both of their projects differently than any that accords a central role to questions of

Posed this way, the question asks in “linguistic mode” whether there is a *thinkable* totality of all that is that is also, in some “logical” sense, a unity: a *one* whose composition or structure is itself intelligible on the basis of a formal consideration of it.

In fact, this question was already central to discussion “between” recognizable ancestors of the analytic and continental traditions, long before the linguistic turn itself. The negative answer to it given by Kant in the argument of the “Antinomies” section of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, for instance, points to the broadly logical paradoxes that he took to be involved in any conception of the world as a completed totality of phenomena, while one of Hegel’s main goals in the *Science of Logic* was to overcome this Kantian antinomic reasoning by means of a speculative picture of the ultimate reconciliation of the paradoxes of the whole at the level of the Absolute.⁵⁴ Whereas Husserl, in his later phenomenology, treated the world (in one of its senses) as the indeterminate but always-expansible horizon of possible experience, his analysis of meaning and sense also pointed to what he saw as its basis in the pre- or proto-rational foundation of the everyday “lifeworld.” In the early decades of what would become the “analytic” tradition, the question already posed by Kant received a more rigorous kind of formulation through Cantor’s set theory and the paradoxes of totality – most decisively, Russell’s paradox of the set of all sets not members of themselves – that appeared to show the impossibility of maintaining without contradiction the existence of a total set or set of all sets.⁵⁵

Today, differing answers to the question of the world also situate and articulate key contemporary projects of both “analytic” and “continental” philosophers. On the one hand, recent prominent projects in “analytic” metaphysics, such as David Chalmers’ *Constructing the World* and Ted Sider’s *Reading the Book of the World*, have essentially presupposed or relied upon the coherence of the idea of the world in their strongly constructivist or naturalist projects of analyzing its structure.⁵⁶ On the other, recent positions of a more directly continental lineage

(epistemic) “access”, subjectivity, and objectivity. As a result, the critique fails to meet its target and many of the positions based on it largely miss the significance for the question of realism of the twentieth-century linguistic turn itself (see Livingston (2013) for a more detailed development of this point).

⁵⁴ See Hegel (1812), especially pp. 157-65.

⁵⁵ For connections and parallels between Kant’s cosmological antinomies and set-theoretical paradox, see, e.g., Hallett (1986), pp. 223- 234; Moore (1990), pp. 149-51; and Priest (2002), pp. 87-102.

⁵⁶ This is not to say, of course, that contemporary representatives of the “analytic” tradition are univocal in considering the idea of the totality of the world to be intelligible. An important strand of contemporary

set out, by contrast, from a radical denial of the existence of a totality of all that is. For example, early in his 1988 *Being and Event*, Alain Badiou declares as a fundamental motivating basis for his project of set-theoretical ontology that “the one *is not*,” or more specifically that there is no *total* domain of entities, objects, facts or phenomena.⁵⁷ This claim of radical non-totality is in one sense an axiomatic decision, but Badiou also seeks to motivate it on the level of ontological reflection by considering the implications of Russell’s paradox of the set of all sets that are not elements of themselves.⁵⁸ Here, therefore, the world is understood as radically *incomplete*, or as fundamentally incapable of being gathered into a single totality, on pain of irreducible contradiction or paradox.⁵⁹

From this perspective, the requirement to maintain the consistency of the language in which beings and phenomena are presented itself requires the non-existence of the world as such and in the singular; this position is extended, but not fundamentally modified, in Badiou’s 2006 sequel, *Logics of Worlds*, which posits an irreducible plurality of worlds as individually structured domains of presentation, each with its own (generally non-classical but consistent) logic. But another possibility, very much within the matrix of the same problems but suggesting a radically different answer to them, is the one explored by Graham Priest in a series of works: to explore the structure of the paradoxes that arise necessarily on the assumption of the existence of a totality of all that can be thought, or all that is linguistically expressible, or the “One” of all that is, accommodating them within a *paraconsistent* logic (one that does not assume the principle of

argumentation, inherited ultimately from the later Carnap’s idea of a plurality of language frameworks (see Carnap (1950)) and perhaps passing through Putnam’s “internal realism”, challenges the idea of a unitary world by maintaining that any description of facts or phenomena is irreducibly situated within one or another theory, domain of discourse, or set of logical operators. This strand of argumentation is also by no means limited to projects that continue to see themselves as situated within the “linguistic turn” itself, but is just as often today articulated in terms of “metaphysical” or “metametaphysical” claims about the scope and structure of logic quite irrespective of considerations about natural languages (as recent discussions about “quantifier variance,” for example, witness.)

⁵⁷ Badiou (1988), pp. 23-25.

⁵⁸ Badiou (1988), p. 31; pp. 38-48.

⁵⁹ For a closely related recent argument for the non-existence of the world in this sense, made from a partly Schellingian perspective, see Gabriel (2013).

ex falso quodlibet, according to which anything at all can be inferred from a contradiction) and maintaining the existence of actually true contradictions.⁶⁰

If, then, these various contemporary projects are united in giving a presuppositional or foundational status to one or another assumption about the way in which formal and logical reasoning captures, or indicates the limits of, a consideration of the world as a whole, it appears possible to pose the question that divides them, that of the way in which formalism, at its limits, itself articulates the logical or meta-logical structure of the world as such. This is not, importantly, a question about the powers or limits of *specific* natural/historical languages, such as they might be thought to show up in the problems of mutual translation or in the question of the “incommensurability” of various languages with one another. It is, rather, essential to its posing – and, as I have argued, urgent in receiving the legacy of Wittgenstein and Heidegger – to understand it as a question about the structure and limits of language in the *singular*, or of language as such.

It is true that twentieth century and contemporary inheritors of the linguistic turn, even and perhaps even especially in light of interpretations of Wittgenstein or Heidegger or both, have often denied the existence of any such thing, declaring rather the moral of an irreducible contingency and irremediable plurality. On this kind of position, there are indeed worlds in the plural, correspondent to the variety of cultures, languages, or practices, but there is no *one* world, correlative to language as such, as the totality of all that is or all that can be said or meant.⁶¹

⁶⁰ See, e.g., Priest (2002); Priest (2014); Priest (2015). For a formally based framework that situates the differing positions outlined here in terms of the orientations of thought they represent, see Livingston (2012), chapter 1.

⁶¹ Cf. the conclusion that Richard Rorty draws from a consideration of the positions and development of the early and late Wittgenstein as well as the early and late Heidegger in his 1989 article, “Wittgenstein, Heidegger and the Reification of Language.” 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.” (Rorty (1989), p. 52), the former “advancing” in the direction of pragmatism and the rejection of the very idea of philosophy as positive theory, while the latter regressed from the social pragmatism formulated (on Rorty’s reading) in *Being and Time* to the later mysticism marked by the grand being-historical narrative of the totality and closure of “Western metaphysics,” a narrative of which Rorty himself is suspicious. Both Rorty’s characterization of the developments of the two philosophers and his critique of the tendency to “reify” language are, however, consequences of his own presumptive dismissal of the problematic of language and world that we have considered here: according to Rorty, for example, it is essential in avoiding the “reification” that he inveighs against “that we not think either of language in general or a particular language (say, English or German) as something which has edges, something

The index and proof of this radical nonexistence of the world-in-the-singular is often, here, the presumptive incommensurability of languages and cultures, the salutary differences that allow for the inscription in every communication and practical relationship the ineffable reserve of the “untranslatable” or the irreducibility of the individual, situated, or radically embodied. But if, as I have argued, the dynamics of the contemporary global regime of capital, technology, and information force us to consider in a renewed way the possibility of a critical reflection on the unity of the world, then it is relevant to consider the ways that both Heidegger and Wittgenstein (both early and late), through their considerations of language, meaning, and sense, themselves undertake this reflection and point toward its further development.

What form might such a further development of the problematic of the relationship of the structure of language to the possibility of the world take, today? On the one hand, it would involve a renewed inquiry into the possible sense of the One of *what is* as it gives itself to be thought. This would be a contemporary repetition of the problem posed by Parmenides about the logical sense of being, to whose response Plato devoted the considerable resources of his late argumentation in dialogues such as the *Parmenides*, the *Sophist*, and the *Philebus*. On the other, and just as importantly, it would involve displacing this inquiry onto the transformed ground of contemporary logic and formal knowledge. To pursue the inquiry would then be (in the Heideggerian jargon) to grasp the very basis of linguistic sense as resting, not in factual institutions or given situations, but in the underlying or deeper structure of the granting of presence, the opening of the possibility of sense or the meaning of a life on the ultimate ground of what is. Or it would be to take up in a renewed way the inquiry into the essential and unitary dimension of *form* that arguably articulates, beyond or before empirical instances, the key concepts of “both” Wittgensteins, those of *logical form* and *forms of life*.⁶²

which forms a bounded whole and can thus become a distinct object of study or of philosophical theorizing.” Insofar as Rorty cites here a basis for this dismissal, it is the moral he draws from Donald Davidson’s project of semantic analysis and its “naturalized” approach. However, it is certainly possible to read the implications of Davidson’s project differently, as suggesting both the positive possibility of a “transcendental” or quasi-transcendental analysis of the positive conditions of linguistic truth and meaning that itself develops the problematic of the structure of language and world considered here (cf., e.g., Wrathall, Okrent, Livingston (2014)).

⁶² Although Wittgenstein himself uses “form of life” both in the plural or with an indefinite article (as in, e.g. PI sections 19 and 23) and in the singular (as, e.g. in PI 241, where he speaks of agreement “in language” as “agreement ...in form of life”), it is more or less standard in many contemporary interpretations to read “forms of

And given both philosophers' arguments, this would be something like the problem of the origin of sense in the abeyance of any *source* of sense in any subject, object, entity, fact, or situation. Because it is not possible to determine the sense of the world without contradiction from a position within it, and there is at the same time no position *outside* the world from which to determine it either, this inquiry would have to take up in a deepened way the critical question of what sets or establishes the limit of the world and its description, and how this setting itself complicates the easy topological distinction between a simple "inside" and a simple "outside." The consideration of how possibilities and structures of sense arise, at or in the problematization of the boundaries of whatever is, and do so quite independently of any kind of human intentionality, activity, capacity or purpose, might then also define a fitting topic for critical reflection within a philosophical *praxis* to come. Thus distinguished from the characteristic twentieth-century *pathos* of the human agentive subject of meaning and the constitutive anxiety of its nullification within a senselessly plural being, one task of twenty-first century philosophy might then be to locate forms and structures of sense, in their original givenness, at the problematic limit of the world itself.⁶³

life" as irreducibly a plural concept of varying cultures or lifestyles. However, Giorgio Agamben has insightfully and partially independently developed "form-of-life" as an essentially unitary concept capturing the "linguistic being" or "belonging in language" that formally characterizes a linguistic life. See, e.g., Agamben (), p. 11: "Intellectuality and thought are not a form of life among others in which life and social production articulate themselves, but they are rather *the unitary power that constitutes the multiple forms of life as form-of-life.*" See also Agamben's recent investigation of the relationship between form-of-life and rule in the development and practice of Western monasticism (Agamben (2011)), and Livingston (2012), chapter 1.

⁶³ I would like to thank Lee Braver and Iain Thomson for providing helpful comments on an earlier version of this article.

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