Karsten Harries

Wittgenstein, Heidegger and the Future of Philosophy

Fall Semester 2014
Yale University

Contents

1. Introduction[1]

1

In the *Philosophical Investigations* Wittgenstein remarks that philosophical problems: have the form "I don 't know my way about."[2] Of course, not all problems having this form are therefore philosophical: e.g., to have lost one's way in some strange city hardly suffices to make one a philosopher.

But why not? Is it perhaps because in such cases our disorientation is only superficial? In a deeper sense we still know our place and what to do. Thus we could ask someone for help or look for a map. The problem poses itself against a background of unquestioned ways of doing things, on which we can fall back in our attempt to discover where we are and where we should go.

Philosophical problems have no such background. They emerge only where human beings have begun to question the entire place assigned to them by nature, society, and history, and, searching for firmer ground, demand that his place be more securely established. The fundamental question of philosophy is "where is man's proper place?" and philosophy comes to an end when this question no longer is raised, either because man has become secure in knowledge or faith or because he has found it a treacherous question to which there is no answer.

If it is a desire for security that leads human beings to philosophy that same desire can also lead them to forsake it. In dread of its restless questioning, man may ask to be delivered of philosophy and of the threat it poses to the security offered by what is generally accepted. Philosophy is then asked to reform and serve the established —some ideology or faith, science, or the reigning common sense for example — or, unable to perform such service, to criticize and finally destroy itself.

Such doubts concerning philosophy are part of recent philosophizing. They have found expression in recurring attempts to move beyond what philosophy has been. Of

---

[1] See Karsten Harries, "Wittgenstein and Heidegger: The Relationship of the Philosopher to Language," *The Journal of Value Inquiry*, vol. 2, no. 4, 1968, pp. 281-291.
[2] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* [abbreviated PI], trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (New York: Macmillan, 1959) §123.

these Heidegger's and Wittgenstein's have been the most significant. Both have provided interpretations of language that call philosophy in the traditional sense into question. In this course I shall examine and criticize certain theses fundamental to these interpretations in an attempt to show that philosophy, understood as the search for man's pIace, is both possible and necessary.

2

But why try to cover both Heidegger and Wittgenstein in one course? Do they not have their place in very different philosophical corners? What separates these two thinkers, often thought to have been the two most influential philosophers of the 20th century, is indeed more readily apparent than what unites them. "What can be said at all can be said clearly; and what we cannot talk about we must pass over in silence," says Wittgenstein in the preface to the *Tractatus*.[3] Such clarity is hardly what one associates with Heidegger's writings. And although Wittgenstein was to abandon the position of the *Tractatus*, there still seems to be an almost insuperable gap separating the *Investigations*, with their emphasis on "our language" as the ground to which he bid philosophers return, from the dark sayings of the later Heidegger. The shared presuppositions that are necessary if there is to be a genuine conversation appear to be lacking.

And yet there is much they share and in the past few decades there has been increasing discussion of what joins these two philosophers. I am thinking especially of philosophers like Stanley Cavell and Richard Rorty, where it is worth noting that both have their places on the fringes of today's philosophical establishment and are more likely to be read in literature departments than in departments of philosophy. But what joins Heidegger and Wittgenstein is indeed apparent: in their very different ways, both have contributed decisively to the linguistic turn — the title of a collection of essays edited by Richard Rorty — that has shaped modern philosophy. Both were convinced that language mediates our access to reality. Heidegger thus was to call language "the

[3] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. C. K. Ogden (London: Routledge, 1922)

house of being,"[4] a metaphor to which I shall have to return. Careful attention to language thus would seem to be essential to philosophy.

But language is an elusive phenomenon. Where should we look to get at what matters here? Is it logic that holds the key, as the young Wittgenstein and the young Heidegger both thought? Is it ordinary language, as Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* insist — and, as we shall see, Heidegger's position in *Being and Time* is not so very different? Or is it poetry, as Heidegger later came to think? Heidegger's poetic thinking, to be sure, would appear to be representative of a kind of thinking with which Wittgenstein had no patience. In the end the paths marked out by these two thinkers would thus seem to diverge radically. And those who follow one or the other of these paths tend to publish in different journals, read different books, speak different languages. Those unfortunate enough to lose their way and to end up in the wrong camp may find it difficult to understand the curious language-games people there are playing.

All the more reason for those who refuse to accept the division of philosophy into these different camps to consider the common origin of Wittgenstein's and Heidegger's thought. That this common origin has received insufficient attention is hardly an accident; both thinkers have invited such disregard of the past. This is certainly true of Wittgenstein: in the preface to the *Tractatus* he says explicitly that it is a matter of indifference to him whether the thoughts he is presenting were thought by some other thinker before him and suggests that the problems that have figured in traditional philosophy rest on a misuse of language. In the *Investigations* he suggests that these problems are generated by an idling of language. One can point to such passages to present Wittgenstein as an anti-philosopher who has surpassed or undercut the philosophy of the past by showing that the puzzles that occupied it can be made to disappear by "bringing words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use."[5] Heidegger, too, speaks of the end of traditional metaphysics; his own thinking is an attempt to step back to a more fundamental plane. This, it has been argued, makes it impossible to compare Heidegger to the philosophers of the past. His thinking is

---

[4] Martin Heidegger, *Brief über den Humanisnus* (Frankfiurt am Main: Klostermann, 1949), *Wegmarken* (Frankfurt/M: Klostermann, 1967), p. 164. (GA 8)
[5] *Investigations* §116.

fundamental and original in a way that forbids all such comparisons.[6]

But if the work of the mature Heidegger and of the Wittgenstein of the *Investigations* does constitute a break with traditional, especially with Cartesian philosophy, as an effort to overcome that tradition, it retains its roots in it. An attempt to relate and evaluate Heidegger's and Wittgenstein's thought can be made by appealing to this common origin. This is made easier by the fact that both have written works that are still very much part of the Cartesian tradition, so that their break with it is at the same time also a break with an earlier phase of their own thinking. Thus Wittgenstein came to criticize the *Tractatus*, while Heidegger abandoned the views of his dissertation, Die *Lehre vom Urteil im Psychologismus*,[7] and of his *Habilitationsschrift*, *Die Kategorien- und Bedeutungslehre des Duns Scotus*.[8]

2

Modern philosophy was given its direction by Descartes' method. But not just modern philosophy, modern science, and that is to say our technology, and that is to say, our modern world. To fully understand the nature of Heidegger's and Wittgenstein's move beyond this conception of philosophy it is necessary to see what is implied by Cartesian method — the first meetings of this course will be devoted to it. Of special interest here are the often neglected consequences that Descartes' method has for value theory. These, I will argue, are such that a critical approach to value questions must be ruled out; the Socratic conception of the task of philosophy, that it is to lead human beings to become more genuinely human by questioning themselves and their way of life, must be abandoned. Cartesian method tends to transform experience in such a way that what makes experience meaningful or valuable threatens to get lost. Descartes only

---

[6] Cf. Katharina Kanthack, “Nicolai Hartmann und das Ende der Ontologie (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1962) and my review article "The Gnoseo-ontologica1 Circle and the End of. 0ntology," *The Review of Metaphysics*, vol. XVII, no. 4, 1964, pp. 577 - 585.

[7] Martin Heidegger, *Die Lehre vom Urteil im Psychologismus. Ein Kritisch-positiver Beitrag zur Logik.* Disssertation Freiburg 1913 (Leipzig: Barth, 1914). Also in *Frühe Schriften*, *Gesamtausgabe* [GA], vol. 1 (Frankfurt an Main: Klostermann 1978, pp. 59-188.

[8] Martin Heidegger, *Die Kategorien- und Bedeutungslehtre des Duns Scotus*, Habiitationsschrift Freiburg 1915 (Tübingen: Mohr, 1916), GA 1, pp. 189-411.

suspects this loss; his suspicions find expression in his doubt concerning the reality of the world. A world lacking reality is also a world lacking meaning and value. Sensing the loss threatened by his method, Descartes, attempts to remedy this loss by means of his proofs of the existence of God. Given his own method, these proofs, as we shall see, are inadmissible. Yet in spite of the fact that they lead Descartes into inconsistency, they make his philosophy as a whole more adequate, that is to say, they enable him to do greater justice to the texture of our experience.

Later thinkers have made other attempts to preserve reality and value while remaining more strictly within the limits of a Cartesian rationalism. I shall try to show that all such attempts are in principle doomed to fail. As long as philosophy remains subject to its Cartesian origin, it has no room for values, for ethics and aesthetics. As Wittgenstein puts it in the *Tractatus*, "It is clear that ethics cannot be put into words." (6.421) — and if we accept Wittgenstein's in the *Tractatus* fundamentally Cartesian presuppositions, it should be clear.

3

The movement from the *Tractatus* to the *Philosophical Investigations* can be understood as a necessary attempt to gain a richer understanding of experience than the Cartesian tradition allows. We can mark the general direction of this movement away from the tradition with three quotations. The first is from the *Tractatus*:

> Language disguises thought. So much so, that from the outward form of the clothing it is impossible to infer the form of the thought beneath it because the form of the clothing is not designed to reveal the form of the body, but for entirely different purposes . (4.002)

On this view our language hides its essential structure.

> In this way the most fundamental confusions are easily produced (the whole of philosophy is full of them.) (3.324)

To avoid such confusion Wittgenstein suggests, we have to develop an artificial language that does not obscure the logical essence of our language — The sign-language of the *Tractatus* is such a language.

The second quotation is from the *Philosophische Bermerkungen* or *Philosophial Remarks* of 1930[9]:

> How strange if logic were concerned with an 'ideal' language and not with ours. For what should this ideal language express? Presumably what we are now expressing in our ordinary language; then logic must investigate it... Logical analysis is analysis of something we have, not of something that we do not have. It is the analysis of sentences as they are. (It would be strange if human society had spoken until now, without succeeding in uttering a single correct sentence. (PB, § 3)

We meet here with a new emphasis on "our ordinary language," on an analysis of sentences as they are, a warning not to mistake ideal constructions for reality.

The third quotation is from the *Philosophical Investigations*:

> It is interesting to compare the multiplicity of the tools in language and of the ways they are used, the multiplicity of kinds of word and sentence, with what logicians have said about the structure of language (Including the author of the *Tractatus: Logico-Philosophicus*) (PI, § 23)

Taken together these three quotations mark a familiar development: in the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein takes logic to be the essence of our language. Later he repudiates this view: language is no longer believed to have its essence in logic. To the homogeneity of logical space Wittgenstein opposes the heterogeneity characteristic of everyday language.

4

Heidegger's thought underwent a similar development. While in his dissertation Heidegger demands that logic be freed from grammar, this demand is explicitly reversed in *Being and Time*. Heidegger now asks for the liberation of grammar from logic. (SZ 165) On the earlier view, to know the grammar of a language is to know only what Wittgenstein calls in the *Tractatus* its external form. To gain a more fundamental

---

[9] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophische Bemerkungen Schriften*, vol. 2 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1964) *Philosophical Remarks*, ed. Rush Rhees, tr. Raymond Hargreaves (Chicago: U. of Chicago, 1980).

understanding of language we have to pay attention to that in language, which enables it to disclose reality. This, it is argued, cannot be something peculiar to a particular language; that language should have this or that grammar is not essential. We get to the foundation of language only by moving from grammar to logic. In this sense Heidegger's *Habilitationsschrift*, in which he discusses Duns Scotus' doctrine of categories and the speculative grammar of Thomas of Erfurt— then still confused with Duns Scotus — is not only a historical study, but more importantly an attempt to exhibit the logical foundation of language. The same is true of Wittgenstein's exploration of the structure of logical space.

Like Wittgenstein, Heidegger came to recognize the inability of such investigations to do justice to the richness of language and of our experiences. By demanding that grammar be freed from logic and logic subordinated to grammar, Heidegger tries to correct a misunderstanding of grammar and language, said to go back to the Greeks.

> The Greeks had no word for 'language'; they understood this phenomenon 'in the first instance' as discourse. But because the logos came into their philosophical ken primarily as assertion, this was the kind of logos which they took as their clue for working out the basic structures of the forms of discourse and its components. Grammar sought its foundation in the 'logic' of the logos. (SZ 165)

As does Wittgenstein in the *Investigations*, Heidegger attacks a view of language that takes it to be primarily assertion of what is the case. It is this view that is said to underlie traditional logic. Once the inability of that logic to do justice to our language is recognized,

> then there emerges the necessity of re-establishing the science of language on foundations that are ontologically more primordial. The task of *liberating* grammar from logic requires *beforehand* a positive understanding of the basic *a priori* structure of discourse in general as an *existentiale*. (SZ 165)

Here an important difference between Wittgenstein and Heidegger appears: unlike Wittgenstein, Heidegger does not want to stop with a mere description of ordinary

language; he still searches for the "*a priori* structure" of language. Perhaps we should say that in *Being and Time* Heidegger demands an existential logic, if the word "logic" did not suggest greater rigidity and homogeneity than is intended.

5

With Wittgenstein, as with Heidegger, the move away from traditional philosophy is a move away from the reduced understanding of our experience that is part of our Cartesian heritage with its emphasis on reflection and detached observation rather than doing. But if this move makes it possible to do greater justice to experience in all its variety, a price is paid when, like Wittgenstein in the *Investigations* one stops with ordinary language and refuses to question it. According to the traditional view, such language has its measure and foundation in something else, perhaps in some eternal truths, which it expresses only inadequately. His knowledge of this higher dimension enables the philosopher to be a critic of ordinary language and life. Socrates was a philosopher in this sense: open to what is higher, he could not simply accept the Athenians' use of language, but had to test and criticize it. Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* still belongs to this tradition, even if the role of the philosopher has become a much smaller part than it had been with Socrates. No longer does the philosopher lead the way to the good life; the whole value sector has been taken away from him.[10] He has to content himself with pointing out the conditions that must be met if our speaking is to be meaningful. Yet in this he can still appear as a critic of everyday language who opposes to it an ideal that serves as its measure. In the *Investigations* such claims are rejected. If the philosopher criticizes the use of language at all, it is that of philosophers. Philosophy becomes a discipline that is to free us from philosophy.

---

[10] One could object that in the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein does attempt to lead us to the good life, but he does so, not by providing us with a measure, but by showing that we must give up our demand that there be such a measure. Cf. the explanation Wittgenstein sent to Ludwig von Ficker in 1919 . "The book's point is an ethical one. I once meant to include in the preface a sentence which is not in fact there now, but which I will write out for you here, because it will perhaps be a key to the work for you. What I meant to write, then, was this: My work consists of two parts: the one presented here plus all that I have *not* written. And it is precisely this second part that is the important one." Paul Engelmann, *Letters from Wittgenstein. With a Memoir,* tr. L. Furtmüller, ed. B. F. McGuinness (New York: Horizon, 1967).

Implicit in Wittgenstein's critique of traditional philosophy is an inversion of the Platonic belief that our language has its measure and foundation in something higher. It is now said to be "'in order as it is.'" "That is to say, we are not striving after an ideal, as if our ordinary vague sentences had not yet got a quite unexceptionable sense, and a perfect language awaited construction by us." (I 98) But is ordinary language in order as it is? Listening to how language is used most of the time, one cannot but wonder whether this really is the case. Is there not still need for a Socrates and his suspicions that language as it is used most of the time is not in order? I shall return to this point later. Here I would only like to suggest that the consequences of the *Investigations* for value theory are as disturbing as those of the *Tractatus*. While in the *Tractatus* value appears to exceed the grasp of the philosopher, indeed of meaningful discourse, the *Investigations* invite acceptance of already established ways of speaking and living. It is possible to interpret the philosophy of the *Investigations* as a philosophy for that last man whom Nietzsche describes in his *Zarathustr*a.

6

Heidegger escapes similar charges by refusing to take for granted that our language is in order as it is. Although his call for the liberation of grammar from logic parallels Wittgenstein's rejection of his own earlier approach, Heidegger remains aware of the questionable nature of ordinary language. This awareness lets him distinguish between authentic and inauthentic discourse, between a speaking that reveals what is spoken of (*Rede*) and 'idle talk' which takes it for granted (*Gerede).* Has a blind man, who from listening to others has learned to use the word "red" more or less correctly, really understood its meaning? He, too, calls blood, lips, roses, and communists "red." I am reminded of Ved Mehta, for many years a contributor to the New Yorker, who described persons and things in a way that let one forget that he was blind. But is the way we, who can see, use a word, say the word "red," so very different. Of course we know the meaning of "red, " of course we know that roses are red; we know it so well that we don't even have to stop to think. Language is taken for granted; words become clichés.

Unlike Wittgenstein, Heidegger emphasizes how much of our speaking is what he terms idle talk, mere *Gerede*. He insists that language is not quite in order as it is ordinarily spoken and that another kind of speaking must be opposed to it. In the works following *Being and Time* this distinction is further developed. There is thus a step in Heidegger's development to which very little corresponds in that of Wittgenstein. This step once more establishes a tension: ordinary language is once again found inadequate, but the measure is furnished this time not by logic, but by poetic speaking.

Whether Heidegger has done justice to what we ordinarily call poetry is less important in this context than the thesis that everyday speaking has its foundation in a speaking that is, as Heidegger calls it, "the founding naming of being and the essence of all things."[11] Ordinary language is said to have its foundation in poetry, where I should be clear that poetry here cannot quite mean what we usually mean by "poetry," which presupposes ordinary language rather than founds it.

To move from ordinary language to poetry in Heidegger's sense is not to move back to the Socratic view of the philosopher as a critic of language. What Wittgenstein takes to be true of our language is also true of that "founding naming" Heidegger calls poetry: as the foundation of language it is itself not in need of justification. If only through poetry man is given a measure, poetry itself cannot be measured. This returns us to the question that will run like a thread through this course: can philosophy furnish a valid critique of an established language and way of life? Or must the philosopher, lacking the strength to be poet or prophet, observe and serve what has been well established, be it science or ordinary language.

---

[11] Martin Heidegger, "Hölderlin und das Wesen der Dichtung," *Erläuterungen zu Hölderlins Dichtung*. (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1951), p. 40 (GA 4). [abbreviated as E]. For English translations of the essay see Keith Hoeller's translation in *Elucidations of Hölderlin's Poetry* (Amherst, New York, Humanity Books, 2000) and the older translation by Douglas Scott in *Existence and Being*, ed. Werner Brock (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1965).

2. Cartesian Method

1

It has become fashionable to attack Descartes. This is not a mere fashion, but stems from an uneasiness with what modern philosophy has become and where it has led us. As more philosophers have begun to suspect that the road on which they have been travelling is a dead end street, attempts are made to retrace already taken steps; a search false starts, for the missed turn and for those who may have misled us begins.

Among these Descartes deserves a special place. For better or for worse the course of modern philosophy and indeed of our modern world was shaped by his conception of proper philosophic method. This makes it possible to try to call much of modern philosophy and indeed the shape of our modern world into question by criticizing its Cartesian presuppositions.

Of such attempts Heidegger's and Wittgenstein's have been perhaps the most important. Both claim to have done much more: Heidegger demands of us that we step back, not just beyond Descartes, but beyond Plato to the Pre-Socratics and even more to Greek tragedy, while the Wittgenstein of the *Investigations* hopes to liberate us from philosophy altogether. But even if we don't think it necessary and refuse to follow them this quickly to the supposed origin of philosophy and beyond, it is, as I hope to snow, rather difficult not to follow them at least beyond Descartes.

But we should not make things too easy for ourselves. Before we cheerfully emancipate ourselves from the Cartesian tradition, we should give some thought to this question: how did Descartes' thought gain such decisive importance? If indeed he erred, his error cannot have been simple and obvious. To gain such power it had to answer to a deep-rooted need.

2

Few philosophers are initially as accessible and in the end as elusive as Descartes. Consider the seemingly easy steps that in the *Meditations* prepare the way for Descartes' proof of the existence of God, simple enough to serve as a popular introduction to philosophy.

(1) In order to gain an indubitable, unshakeable foundation Descartes begins by trying to doubt all that he had up to then taken for granted.

(2) He establishes that foundation by reflecting on the *cogito*: I cannot doubt that I, a thinking thing, exist.

(3) This leads to the discovery of a criterion of what is necessary if I am to truly know something: I must have a clear and distinct representation of it.

(4) But doubts return: how do I know whether what presents itself to me clearly and distinctly is really true? Have I not been deceived in the past and may I not be deceived again? How can I make sure that clear and distinct ideas will not also prove deceptive?

(5) The proof of the existence of God is designed to defeat such doubts and thus to secure the trust put in clarity and distinctness.

These steps seem easy enough, yet the more we think about them, the more obscure their meaning becomes. Consider the very first step: does it make sense? What are we really doubting when we doubt as Descartes would have us doubt? Descartes introduces his doubt as a methodological device, guarding against error. Too often we accept what is questionable and are content with appearances, hypotheses and conjectures.

Not that we can dispense with this altogether: we simply don't have time to examine and weigh carefully all that we see and hear. So we rely on what one says. But when a philosopher builds on hearsay and conjecture his thought will lack a foundation. To secure a foundation for philosophy, and beyond that for all scientific knowledge, Descartes demands that we take as false all that is not so patently true that it will resist our attempts to doubt it.

In order to doubt we must be able to conceive of the possibility that things may be different from the way they appear to us. Essential to doubt is the contrast between the way things may perhaps be and the way we take them to be. If there is no way of moving from the latter to the former, there can be no doubt. It is thus perfectly meaningful to doubt whether the world that I naively take to be as I see it really is that way. In this context philosophers, including Descartes, have always appealed to the many ways in which deception is part of our experience: think of defective vision, of

optical illusions, or more generally of the limitations imposed on us by our senses. The following passage from Book X of Plato's *Republic* is often cited in this connection:

[Socrates] I will explain: The body which is large when seen near, appears small when seen at a distance?

[Glaucon] True.

And the same object appears straight when looked at out of the water, and crooked when in the water; and the concave becomes convex, owing to the illusions about colors to which the sight is liable. Thus every sort of confusion is revealed within us; and this is the weakness of the human mind on which the art of conjuring and of deceiving by light and shadow and other ingenious devices imposes, having an effect on us, like magic.

True.

And the arts of measuring and numbering and weighing come to the rescue of the human understanding — there is the beauty of them — and the apparent greater or less, or more or heavier, no longer have mastery over us, but give way before calculation and measure and weight?[12]

Descartes would have agreed. But he is not content with such well-known doubt concerning the reliability of our senses; he wants to go further. How can we be sure that the world in which we find ourselves is more than something we just imagine? Can we not conceive of an evil demon who delights in deluding us into thinking real what lacks reality? Perhaps the world exists only as our idea, an idea that does not misrepresent, but does not represent at all?

But when doubt is stretched to this point it threatens to become meaningless. To explain the meaning of this doubt Descartes still appeals to our ordinary understanding of what it means to doubt. But this appeal conceals the shift that has taken place. We may be able to make sense of doubting whether the world really is as it presents itself to us, but what sense does it make to doubt the reality of the world?

---

[12] Plato, *Republic*, X, 602 c-d, trans. Benjamin Jowett.

What does "reality" mean here? Suppose our world turned out to be unreal? What difference would this make to us? How could we even know? If Descartes' doubt is to make any sense at all, it must be possible to point out the difference between a real and an unreal world. That there is such a difference is taken for granted by Descartes and with it the significance of his methodological doubt. But what is this difference?

"Think of dreams," Descartes might say; "to say that the world I see before me lacks reality is to say something like 'life is a dream.'" But this appeal to the imaginary world of our dreams is of no more help than the appeal to past error. For again, part of the meaning of dreaming is the contrast between dreaming and being awake. If we are to make sense of dreaming there must be criteria to distinguish dreaming from waking. When all of life is called a dream, the word loses its meaning unless we can give content to the idea of another life. Are there criteria to distinguish a world that is only my dream from one that really exists? O.K. Bouwsma argued forcefully that this is not the case and as a result finds Descartes' doubt meaningless.[13] Imagine, he suggests, Descartes' evil demon having deceived man and then, to really taste his victory, trying to convince man that he has indeed been deceived. How would our evil demon go about doing this? It is difficult to think of an answer.

But it is also difficult to dismiss Descartes and Cartesian doubt quite this easily. There does seem to be a point to it. But what is it?

3

By now someone must be growing impatient and accuse Bouwsma and me of overlooking the context in which Descartes' discussion appears: isn't it clear that Descartes bases his doubt on a certain conception of human understanding? And given that conception, does it not make sense?

Yes, but does that conception make sense? And what is that conception?

What Descartes takes for granted is that thought represents reality. Following medieval tradition, he distinguishes between *realitas objectiva* and *realitas formalis*.

---

[13] O. K. Bouwsma, "Descartes' Evil Genius," *Philosophical Essays* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965), pp. 85-97.

The representation (*idea*) intends another reality that it claims to represent (*realitas formalis)*. Claiming to represent, the idea has a meaning, i.e. is *realitas objctiva*.

A similar view is found in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*. Consider these statements:

> 2.1 We picture facts to ourselves.
>
> 2.1513 So a picture, conceived in this way, also includes the pictorial relationship, which make it into a picture!
>
> 2.221 What a picture represents is its sense.

Is this interpretation of how thought and language work convincing? It is easy enough to come up with plausible examples. Think of photographs, pictographs, maps, blueprints -- don't they teach us what it means to make pictures? And do we not also make mental pictures when we remember, for example, or when we imagine? But we must not lose sight here of something that Wittgenstein points out: to see a picture as a picture is to see it as a more or less faithful reconstruction or model of reality; to find out whether a picture is successful or unsuccessful, true or false, it must be possible to compare it with reality. This makes it necessary that reality be given to us apart from that picture. **If the picture theory is to be made sense of, there must be a way in which reality is given to us apart from pictures.** The picture theory can be extended to all thinking, as Wittgenstein tries to do in the *Tractatus*, only by a misunderstanding, for such extension destroys the tension between pictured reality and picture which must be preserved if the theory is to be maintained.

The same goes for the Cartesian version. It, too, is incapable of doing justice to all our access to reality. The attempt to extend it in this manner destroys the distinction between representation and represented reality on which it rests. What enables Descartes to interpret *idea* as *realitas objectiva*, a reality claiming to represent some other reality? Or, in the language of the *Tractatus*, how are we to understand the pictorial relationship that alone makes the picture into a picture? If ideas were all we were given, the thought of referring them to some other reality, i.e. of understanding them as representations, could never arise. **There must be a more immediate awareness of reality than that provided by ideas.** Unless we can clarify the nature of this awareness, the meaning of

the distinction between objective and formal reality remains obscure. It is thus hardly possible to appeal to this distinction to make sense of Cartesian doubt. The distinction turns out to be just as questionable as the doubt it was to explain. Descartes does not help us here. He is working within an inherited framework that he accepts without challenge. If we reject it, all of the *Meditations*, and especially the five steps outlined above, seem to become pointless.

But are they pointless? We have to look further to do justice to the *Meditation*s

4

We are given a hint of where to look by Descartes' apologetic remark that since he was "not considering the question of action, but only of knowledge," there could be "neither peril nor error" in the adopted course of doubt.[14] The phrase "only of knowledge" should be noted. First of all and most of the time the things we know are never matters "only of knowledge." The world is known in an engaged rather than in a detached manner; reality reveals itself to us in our activities and concerns. As Heidegger will point out, a hammer or a knife are thus first of all not mere objects of knowledge, but things to be used; I know other human beings not in detached contemplation, but by living with them and caring for them.

It is, however, possible to bracket such engagement and to divorce knowledge from action. Some bracketing is implicit in all reflection. To reflect is to step away from the things that normally concern us. Consider Descartes, sitting idly by his fire, questioning reality, while the Thirty Years War was raging. "Today, then, since very opportunely for the plan I have in view I have delivered my mind from every care (and am happily agitated by no passions) and since I have procured for myself an assured leisure in a peaceable retirement, I shall at last seriously and freely address myself to the genera1 upheaval of all my former opinions."[15] This is no incidental bit of biographical information, unrelated to philosophy. It tells us that the philosopher's enterprise has its origin in a reflective disengagement from the world. This establishes a point of view that

---

[14] *Meditation* I, vol. 1, p. 148. Page references are to *The Philosophial Works of Descartes*, two vols. trans. Elizabeth S. Haldane and G. R. T. Ross (New York: Dover, 1955). Cf. *Reply to Objection V*, vol. II, p. 206.

[15] *Meditation I,* vol. 1, p. 144.

lets her or him take a more detached look at things. Reflection carried to extremes transforms us into mere spectators of our own life, which has become somewhat like a part we play in a drama of unknown significance. The self no longer inhabits the world, but floats above it.

With his insistence on doubt, Descartes puts this angelic, transcendental subject at the very center of the philosophic enterprise.[16] Along with this goes an interpretation of being as first of all objective being, being for a subject. The "for" emphasizes the distance separating subject and object; it also suggests that part of this interpretation is the assertion of the priority of the subject over the world understood as the totality of objects. Man denies himself as member of a larger order that transcends him. He is no longer assigned a vocation by the place he occupies in the world; indeed, it is no longer possible to speak of such a place: as subject, as the being for whom the world is, man becomes the foundation of the world and loses his place in it.[17]

Descartes recognizes that his methodological doubt threatens to lead to a loss of reality. But the meaning of this loss is unclear, and must remain so, as long as "reality" is taken for granted. What is the meaning of "reality"? I want to offer as a first suggestion that in this context, to say that something is real is not so much to say that something is the case, but rather, that it has a claim on us. The real has weight; it burdens our freedom; just this lets it matter. Consider the heaviness of the body after a strenuous climb; or hunger; or glaring sunlight, or the piercing whine of a siren. Only what transcends us can weigh on us. "Transcends" here means no more than not dependent for its being on our consciousness. To say that reality claims us is to say that reality is

---

16 See Karsten Harries, "Descartes, Perspective, and the Angelic Eye," *Yale French Studies*,. 49, 1973, pp. 28-42. Cf. Alexandre Koyré, *Essai sur l'idee de Dieu et les preuves de son existence chez Descartes* (Paris: Leroux, 1922), p. 93: "I1 nous parait extremement vraisemblable que ce chapitre de l'angelologie de Saint Thomas a servi de source à la psychologie de Descartes et cela d'autant plus qu'il ne faisait par là que retourner à la doctrime augustinienne. En effet la psychologie comme la gnoseologie augustiniennes ne valent selon Saint 'Thomas que pour les anges."

17 Cf. Martin Heidegger, *"Nietzsches Wort 'Gott ist tot," Holzwege* (Frankfiurt/M: Klostermann, 1957), p. 241. "Denn der Mensch ist in die Ichheit des ego cogito aufgestanden. Mit diesem Aufstand wird alles Seiende zum Gegenstand. Das Seiende wird als das Objektive in die Immanenz der Subjektivität hinein getrunken. Der Horizont leuchtet nicht mehr von sich aus."

essentially transcendence entering our consciousness. If this is accepted, it is easy to sec why reflection disengages us from the world and transforms the things that concerned us into mere objects; immanence obscures transcendence. As the transcendence of the subject is established, the transcendence of the world recedes. The world loses its claim on us and becomes unreal. At the very center of the *Mediations* lies the dreadful suspicion that the world revealed in reflection asks nothing of man and offers him nothing by which to orient himself. "Just as if I had all of a sudden fallen into very deep water, I am so disconcerted that I can neither make certain of setting my feet on the bottom, nor: can I swim and so support myself on the surface."[18] Such almost Kierkegaardian statements are rare with Descartes; yet they cannot be dismissed as mere rhetoric. At stake in the *Meditations*, although only suspected and not explicitly acknowledged, is the meaning of human existence that is threatened by the philosopher's willingness to doubt, to surrender the security offered by prereflective experience in order to establish a firmer ground.

As was pointed out, to liken life to a dream is to presuppose a mode of awareness with which this reduced experience can be compared. I now want to suggest that this is prereflective experience. Only because Descartes is not totally reflective, but reflection operates against the background of a pre-reflective appreciation of the world, is he able to recognize the loss of reality threatened by reflection; but this does not lead him to return to a pre-reflective point of view. Instead it leads to an attempt to correct this deficiency, by reasserting transcendence as a realm of real objects, i.e. formal reality, to which our ideas must correspond if they are to be true. If the world of ideas is transcended by the subject, the subject is in turn transcended by the real world. In this way an attempt is made to give back to the world the weight that was lost in the course of the reduction to objectivity. **The distinction between objective and formal reality, and more generally that between appearance and thing-in-itself, appears thus as a metamorphosis of distinction between a disengaged, reflective and an engaged, pre~-reflective awareness.** This metamorphosis is demanded by Descartes' commitment to methodological doubt and thus to an ontology of objectivity that lets him condemn the former mode of knowledge as indistinct and inferior. This commitment, however, in

[18] *Meditation II*, vol. 1, p. 148

spite of the demands made by the method, remains incomplete. Were it to be complete, there would be no reason to oppose formal to objective reality.

To sum up: objective reality, as used by Descartes, presupposes a reference to formal reality. Objective reality is reality that claims to represent. But what gives rise to this claim? Descartes fails to clarify this. The distinction is borrowed from the tradition and taken for granted. It has been argued here that this taking for granted hides a failure to carry through the reduction of experience demanded by his method. Had he done so — and only a philosopher capable of forgetting himself as a human being is capable of this — he could not have recognized the incurred loss and the attempt to remedy it by re-establishing transcendent reality would have been pointless. Once the reduction has been completed, it can no longer be recognized as a reduction.

5

If this suggestion, that Descartes' doubt depends on his failure to carry through the reduction of experience demanded by the adopted reflective stance is correct, there should be some connection between it and the hypothesis of the evil demon that Descartes himself uses to make his doubt seem plausible.

Descartes' evil demon has its origin in the conception of an omnipotent God in whose will all truths have their foundation.[19] Descartes adds to this the suspicion – unknown to the Middle Ages — that God may not be attuned to us poor humans; his evil demon is God turned indifferent or even hostile to man's desire to grasp what is as it is. A transcendent ground of truth is posited, only to be declared inaccessible. Let us suppose this suspicion well founded: in that case, how can there be any proof of the existence of a God who does not deceive us? Indeed, how can there be any proofs at all? Is Descartes not caught in the circle first pointed out by Mersenne and Arnauld[20]: he has to presuppose the validity of clear and distinct ideas, otherwise he could know nothing with certainty, nor could there be proofs of any kind; but this validity is established only by means of the proof of the existence of God. Either the divine guarantee of the truth of clear and distinct ideas is presupposed, or it is unnecessary. Descartes tries to answer

---

[19] Alexandre Koyré points to Ockham and his disciples. Cf *Esssai,* pp. 96 - 97.
[20] *Objections II,* vol. 2, p. 26 and *Objection IV*, vol. 2, p. 92.

these objections by insisting that the truth of what we comprehend clearly and distinctly cannot possibly be doubted while we so comprehend it.[21] Here there is no need to appeal to God nor need man fear the evil demon. Truth is founded in the way things appear to the perceiving subject. Again it is reflection that, by transforming being into appearance, transforms also the meaning of truth. Making the subject's firm grasp of what it perceives the foundation of truth, Descartes forces us to question a view that seeks that foundation in God.

Why, then, does Descartes raise the specter of his evil demon and invoke God to banish it? What is unsatisfactory about a conception of truth that founds it in a mode of awareness? That Descartes feels that he must prove the existence of God to allay his doubts presupposes **that he is not prepared to leave the subject as the sole foundation of truth and senses the loss of reality that this would involve.** The claims of reflection are checked by a pre-reflective awareness of transcendence.

6

If Descartes were to grant that reflection brings about a reduction of experience that threatens us with a loss of reality, he would also insist that it is only by risking that danger that philosophy can be established on a firm foundation. The philosopher must be willing to surrender the ground that has supported him in order to gain a more certain ground. Cartesian doubt is essentially such a stepping back from our ordinary ways of knowing the world, but only in order to gain more complete mastery over it. By means of his method Descartes hopes to grasp the world and to place it at the disposal of man.

Be it with our hands or with our mind, we can grasp only what endures. All that is evanescent — rushing water, shifting cloud formations a fleeting smile — eludes our grasp; we reach for it and hold nothing in our hands. To wish for mastery of the world is to wish for a conquest of time, for a view of the world *sub specie aeternitatis*. It is also to wish for a world more homogeneous than the world of our lived experience that in so many ways escapes us. If we are not to lose ourselves in this world we must discover the simple in the complex, reduce what is heterogeneous to homogeneity.

---

[21] *Reply to Objections II*, vol. 2, p. 38 and *Reply to Objections IV,* vol. 2, pp. 114-115.

To reflect is to take a first step in this direction. By transforming the world of everyday experience into a collection of objects we establish the thinking subject as the common measure of all things. By stepping back from) the world, we place the world before us — it becomes like a picture, available for inspection and analysis.[22] This world picture could still prove so rich as to exceed our grasp. **The demand for complete conceptual mastery leads necessarily to the demand that our world picture be like a mosaic: the world is to be analyzed into simple parts and then to be reconstructed out of these parts without loss.** Such reconstruction is science.

In the *Rules* Descartes first sought to establish the conditions that must be met if there is to be "science," i.e. "true and evident cognition."[23] He argues that "mankind has no roads towards certain knowledge open to it, save those of self-evident intuition and necessary deduction."[24] The former is tied to the apprehension of simple natures. By their very essence such simple natures do not permit any doubt as to what they are. We either grasp them or we don't grasp them; we do not grasp them partially for they have no parts.[25] The status" of these simples is left somewhat uncertain. Descartes certainly suggests that they are recognized, not invented; they are more than figments of the mind: they are the building blocks, not only of science, but of reality. But there are also passages where Descartes separates the orders of knowing and being and does not insist

---

[22] Cf. Martin Heidegger, "Die Zeit des Weltbildes," *Holzwege,* pp. 82-83. "Weltbild, wesentlich verstanden, meint daher nicht ein Bild von der Welt, sondern die Welt als Bild begriffen. Das Seiende im Ganzen wird jetzt so genommen, dass es erst und nur seiend ist, sofern es durch den vorstellend-herstellenden Henschen gestellt ist. Wo es zum Weltbild komnt, vollzieht sich eine wesentliche Entscheidung über das Seiende im Ganzen. Das Sein des Seienden wird in der Vorgestelltheit des Seienden gesucht und gefunden."

[23] *Rule II*, vol. 1, p. 3.

[24] *Rule XII,* vol.1, p. 45.

[25] *Rule XII*, vol. I, p. 42. "For if our mind attains to the least acquaintance with it, as must be the case, since we are assumed to pass some judgment on it, this fact alone makes us infer that we know it competely. For otherwise it could not be said to be simple…" Closely related is the idea of a clear and distinct perceptiono "I term that clear which is present and apparent to an attentive mind, in the same way as we assert that we see objects clearly when, being present to the regarding eye, they operate upon it with sufficient streneth. But the distinct is that which is so precise and different from all other objects that it contains within itself nothing but what is clear " (Principles I, no. XLI, vol. I, p. 237) Simple natures are by their very nature clear and distinct. Clear and distinct ideas are or can be analyzecl intot simple natures.

that they must run exactly parallel: what is simple in one may not correspond to what is simple in the other.[26] With this admission the foundation of Cartesian science in intuition becomes questionable.

From our intuition of such atomic simples we can proceed to a knowledge of more complicated structures. To do so we must rely on deduction. While intuition is said to take place "at the same time and not successively," deduction takes time. Its certitude is "conferred upon it in some way by memory."[27] But is memory reliable? If not, science can be no more than an assemblage of disconnected intuitions of simples. In the *Rules* Descartes tries to minimize this danger by suggesting that we can learn to perform our deductions so quickly as to all but cut out our dependence on memory.[28] The measure of knowledge is thus provided by the instantaneous intuition of a simple nature. Deduction is suspect because of its tie to time.

These suspicions were to increase. Thus in his *Replies to Mersenne* Descartes tells us that God's guarantee is necessary only to assure the reliability of our memory.[29] Doubt appears here not simply as a result of reflection that transforms being into appearance but as a function of the Cartesian ideal of scientific precision, which by its emphasis on the moment of intuition threatens to imprison us in the instant and make us like an infant whose "power of thinking is asleep."[30] According to Descartes the infant does think, he is even conscious of his thought, and yet he cannot recognize himself in his successive thoughts.[31] The infant has no past, no sense of time. The same would be true of the scientist were he to rely only on intuition. The loss of reality threatened by

---

[26] Rule XII, vol. 1, pp. 40 - 41. "Finally, then , we assert that relatively to our knowledge simple things should be taken in an order different from that in which we should regard them when considlered in their more real nature. Thus, for example, if we consider a body as having extension and figure, we shall indeed admit that from the point of view of the thing itself it is one and simple... But relatively to our understanding we call it a compound constructed out of these three natures, because we have thought of them separately before we were able to judge that all three were found in one and the same subject. Hence here we shall treat of things only in relation to our understanding's awareness of them and shall call those only simple, the cognition of which is so clear and distinct that they cannot be analyzed by the mind into others more distinctly known." Cf. *Rule VI*, vol. 1, p. 15.

[27] *Rule III*, vo1. 1, p. 8; *Rule XI*, vol. 1, p. 33.

[28] *Rule VII*, vol. 1, p. 19.

[29] *Reply to Objections II*, vol, II, p. 38..

[30] *Reply to Objections IV*, vol, II, p. 103.

[31] *Reply to Objections IV*, vol, II, p. 115.

Cartesian doubt is thus closely related to the loss of temporality threatened by Descartes' insistence that man grasp completely what is.[32]

If it is Descartes' insistence on clarity and distinctness that leads him to his atomism, this in turn can be supported by an appeal to the traditional conception of the human spirit as in search of unity, not coming to rest until it discovers unities — in Descartes' case on one hand the simple natures that underlie all we know, on the other hand, the more problematic unity of an all-embracing system. Logical atomism and systematic philosophy have their foundation in the same attempt to reconstruct the world in the image of the human spirit. Such reconstruction is the goal of Descartes' *mathesis universalis*.

This raises the question of how such reconstruction is related to reality. It is by no means obvious that reality must conform to the demands made by the human spirit. On the contrary, to do justice to these demands the human knower may have to do violence to what is. It is possible to see in the demand for clarity and distinctness an inhuman demand that lets us forsake the world with all its confusing, constantly changing richness for our own crystalline constructions.

In the *Rules* this question is not raised. And yet, by distinguishing the order of knowing from the order of being, thus questioning the trustworthiness of intuition, and by calling attention to the problematic status of memory, thus questioning the trustworthiness of deduction, the *Rules* do pose it in a way that demands an answer. 'l'he *Meditations* attempt to provide it.

---

[32] Cf. the proof of the existence of God from time. (*Meditation III*, vol. I, p. 168) Given the independence of each moment, the reproduction of the past in the present, be it as memory, be it as continued existence, depends on God. The argument from time is thus implicit in Descartes' proof that God exists and is not a deceiver.

3. Ontological Implications

1

We have made some progress in our attempt to understand the nature of Cartesian method. We have seen that it demands a reconstruction of the world that will facilitate its comprehension. This reconstruction presupposes a twofold reduction of reality, first to objectivity, then to what can be made clear and distinct.

To use the word *reduction* in this context is to suggest that as a result of his method, Descartes is prevented from doing full justice to reality. Yet Descartes, while he might grant that the first step, the reduction of being to objective being, does indeed threaten a loss of reality, would argue that the second, the move to the clear and distinct, far from compounding the threat, overcomes it. To show that this is indeed so, Descartes has to establish clarity and distinctness as the criterion of the truth of an idea. Only if this is possible can the gap between the logical and the· ontological, which opened up in the *Rules,* be closed. In the *Meditations* a first attempt is made to provide the necessary bridge by means of an analysis of the *cogito*: I cannot doubt that I, a thinking thing, exist; and if Descartes is right, what makes it impossible for me to do so is nothing but the clarity and distinctness of the idea involved.

But is he right? If he were, what reason would there be to begin with the *cogito*, rather than with any other clear and distinct idea? The appeal to the *cogito* makes sense only if it offers us a unique opportunity to check whether the clarity and distinctness of an idea does indeed assure us of its truth. This check would be pointless if it offered us no more than just another appeal to clarity and distinctness. If our trust in the clear and distinct stands in need of justification, it must be founded in some other more fundamental awareness.

In the *Rules* the idea I have of my own existence is mentioned as just another simple nature.[33] — Our intuition of simple natures is taken as the paradigm of "true and

---

[33] That the *Rules* present us with an atomistic doctrine has been questioned. Thus Harold Joachim argues that "in spite of this explicit doctrine," resting on a sharp division between *intuitus* and *deductio*, "there runs through the *Regulae* a more adequate conception of the intellect, though one incompatible with the doctrine expressed … Descartes ought to have said that two things are

evident cognition." There is something confusing about this attempt to locate truth in our apprehension of simple natures. Even if we were to grant Descartes that there is such intuition and that it permits no doubt, in what sense can the intuition of a simple nature be said to be true? Traditionally the locus of truth is sought in judgment, and all judgment involves, even if it cannot be reduced to, synthesis. Intuitions we simply have; they can be considered true or false only when they are referred to something else, so when I take the idea as claiming to present something as it is; but here intuition involves judgment.[34]

---

always essentially involved in every act of knowing: (i) a certain illative movement or *discursus* — an intellectual analysis and synthesis in one — which brings to light distinguishable elements and at the same time points to the logical implication by which each leads to the next the necessary conditions by which they cohere; (ii) a certain unitary apprehension, an immediate, direct perception of the distinguishable elements (as opposed to isolable constituents) as indivisibly constituting a whole *(Descartes's Rules for the Direction of the Mind*, reconstructed from notes taken by his pupils, ed. Errol E. Harris (London, 1957), pp. 38 and. 40). Following Joachim, L. J. Beck has assembled more evidence in support of this coherence view and maintains that "Despite some ambiguous expressions, there is no reason to consider that Descartes's doctrine implies that simple natures are mere atoms of thought, to which correspond atoms of reality…. The simple natures enclose and engender a number of relations which may be of an infinite complexity, the total constituting the whole of reality and the whole of knowledge…. 'The I atom of evidence,' then,… must be understood as 'simple' only in so far as it is the *minimum cognoscibile* for the knowing mind, but as *minimum cognoscibile* it is a whole of the nexus and what is connected — it is, to continue borrowing phrases, an implication with its i*mplicans* and *implicatum*, a simple proposition." (*The Method of Descartes. A Study of the Regulae* (Oxford, 1952), pp. 77 and 79). That there is tension between this interpretation and a number of passages in the *Rules* is admitted by both Joachim and Beck. But this tension is not to be explained away by suggesting that Descartes presented the atomistic thesis only as an "expository device" (Joachim, p. 3) or by admitting that there are "some ambiguous expressions (Beck, p. 77). It has its foundation in the fact that Descartes' demand for a certain, clear and distinct basis for knowledge conflicts with the phenomenon of knowledge. In the *Rules* this tension appears as a result of Descartes's attempt to hold on to both. A strong case for the atomicity of simples is made by Leonard G. Miller, "Descartes, Mathematics, and God," The Philosophical Review, LXVI (1957), pp. 451-465.

[34] In the *Rules* Descartes tends to blur the distinction between intuition and judgment. As Joachim points out, Descartes calls his simples *propositiones* or *enunciationes*, "yet he constantly speaks of these self-evident objects of *intuitus* in terms "which suggest concepts — an 'A' or a 'B and not a complex 'A inplying B'. " (Descartes's *Rules,* p. 33) Among his examples of simple natures Descartes includes

Nor do we move from intuition to judgment by moving from the simple to the complex. An aggregate of simple ideas is not yet a judgment. Just as Wittgenstein insists that the "pictorial relation" be considered part of the picture, so we have to insist that judgments claim to present some reality as it is. If this is accepted, it follows that simple ideas are neither true nor false, and when they are taken as claiming to represent, i e. as *realitas objectiva* our thoughts are no longer simple. Lacking simplicity, they are now subject to doubt. Thus the simple natures of the *Rules* do not withstand the doubt of the *Meditations* when they are taken as *realitas objectiva*. The *cogito* is supposed to furnish us with the one exception that is to vindicate our faith in the clear and distinct.

But do we have a clear and distinct idea of our own existence? We do know *that* we are. The existence of the self cannot be doubted, as it is itself presupposed by all doubt. But Descartes goes further and insists that we know with equal certainty *what* we are. Granting the fundamental importance of the "I" as the underlying ground of all mental activity, does this imply that I have a clear and distinct idea of the self, more specifically, of the self as thinking substance? Such an idea is hardly gained by a simple intuition, as Descartes would have it, but rests on an interpretation of what it means to be, an interpretation that can be challenged.

Descartes links perfection to *existence*.[35] Descartes calls perfect what does not need something else to be itself. What exists by itself is thus more perfect than what depends for its existence on another. Substances are more perfect than attributes, since the latter depend on the former.[36] **To be "means thus first of all to be a**

---

existence, unity, duration, extension, things that are the same as a third thing are the same as one another, the triangle is bounded by three lines only, 2 + 2 = 4, I exist, and I think. A potentially important distinction is, however, drawn in the *Principles*: "And when I stated that this proposition *I think, therefore I am* is the first and most certain which presents itself to those who philosophize in orderly fashion, I did not for all that deny that we must first of all know *what is knowledge*, *what is existence,* and *what js certainty*, and that *in order to think we must be* and such like; but because these are notions of the simplest possible kind, which of themselves give us no knowledge of anything that exists, I did not think them worthy of being put on record." (I, no X, vol. I, p. 222) Descartes here draws a distinction between "notions of the simplest possible kind," which giver us no knowledge of existence, and propositions, which do. Yet Descartes continues) to maintain that the proposition *I think, therefore I am* expresses a simple intuition.

[35] *Principles* I, XIV, vol. 1, pp. 224-225.

substance. This interpretation of being enables Descartes to tie my certainty that I am now thinking to the far more dubious claim that I have a clear and distinct idea of myself as a thinking substance. A more careful analysis would seem to show rather that the certainty that I am now thinking does not depend on a clear and distinct perception of what I am. It lacks the transparency Descartes attributes to it.

Yet even if we accept his interpretation of being as substance, Descartes' analysis of the *cogito* must be questioned. Substance, Descartes tells us, is only known as that in which attributes reside. Thus "we do not have immediate cognition of substance."[37] Descartes' analysis of the *cogito* reflects this. The mind is defined as that substance in which thought resides. Thought is the attribute of mind. To know what I am, i.e. thinking, is also to know that I am, i.e. that I am substance. It is difficult to reconcile this with Descartes' insistence that "He who says, I think, hence 1 am, or exist, does not deduce existence from thought by a syllogism, but by a *simple act of mental vision* recognizes, it as if it were a thing known per se.[38] Even though Descartes would seem to be right when he points out that we do not deduce our own existence by a syllogism, given the Cartesian understanding of substance, the idea I have of myself as a thinking substance cannot be simple and deduction or some other complex act of cognition must be involved. Yet Descartes cannot admit that the idea I have of my own existence is in any way complex if it is to function as the paradigm of what in the *Rules* is called intuition and therefore indubitable and not in need of the divine guarantee.

This difficulty points to a deeper problem: if all knowledge of substance is mediated, that is to say, if there is an awareness of existence only where there is some understanding of essence, then simple intuition cannot in principle give us access to substance or existence. All awareness of reality is more than just having an idea; it refers that idea to transcendence; thus it is more than just intuition and involves judgment. To save reality Descartes would have to either argue for a simple intuition of substance or give up his attempt to find truth in simple intuition. **Descartes avoids having to face this alternative only by blurring the distinction between intuition and judgment**. He

---

[36] *Meditation V,* vol. 1, p. 182. *Principles* I, LII, LII, LIII, vol. 1, pp. 239-240.
[37] *Reply to Objections IV*, vol. 2, p. 90.
[38] *Reply to Objections IV*, vol. 2, p. 38. My italics.

recognizes that the idea I have of my own existence is neither just another simple nature nor a complex insight based on deduction. But since his own analysis appears to leave him only the choice between these two, he tends to assimilate the *cogito* to other simple natures.

Just as Descartes' analysis of the *cogito* blurs the distinction between intuition and judgment, so it tends to conflate knowing something immediately and knowing something clearly and distinctly. To say that my knowledge that I am is immediate is to suggest that in self-knowledge the subject apprehends itself directly without any mediating idea. If this were Descartes' interpretation, the *cogito* could never be used to support clarity and distinctness as a general criterion of what is necessary to truly know something, for the certainty with which I know that I exist would be based on the immediacy with which I apprehend myself, not on the clarity and distinctness of the idea which I have of myself. If the *cogito* is to furnish us with such a criterion, Descartes must admit that there is some mediation even in the case of the *cogito*. This just restates a point made above: the recognition "I think, hence I am, or exist" involves more than a simple act of intuition; it involves judgment. The idea 1 have of myself refers beyond itself to myself. To make sense of this, **we must posit a double awareness of the self**: to know that the idea I have of myself does indeed refer to myself I must have some more immediate access to that which it represents, that is to myself. Descartes does indeed maintain that "there can exist in us no thought of which, at the very moment that it is present in us, we are not conscious."[39] Consciousness is marked by a double-awareness. An immediate self-awareness attends all our ideas including the idea I have of myself. It is this awareness that provides the *cogito* with its certainty. But again it is the immediacy of this awareness rather than the clarity and distinctness of the idea I have of myself that accounts for the indubitability of my existence; and again this makes it impossible to use the *cogito* to establish clarity and distinctness as a criterion of truth.

It is perhaps confusing that immediacy may be used in two senses: what mediates may be an idea, it may also be reflection. I can thus have an immediate perception of a simple clear and distinct idea, which reflection shows to be a representation of some other thing. Such, it would seem, is the idea I have of myself. Given their simplicity,

---

[39] *Reply to Objections IV*, vol. 2, p. 115.

one is tempted to argue, the represented must be either completely present in such ideas or not at all. They must be like transparent glass through which we see clearly and distinctly what lies on the other side, if they are to be representations at all. But only in the case of my own self am I actually on that other side, and thus able to bear out that the clear and distinct is indeed a transparent medium.

But this argument must be rejected: while we may grant that a simple idea is grasped either completely or not at all, it does not follow that what that idea represents must be simple as well. **Clarity and distinctness furnishes only a criterion of what can be grasped without loss; in no way does it give us an assurance that what we can grasp in that way is a true representation of what is.**

Yet even if, in spite of these considerations, we were to grant Descartes that the clear and distinct offers us a transparent medium, a difficulty remains. If the logically simple corresponds to the ontologically simple, then it follows that only ideas of substance can be truly clear and distinct. But we have no immediate cognition of substance. Furthermore, since substance is defined as that which does not depend for its being on the being of another, in the end there can be only one absolutely clear and distinct idea, the idea of God. In the third meditation Descartes shows himself willing to admit this. There he calls the idea of God *maxime vera, et maxime clara et distincta*.[40] **But can there be degrees of clarity and distinctness**? And what are we to make now of the proof of the existence of God? Is it only a device for getting the reader of the *Meditations* to recollect what in some sense is already known to him, just as Plato thought that the higher truths had to be recollected.[41] Yet such a theory seems incompatible with Cartesian method. **Cartesian method is designed to establish the human ability to grasp what is known as the measure of what is true; the proof of the existence of God is designed to make God's creative knowledge that measure**.

---

[40] *Meditation III*, vol. I, p. 166.

[41] Cf. *Meditation III*, vol. I, p. 166.. "…; but when I slightly relax my attention, my mind, finding its vision somewhat obscured and so to speak blinded by the images of sensible objects, I do not easily *recollect* the reason why the idea that I possess of a being more perfect than I, must necessarily have been placed in me by a being which is really more perfect." (My italics)

In the *Meditations* Descartes tries to hold on to both; an attempt is made to found God in man and man in God. On analysis this circle dissolves: the subject is prior in the order of knowing, God in the order of being, but with this recognition the order of knowing and that of being again separate. A gap opens up between the two that renders Descartes' hope for an adequate picture of the world vain. Reality eludes our grasp.

2

In this connection it is interesting to compare J)escartes' thought with that of the last great medieval philosopher, Nicolaus Cusanus.[42] When reading through the *Rules* one is struck by repeated attacks on those who are content with knowledge that is only probable. Descartes wants certainty, not conjecture.[43] Conjecture, on the other hand, is one of Cusanus' favorite words. There are, however, some striking similarities between their views. According to Cusanus, too, the mind, by its very nature, demands unity; with him, too, this leads to a search to bring the manifold under a unity. The human intellect (*mens)* in seeking its own measure in the world can only succeed to the extent to which it succeeds in applying this measure to the manifold.

The language that Cusanus uses to formulate his theory of the *mens* still suggests Thomas Aquinas. Like Thomas, Cusanus relates *mens* to *mensura*.[44] The intellect applies a measure to things. Thomas and Cusanus further agree in taking counting to be the prototype of all measuring. "One implies the idea of primary measure; and number is multitude measured by one."[45] Thomas here refers to Aristotle who had pointed out that "unity in the strictest sense of the word, is a measure, and most properly of quantity and secondly of quality."[46] But if Cusanus follows Thomas in his conception of *mensurare*, he disagrees with him about the sense in which *mens* is *mensura*. For Aristotle and Thomas mind is not so much measure as measured. "Knowledge, also, and perception,

---

42 Cf. Karsten Harries, *Infinity and Perspective* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2001), especially Chapter 10, "Homo Faber: The Rediscovery of Protagoras, " pp. 184-199.
43 Cf. *Rule XII*, vol. 1, p. 47.
44 Nicholas of Cusa, *Idiota de Mente*, I; trans. *The Layman on Mind* in Jasper Hopkins, Nicholas of Cusa on Wisdom and Knowledge (Minneapolis: Banning, 1996), p. 171.
45 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* I, II, 2 , in *The Basic Writings of St. Thomas Aquinas*, 2 vols. ed. Anton C. Pegis (New York: Random House, 1945).
46 Aristotle, *Metaphysics* X, 1, 1053b4. Trans. W. D. Ross.

we call the measure of things for the same reason, because we know something by them, while as a matter of fact they are measured rather than measure other things.“[47] For Cusanus on the other hand, *mens is mensura* in a far stronger sense. He accuses Aristotle of having missed the significance of Protagoras' "man is the measure of all things. “ The human being, for Cusanus, is a living unity, who constitutes his world by giving it his measure. In emphasizing the constitutive power of the human intellect Cusanus resembles Kant more than Descartes. Cusanus thinks of man as of a second God, a creator of conceptual forms in which he mirrors himself and with which he structures what confronts him in his own image.

In constituting an object out of the manifold the *mens* singles out certain features for special attention. These features do not exhaust the manifold; the constituted unity is surrounded by the shadow of what has escaped the activity of the *mens*. Using Kantian language, appearance is transcended by the thing-in-itself. This transcendence is given in the failure of our attempts to subjugate the manifold by capturing it in our conceptual nets. Thus the tree that I now see before me — an elm tree, its leaves beginning to turn yellow — is given to me as richer than any description I could provide. Something outside the constituted unity always remains and informs the *mens* that it has only produced a conjecture concerning reality and that it is in principle always possible to improve on it. Such openness characterizes all our encounters with what is real: there, is always something that escapes the activity of the *mens*, a horizon that forces the human knower to acknowledge his limits; this horizon prevents the *mens* from constituting a unity that does not in some way fall short of the unity it demands. Never satisfied it always strives for satisfaction: a living unity in search of itself. Only if it could constitute an all-including unity could it come to rest, but this is impossible to the finite intellect. Adequate knowledge of what is real remains in principle an unattainable ideal. Man can know adequately only what has its measure in his own finite understanding, i.e. what he has himself constructed. We fully know only what we can 'make, be it a conceptual model or a machine. But we cannot make existence. If this or a similar view of the understanding is accepted, **the demand for a. fully adequate knowledge of the world**

---

[47] *Metaphysics* X, l, 1053 a 32 ff. Cf. 1057 a 8 - 11, *Summa Theol*. I - II, 91, 3 ad 2; I~II, 64, 3; I, 14, 8 ad 3.

is a demand to be rid of the finite lot of man and thus to take the place of God. Cusanus is too much a Christian not to think that this demand has its foundation in pride. Thus he insists that man become learned about his ignorance and affirm the inadequacy that is his lot. Not to do so would be to sacrifice reality to human pride.

Descartes rejects the limits on which Cusanus insists and holds out hope for **a world become transparent to knowledge.** And yet, in the end he is forced to half recognize that this is a false hope that can only lead to the loss of reality. His proofs of the existence of God exhibit this failure.

3

Descartes' proofs of the existence of God may be construed as attempts to exhibit in God the condition of meaning, in particular of the meaning of knowledge, i.e. of truth.

God is defined by Descartes as the most perfect being. To form this idea of God it is necessary to have an idea of perfection, and not only that, but of degrees of perfection. Developing this train of thought, Descartes points out that when ideas are viewed as ideas only and not as representations, they do not have degrees of perfection, and that is to say also, they cannot lay claim to truth. "Further, when we reflect on the various ideas that are in us, it is easy to perceive that there is not much difference between them when they are considered only as modes of thinking, but they are widely different in another way, since the one represents one thing, and the other another."[48] The same view is expressed more forcefully in the *Meditations.* "If ideas are only taken as certain modes of thought, I recognize amongst them no difference or inequality… but when we consider them as images one representing one thing and the other another, it is clear that they are very different one from the other."[49] Man, as a thinking being, possesses formal reality; his ideas, being modes of his thinking, share in this formal reality. In this respect they are all alike. They possess the same degrees of reality. To put it differently, ideas viewed as *presentations* rather than as *representations* have the same weight. But, as a matter of fact, we do find one idea weightier than another. "There is no doubt that those which represent to me substances are something more, and contain so to

---

48 *Principles* I, XVII, vol. 1, pp. 225-226.
49 *Meditation III*, vol. 1, p. 162.

speak more objective reality within them (that is to say, by representation participate in a higher degree of, being or perfection) than those that simply represent modes or accidents."[50]

Here we have the crucial notion on which the Cartesian proof of the existence of God ultimately depends. Regardless of how we interpret this passage in detail, it is clear that in ascribing degrees of reality or perfection, Descartes is ascribing degrees of value. Following medieval tradition Descartes still ties together the orders of being and value. Ideas, in so far as we don't consider what they represent, but take them to be just our presentations, have all the same degree of reality. They are of equal weight. But they do not present themselves to us as such. If they did there would be no value, there would be no reason to move beyond ideas to the world they represent. Man would be caught up in an absurd dream-like world that would bear no reference to anything outside itself. Since the world is given to man possessing weight and significance, he is forced to refer his ideas to a transcendent reality.

In spite of the demands made by his method, Descartes in the end admits the inescapability of acknowledging that we human knowers are claimed by a reality transcending us. As he points out, I cannot be my own cause, for "were I independent of every other and were I myself the author of my being, I should doubt nothing and I should desire nothing, and finally no perfection would be lacking to me; for I should have bestowed on myself every perfection of which I possessed any idea and should thus be God."[51] Man experiences himself as a being in need, desiring to find satisfaction by achieving coincidence with that reality in which he has his measure. Man is in search of perfection; this is sufficient to convince him that there is a transcendent reality and that this reality is not-only the ground, but the measure of his being. To deny this measure is to fall into error and sin. Descartes still understands: man as *imago Dei*. Man has his measure in God; the world presented to him is not his creation but a recreation; the objects confronting him are not presentations but representations. Because of this they can be objects of care and concern.

---

[50] *Meditation III*, vol. 1, p. 162.
[51] *Meditation III*, vol. 1, p. 168.

But if Descartes himself thought he needed God to save reality, his own methodological commitments led philosophers in another direction. Hume completes the reduction called for by the subjective turn of Cartesian thought. The representational status of ideas is denied and with this denial Cartesian doubt becomes unintelligible. For the Hume of the *Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding* the basic constituents of the world are impressions, modes of thought, which as Descartes had recognized, properly speaking cannot be said to be either true or false. These impressions do not refer beyond themselves, they are presentations. They do associate in certain patterns, but there is no discernible ground for this, there is no assurance that these patterns may not suddenly give way to unintelligible chaos. All facts are radically contingent.

> The implications of Hume's philosophy, which he himself clearly perceived and insisted upon, amount to saying — although he himself does not put it this way — that there is no reason why anything happens as it does and that the universe is totally irrational and senseless in its proceedings. We can ask what happens, but to ask why it happens is to ask a meaningless question ... All we can say is what happens happens. It is just so, and this is the end of the matter. Everything is just a brute fact, we live in a brute fact universe. This then is the vision of a world without purpose, sense, or reason, and it is the inner substance of Hume's philosophy.[52]

Stace may have failed to do justice to Hume. What he describes as the inner substance of Hume's philosophy represents perhaps but a side of it. But this side has found successors and has fathered a great deal of philosophic literature that, true to its commitment to the Cartesian reduction, had to rob being of transcendence and thus of meaning. Nothing usurps the place of transcendence.

4

I have tried to show that nihilism is part of' our Cartesian inheritance. But it would be futile to blame Cartesian method. Its success presupposes a willingness to distance oneself from the way we experience things first of all and most of the time in

---

[52] Walter T. Stace, *Religion and the Modern Mind* (Philadelphia, 1952), p 164.

> order to assert, from the newly gained vantage point, our mastery over the world. Our own age is witness to the triumph of this project, witness also to the price to be paid; the world has become and is still becoming ever more one-dimensional, flatter; as man became increasingly objective, so did the world: objective and mute.

Wittgenstein' s *Tractatus* may be read as a work that with great clarity reveals the consequences of Cartesian method. By doing so, he prepares the way for the step beyond that method.

4. The Adequacy of Pictures

1

In the preceding two sessions I suggested that Cartesian method demands a reduction of experience. This reduction leads to a particular interpretation of being:— to be is to be object of an ideally disinterested awareness; of man — angel-like man floats above the world, a disembodied thinking subject — and of truth — only that is true which presents itself clearly and distinctly to the thinking subject. But if this is where his method leads us, Descartes himself refused to be led just by it. With his proof of the existence of God he made an attempt to hold on to an understanding of being as founded in God, of man as not only the measure of objects, but as measured by God and his creation, and truth as having its measure not only in the subject, but also and more fundamentally in God. In this context, what matters is not so much the question whether Descartes' proof of God's existence is successful or not — from what was said it follows that in terms of his own method it cannot be — but rather to see that Descartes' attempt to give philosophy a foundation, including his method and his proof of the existence of God, can be understood only if we keep in mind his stance in between two points of view: historically put, between medieval and modern philosophy; more philosophically speaking, between the world understood as an order of meaning and the world understood as the totality of facts. Although by no means the same, these two characterizations of Descartes' place are related in that modern philosophy has its foundation in Cartesian method and its reduction, while medieval philosophy with its emphasis on analogical thinking was able to remain closer to the meaningful world that is given to us in our daily experience. The more a philosopher commits himself to Cartesian method, the more this world will remain concealed from him and his investigations, until finally all that moves and claims us human beings, all that gives things their weight, is banished from philosophy. More concisely than any other work, Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* marks this point in the development of modern philosophy.

2

Two of Descartes' key conceptions, his logical atomism and the picture theory, occupy a prominent place in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus.*[53] As with Descartes, Wittgenstein's logical atomism has its foundation in a demand that our speaking and thinking be clear and precise.

> What can be said at all can be said clearly, and what we cannot talk about we must pass over in silence. (Preface)

This statement is not so much a description as a prescription. Yet by being simply stated, as if it were self-evident, the fact that a good part of what ordinarily counts as "saying something" is excluded from meaningful discourse is concealed. There is no suggestion that something might be lost when language is reduced to what can be said clearly. Only towards the end of the *Tractatus*, when the dimension of that of which we cannot speak seems to include almost all that matters, does this loss show itself.

The *Tractatus* begins with a few propositions outlining an ontology, propositions that at first appear to be asserted without supporting arguments: the world is said to be "all that is the case" (1) ; "something can be the case or not be the case and everything else remain the same." (1.21) On this view the world is like a mosaic, but a mosaic which just happens to be as it is; each stone, each atomic fact, could equally well not be; neither causality nor divine will bind the separate stones together.

---

[53] Two related objections have been urged against the first part of this thesis: (1) Descartes is not a logical atomist at all. As, e.g. Joachim has shown, Descartes' simples are tied together by internal relations. But does it make sense to speak of a logical atomism with internal relations? (2) Wittgenstein's atoms are facts, while Descartes' simples are closer Wittgenstein's objects, which are essentially tied into one logical network. An answer to the first objections has already been given: atomism represents at least one prominent strand in Descartes' thinking. The second objection is more difficult to deal with. As pointed out, Descartes fails to distinguish clearly between concepts and propositions. Both can refer to objects of simple intuition. Wittgenstein, on the other hand draws a sharp distinction between names and propositions, between simple objects and atomic facts. But in spite of such obvious differences, the logical atomism of both has its foundation in the sane demand for clarity and distinctness, a demand that finds expression in the thesis that whatever is complex must be analyzable into absolute simples. Cf. Max Black, *A Companion to Wittgenstein's "Tractatus"*(Ithaca, 1964), pp. 65 - 67.

While atomic facts are the primitive parts of more complex facts and of the totality of facts, i.e. the world, they can be analyzed further: atomic facts are constituted by the conjunction of things [*Gegenständen (Sachen, Dingen*)] (2.01); these things, we are told, are simple enduring objects. (2.02, 2.027). Together they constitute the substance of the world (2.021). Since facts must be conjunctions of objects, this substance determines the limits not only of this, but of countless possible worlds.

Wittgenstein tries to show that there must be such a substance, by indicating that we must presuppose it, if our propositions are to have a sense. Only if the world has a substance, can we speak clearly and, given the restriction put on language in the preface, can we speak at all (cf. 2.02-2 .021).[54]

To be clear a proposition or picture has to represent a possible state of affairs in such a way that it is in principle possible to decide whether or not what is asserted really obtains — meaningful propositions are true or false, they are not something in between. **Once this is granted, logical atomism can be defended as the necessary condition of the possibility of meaningful discourse.**

Consider the proposition ”there is a red book in this room." Does it have a determinate sense? Look at this book here, is it still red or is it already orange? Well, one is tempted to say, it is sort of red. But if the book is sort of red, is the proposition not also only sort of true? Just this we wanted to avoid. If our propositions are to be clear in Wittgenstein's sense we have to give our words a more definite meaning, definite enough to enable us to know exactly what it is that is being described and what would have to be the case to make the description true. If the proposition is to have a determinate sense -- where the sense of a proposition is defined as what it presents (2.221) — it must be made up of parts which cannot be analyzed any further (cf. 3.21). If this is denied, further determination of the proposition is always possible and it becomes necessary to deny also that there can be complete description. But it is just this that Wittgenstein demands (cf. 4.023).

Of course, if we try to think of some situation in which someone might really say "there is a red book in this room,” there usually would be no problem. We normally don't have to worry what exactly it is "red" refers to. The particular situation in which the word

---

[54] Cf. James Griffin, *Wittgenstein’s Logical Atomism* (Oxford, 1964), pp. 65 - 67

is being used makes clear what is meant. Usually then the meaning of a word is constituted, at least in part, by how it is used in particular situations. But the Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus* cannot take care of the problem in this way; if he did the argument for simples would collapse. That he sees a need for simples presupposes that language is not interpreted in terms of the more comprehensive phenomenon of man's being in and dealings with the world, but as possessing the objectivity of topographical maps. Wittgenstein's demand, that the pictures we make of the world have a completely determinate sense apart from the context in which these pictures are used, leads him to assert that our pictures must be conjunctions of simple elements. Thus propositions are said to be made up of names, and since thoughts are also pictures, something analogous must hold here. If our propositions are to be either true of false, if approximations and conjectures are to be excluded, these elements of pictures must name onto1ogical elements: names name objects. Since facts, to be describable, or even thinkable, must be conjunctions of such elements, this substance determines the limits of this and of all possible worlds. Thus, although Wittgenstein begins the *Tractatus* with a discussion of the world, this discussion presupposes his theory of language. In spite of an apparent realism, an idealized language is made constitutive of the world.

3

The thesis that the world is made up of atomic facts and that each of these atomic facts can be interpreted as a conjunction or intersection of simple objects invites a search for such objects. What does Wittgenstein have in mind when he speaks of objects or things, or, alternatively, of names? His definition tells us that names must be indefinable; we can only exhibit their meaning by showing how they are used, i.e.by forming propositions in which these names occur and by pointing to the atomic facts which these propositions assert to be the case (3.221, 3.26). To be sure, the argument Wittgenstein provides does not require us to identify what things and atomic facts are; it simply derives from the requirement that our assertions have a determinate sense, certain conditions. The argument itself leaves the statement of these conditions quite formal and empty. Yet such empty statements not only invite attempts to provide more content than

the argument itself demands, but if all such attempts were to break down we should begin to wonder whether we were not perhaps wrong to insist on determinacy of sense.

What has been called the 'old interpretation' of the *Tractatus* thus "'makes Wittgenstein 's. elementary propositions into Russell's atomic propositions or Carnap' s protocol sentences;" it "takes propositions of the 'this red now' variety as elementary" and "considers analysis as analysis into units of experience."[55]

To call this the 'old interpretation' is' to suggest that we know better. James Griffin thus argues that analysis in Wittgenstein's logical atomism is a reduction to what is; basic, not in experience, but in reference.[56] "That the Tractatus has nothing to do with sense-data, I want now to maintain, is almost certain."[57] Griffin thus goes beyond the weaker thesis that, given the logical nature of the work, Wittgenstein did not have to furnish examples of elementary propositions, a thesis that may seem to leave some room for the sense-datum reading although it doesn't saddle Wittgenstein with it.

The arguments Griffin, advances against the sense-datum reading are instructive, if not altogether convincing. The first is familiar: "To attack the 'this red now' example all that one need do as Anscombe shows, is cite 6.3751: 'It is clear that the logical product of two elementary propositions can neither be a tautology nor a contradiction. The statement that a point in the visual field has two different colours at the same time is a contradi6tion.' Hence 'this red now' is not elementary."[58] But while the argument shows that we cannot reconcile the 'this red now' interpretation of elementary propositions with.what Wittgenstein has to say about such propositions in the *Tractatus*, this does not mean that, in spite of this, Wittgenstein may not have been thinking of this interpretation. That this was indeed the case is suggested by a number of observations in the later *Philosophische Bemerkungen*, where he considers whether it might not after all be possible for two elementary propositions to contradict one another: "Can there be a construction within the elementary proposition, which does not work with the aid of the truth function and also has an effect on how one proposition follows from another? Then

---

55 Ibid., p. 4.
56 Ibid., p. 149.
57 Ibid., p. 150.
58 Ibid., p. 5. Cf. G. E. M. Anscombe, *An Introduction to Wittgenstein's Tractatus* (London, 1959), p. 27.

two elementary propositions can contradict one another" (PB VIII, 76, p.18; cf. pp.105-114). Developing this thought, Wittgenstein points out that he was mistaken when he compared the picture to "a scale applied to reality" (2.151). It is not the picture or proposition which is like a scale applied to reality, but "a system of propositions. (PB, p. 19). He now criticizes himself for not having realized, when writing the *Tractatus*, that to know that a point in the field of vision is blue is to know also that it is not red, not green, etc. "For when I apply a system of propositions to reality, this already says — just as with a spatial system, that always only one atomic fact can obtain, never several."[59]

Once the atomicity of elementary propositions has been limited in this way, Anscombe's argument against the sense-datum interpretation loses its force. And, interestingly enough, it was precisely Wittgenstein's tendency to think in terms of this interpretation, even while aware of the difficulties connected with it, that led him to make this revision.

Griffin adds two arguments of his own which, he thinks, "settle the matter." "First Wittgenstein is perfectly explicit that objects, as he uses the term, are what constitute the world. And there is no possibility that 'the world' can be read as 'the world of my experience': he means, he says, reality. Second, objects are eternal, and this would hardly be the case with the parts of a sense-datum."[60]

The first argument settles nothing at all. Perhaps it could do so if we already knew what Wittgenstein means by 'world' and 'reality,' but this is open to interpretation. What Wittgenstein means by 'world' depends on what he means by 'elementary propositions' and vice versa. Griffin's first argument thus begs the issue by assuming that we already know what is still at issue.

His second argument, that objects are said to be eternal while the parts of a sense-datum are not, is also subject to doubt. To speak of "the parts of a sense-datum" is misleading. The analogy is not so much to small areas making up a larger one as it is to co-ordinates determining a point (cf. 3.41). In the former case there is a homogeneity between the constituting elements and what is constituted, which is lacking in the latter case. Assuming that the latter is what Wittgenstein has in mind, it is not clear why the

---

[59] Waisnann' s Notes of 12. 12. 1929, *Wittgenstein's Schriften*, vol. 2, Appendix, p. 317.
[60] *Wittgenstein's Logical Atomism*, p. 150.

elements constitutive of a sense-datum might not be eternal, while the sense-datum itself is not. Why, e.g., could we not understand a sensed datum as an intersection of eternal objects.'

The sense-datum reading of the *Tractatus* is not ruled out quite as easily as Griffin seems to think. On 'the contrary, Wittgenstein's later development of his position in the *Tractatus* suggests that he entertained this interpretation in spite of the fact that he recognized its incompatibility with Tractarian atomism and knew that such interpretation goes beyond the limits of a purely logical investigation.

4

Griffin's attack on the sense-datum interpretation is designed to support his own claim that Wittgenstein's atoms are indestructible material objects. If Griffin is right, Wittgenstein was indebted for his atomism to Heinrich Hertz, especially to Hertz's *Principles of Mechanics*: There "Hertz gives the characteristics which any language for the description of the world (from the mechanical point of view) must possess. Wittgenstein models so much of the *Tractatus* on this work that there is point to thinking of the *Tractatus* as *The Principles of All Natural Science*s. The *Tractatus* too aims at setting up principles for language, but they are the principles governing not a particular kind of report, but any report about the world; and the reports in the *Tractatus* are *about the world*; not about experience, and not about sense-data."[61] Wittgenstein's propositions are taken to describe a world made up of simple, indestructible material objects, of what Hertz calls "material points." "The world is, if not entirely then partly an aggregate of material points. The models, the pictures we make of he world are built in a similar way out of the symbols which represent these material points."[62]

I do not think Griffin's attempt to support his interpretation of the *Tractatus* by an appeal to *The Principles of Mechanics* successful, yet his comparison of Tractarian atomism to that of Hertz's *Principles* does enable us to see more clearly the

---

[61] Ibid., p. 5.
[62] Ibid. p. 10.

presuppositions of the former. Wittgenstein could indeed find there "the outlines of a picture theory."[63] As Griffin points out, Wittgenstein's assertion, "Wir machen uns Bilder der Tatsachen" (2.1) recalls Hertz' s “Wir machen uns innere Scheinbilder oder Symbole der äusseren Gegenstände" — the similarity extends here even to diction.[64] Wittgenstein and Hertz agree further "that there must be something in common between picture and fact.[65] But at this point their agreement becomes questionable. Underlying the picture theory in the *Tractatus* is the Cartesian assumption that the world is transparent to language. Only on this assumption does Wittgenstein's logical atomism lead to an ontological atomism; only this assumption enables him to assert the isomorphism of picture and fact: names or the elements of pictures represent objects, the elements of facts.

Hertz, too, is an atomist when it comes to the construction of his mechanical model. Thus the world, as it is described by this model, appears to be made up of “material particles.” A "material particle" is defined as a characteristic, by means of which a definite point of space at a given time is uniquely correlated with a definite point of space at every other time. Given this definition it follows that material particles must be “immutable and indestructible”; in this, as Griffin observes, they are like Wittgenstein's objects. The "mass" contained by a space is defined as the number of material particles found in this space, compared to the number of material particles found in some other specified space at a specified time. A "material point" is defined as a finite or infinitely small mass, imagined in an infinitely small space. Each material point consists of "a certain number of conjoined material particles.”[66]

Yet if we are not to misunderstand Hertz, we must keep in mind that he is not trying to present us with a fully adequate picture of the world. He is developing a model that he is confident will find future application; but to be applicable, it is by no means

---

[63] Ibid., p. 150.
[64] Heinrich Hertz, *Die Prinzipien der Mechanik* (Leipzig, 1894), p. 1. Note. however, the diference between *Bilder* and *Scheinbilder*. *Scheinbilder* are not pictures but only seem to be so. Trans. D. E. Jones and J. T. Walley, The Principles of Mechanics, Presented in a New Form, (London 1899; Dover ed. 2003.)
[65] *Wittgenstein’s Logical Atomism*, p. 100.
[66] *Prinzipien der Mechanik*, p. 54.

necessary that there should be a strict correspondence between the elements of the model and the elements of the world, if indeed the world is made up of such elements at all. All that is required is that we can use the model to make true predictions. Indeed, if we consider Hertz's definition of "material point" one wonders whether there could ever be such a thing. How can a finite mass occupy an infinitely small space? Material points are fictions that serve Hertz in the construction of his mechanical model. This model is applicable even though in fact there is no such thing as a material point. Hertz's definitions invite us to construct models of a certain type. They enable us to give to our description of the world a unified form. As Wittgenstein puts it, "Mechanics determines one form of a description of the world by saying that all propositions used in the description of the world must be obtained in a given way from a given set of propositions — the axioms of mechanics. It thus supplies the bricks for building the edifice of science, and it says, 'Any building that you want to erect, whatever it may be, must somehow be constructed with these bricks, and with these alone. '" (6.341) Hertz's definitions provide the clay from which these bricks are to be made. As Hertz points out, in order to form these definitions we need only what Kant had argued was available *a priori*: the pure intuitions of time and space. Although Kant took them to be transcendental conditions of our experience, experience, as Kant uses the term in *The Critique of Pure Reason*, appears only as the result of the reduction discussed earlier: experience is understood as the subject's awareness of given objects. The homogeneity that is the result of that reduction of experience is also exhibited by Kant's pure intuitions of space and time. Instead of the heterogeneous space and time of our everyday experience we have the uniform space and time that appears when, the richness of life has been bracketed. It is precisely this uniformity that gives to the mechanical model a neatness and precision that would otherwise be impossible.

Hertz is quite aware that the form of description that he is proposing will prove too limited to do justice to all true propositions, not to mention the whole of language. Wittgenstein makes a similar point concerning such models, when he likens the attempt to furnish a unified description of the world to the attempt to describe a black spot on a white surface by applying networks with a triangular, square, or hexagonal mesh of a

given degree of coarseness. The choice of network corresponds to the adoption of a particular form of description. (6.341) This view of description does not entail an isomorphism of our description of the world and the world itself. Wittgenstein's example suggests rather the opposite: imagine, e.g., a black circle on a white surface which is to be described using a square network of a given degree of coarseness; not only will all our attempts to give a completely adequate description of the circle in this manner fail, we also should not expect the elements of the description to correspond to elements of the thing described. What in the circle corresponds to the squares of the network? Similarly Hertz's atomistic model does not commit him to an atomistic world. The atomism of the model he constructs has its foundation not so much in the way the world is, as in a demand that the model be as simple and perspicuous as possible. It is thus misleading for Griffin to say that Wittgenstein's picture theory, tied as it is to a logical and an ontological atomism, "comes almost in its entirety from Hertz."[67] Had Wittgenstein only extended Hertz's picture theory to cover all description he could hardly have moved from his logical to an ontological atomism'. Hertz's atomism is hypothetical. It is what Cusanus would have called a conjecture of the human mind, exhibiting the structure of that mind. This atomism determines what Wittgenstein calls a form of description and this form may put such restrictions on the permitted ways of describing the world as to prevent us from doing full justice to it. To determine to what extent this is the case we have to compare the model and the descriptions it allows with reality. The descriptions of science must be measured by a more fundamental encounter with reality — and reality is not to be understood here, as Griffin supposes, as an aggregate of indestructible material objects. Only the picture we are using presents it as such. What is pictured by scientific models is, according to Hertz, “outer experience,” i.e. "concrete sensuous intuitions and perceptions.”[68] It follows that one cannot appeal to Hertz's influence on Wittgenstein to support the thesis that "the reports in the *Tractatus* are about the world, not about experience." Hertz's pictures are pictures of the world as given to us in experience. Hertz is thus closer to the 'old interpretation' of the *Tractatus* than to Griffin's own. Hertz has little to say about outer experience, yet he needs it to provide the

---

[67] *Wittgenstein’s Logical Atomism*, p. 99.
[68] *Prinzipien der Mechanik*, p. 159.

hypothetical descriptions of science with a foundation. As Wittgenstein was to write in his *Philosophische Bemerkungen*: "all talk of sense-data and immediate experience means that we are seeking a non-hypothetical representation." (PB 283)

To show how we can move from more direct descriptions of outer experience to descriptions in terms of the mechanical model and back, Hertz, posits certain rules of translation. These rules transform outer experience by subjecting it to the rule of the clock, the ruler, and the scale.[69] Mechanics rests on an explicitly stated reduction of a far richer experience. This reduction and the incurred loss are necessary if outer experience is to become manageable. They constitute not a weakness of the model, but its strength.

Hertz's views suggest the need for a distinction between primary, non-hypothetical and secondary, hypothetical description. Hertz's version of the picture theory applies only to the latter. If scientific models are to be recognized as pictures of the world at all and not as idle constructions, it must be possible to compare the descriptions they allow with more fundamental descriptions. The contrast between primary and secondary description is essential to Hertz's understanding of the picture theory. But this suggests that when we extend that picture theory to all thought and language, as Wittgenstein proposes in the *Tractatus,* we destroy its sense.

---

[69] Ibid., p. 158.

5. Two Conflicting Interpretations of Language in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*

1

I pointed out last time that the contrast between primary and secondary description is essential to Hertz's understanding of the picture theory. Mechanics provides secondary description. When his version of the picture theory, which makes a great deal of sense, given his concern to exhibit the principles of mechanics, is extended to all thought and language, as Wittgenstein proposes to do in the *Tractatus*, we destroy its sense.

In defense of Wittgenstein one could point out that he is quite aware of the need for a distinction between two levels of language. Thus in the *Tractatus* he suggests that a scientific model, such as the mechanical models of Newton and Hertz, "is an attempt to construct according to a single plan all the propositions that we need for the description of the world." (6.343) Such constructions make a reconstruction of already known true propositions necessary. The multiplicity of their forms of description must give way to just one. Only in this sense does the mechanical model effect a reduction, a reduction that makes it possible to view the totality of all true propositions as one homogeneous system.

Hertz never did claim that the model he had furnished could accommodate all truths about the world. On the contrary, he explicitly denies that mechanics attempts to be in this sense complete:

> The same sense that leads us to eliminate from the mechanics of the inanimate world every trace of an intention, feeling, of pleasure and pain, as foreign to it, lets us have misgivings about depriving our picture of the world of these richer and more varied representations. Our fundamental law, perhaps sufficient to represent the motion of inanimate matter, appears, at least on brief consideration, too simple and limited to represent even the lowest life process. That this is so seems to me not so much a disadvantage as an advantage of our law. Just because it enables us to

> gain a complete view of the totality of mechanics it shows us the limits of this totality."[70]

Hertz not only recognizes that the model he has proposed rests on a reduction and that this reduction may well render it incapable of doing justice to all true propositions, but takes it to be a special virtue of his presentation that the nature of this reduction appears so clearly in his account that it is difficult to overlook it.[71] This raises the question whether the inadequacy to which Hertz points has its foundation in the particular model that he proposes or in the very nature of such models. Wittgenstein denies the latter. He could admit that Hertz furnishes us with a form of description that is still too limited to do justice to all true propositions, but he would insist that this does not mean that there may not be such a form, even if it has not yet been discovered. Its discovery would make it possible to establish a science that would do complete justice to reality and that would no longer have its foundation in other and richer descriptions. Such a science could in principle replace all other descriptions without loss — although it might prove more convenient not to let it do so.

Is such a science possible?[72] If it is, it follows that the distinction between primary and secondary description is inessential. It matters only as long as science remains fragmentary and the ideal universal science has not yet become a reality. Once this happens, what was called primary description becomes only a less perspicuous and in no way fuller report. On this view the reduction on which science rests involves no loss of anything essential, it only provides a more simple form of representation. This seems to be where Wittgenstein is heading in the *Tractatus*. The isomorphism of picture and fact is such that to be a picture at all, a picture must be adequate. There is no room for more or less adequate pictures. From this it follows that if we can translate all true propositions into a language governed by one form of description, such translation can

---

[70] *Prinzipien der Mechanik*, p. 45.

[71] We may want to make an analogous point about the *Tractatus* and appeal to Wittgenstein's letter to Engelmann (See 1, fn. 6). This is indeed a reason for my interest in it.

[72] Cf. Otto Neurath, *Foundations of the Unity of Science: Toward an International Encyclopedia of Unified Science* (1971):

involve no loss. Ideally, all true propositions are part of one universal science — the Cartesian dream of a *mathesis universalis* reappears.

Yet if we need the contrast between two levels of language, one less hypothetical than the other, to understand a model as a model of reality, the reduction of all propositions to propositions of this universal science must result in a loss of reality. This point can be extended and used to question the distinction I have drawn between primary and secondary description: do we not need that contrast to understand a description as a description of reality? *If so*, the reduction of language to description would result in a loss of reality; the distinction between primary and secondary description would not go far enough, indeed there could be no non-hypothetical description. All descriptive language would require a foundation in a primary speaking that can no longer be considered descriptive.

But do we need that contrast? Only if language is constitutive of our encounter with the world. If this is accepted then it does follow that to extend Hertz's account of scientific models to all language transforms pictures' into idle constructions that cannot be verified in any way. **To hold that language is constitutive of the world one has to hold that in the end picture language has its foundation in language that discloses reality more directly.** To escape this conclusion one has to insist, as Wittgenstein does in the *Tractatus,* that we discover whether a picture is true or false by comparing it with reality (2.223). But how is reality given? Wittgenstein fails to answer this question. He may have felt that the limits of a purely logical investigation absolved him from having to do so. His version of the picture theory demands, however, that there be an encounter with reality that does not require the mediation of language or even thought — for, on Wittgenstein's view, thoughts, too; are pictures (3). Is, there such an encounter? Can we even make sense of it? And suppose we were to grant that there is such an encounter, how, given this view, could Wittgenstein defend his claim that language and the world are isomorphous and coextensive? The hope for a science rich enough to do full justice to reality, and this is the old Cartesian dream for a *mathesis universalis*, remains without foundation.

It seems that Wittgenstein became aware of many of these difficulties. At any rate, in the *Philosophische Bemerkungen* he was to return to a position that in some ways

is closer to that of Hertz. He now recognizes the need for a distinction between the hypothetical descriptions of science and more fundamental ways of speaking. Hypotheses, he points out, are necessary to bring what would otherwise be too confusing under control. “The description of phenomena by means of the hypothesis of the material world is indispensable because of its simplicity, compared to the incomprehensibly complicated phenomenological description" (PB 230, pp. 44 and 286). By calling phenomenological description, i.e. description that would be adequate to the observed phenomena, incomprehensibly complicated Wittgenstein suggests that it must remain an unattainable ideal, transcendental in the way π is said to be a transcendental number.[73] There seems to be no available non-hypothetical level of description. This constitutes a move, although Wittgenstein was hardly aware of this, in the direction of the pre-Cartesian views of someone like Cusanus. Like Cusanus, Wittgenstein now knows that to describe reality we always have to simplify and distort it, even if this means that we can never do full justice to it. In the *Philosophische Bemerkungen* the dream of a world transparent to language is given up. "Phenomenological language or 'primary' language, as I called it, no longer appears to me as a goal; I no longer think it necessary. All that is possible and necessary is to separate what is essential in our language from what is inessential.” The recognition “of which parts of our language are idling wheels amounts to the construction of a phenomenological language" (PB 51).

Perhaps one could say that in the *Philosophische Bemerkungen* Wittgenstein makes another attempt to extend Hertz’s account of scientific description to all of language, but now in an altogether different sense. In the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein tended to assimilate scientific description to primary description; in the *Philosophische Belnerkungen* he recognizes that all description is hypothetical and therefore inadequate. Yet to call description inadequate is to presuppose a standard of adequacy. This standard is provided by the never realized ideal of a phenomenological language that would exhibit things as they are. How are we given this ideal? Wittgenstein has no answer. He does, however, suggest that we come closest to this ideal with the language we ordinarily speak. In such speaking reality discloses itself, if inadequately, at least with

---

[73] Thus it plays the part traditionally assigned to God, the ideal observer.

such adequacy as we can hope for. It furnishes the foundation on which the sciences must rest.

2

Wittgenstein's attempt in the *Tractatus* to extend the picture theory to the whole of language and of thought results in an often noted confusion: to make sense of the picture theory the tension between reality and picture must be preserved; it must be possible to compare the picture with reality. This requires that reality transcend language and thought. On the other hand, how can this transcendent reality be given at all? Reality threatens to evaporate and become a mere nothingness. But if this happens, what sense can we make of the picture theory? In the *Tractatus* this difficulty shows itself when we examine what Wittgenstein has to say about language: his statements lead us in opposite and incompatible directions. While some of Wittgenstein' s remarks support a **realistic** interpretation of language, others suggest a **transcendental** interpretation.

By a realistic interpretation of language (or thought) I mean one that places language into a more comprehensive framework; **reality transcends language**; we approach language as a phenomenon in the world. In this sense psychological interpretations of language are necessarily realistic. They presuppose that we are already in possession of a wider horizon.

One can, on the other hand, insist that our understanding of this wider horizon goes unquestioned and is taken for granted by such interpretations; but does it not in turn presuppose the structure of language? No understanding of the world can go beyond the limits that this structure imposes. By a transcendental interpretation of language I mean one which takes language to be constitutive of the world; *the limits of language are the limits of reality*.

The full force of the transcendental interpretation has been recognized only since Kant. Yet there are elements even in Kant that can be used to support the realistic position, e.g. passages where transcendental faculties appear to have a psychological meaning or some of the statements dealing with the thing-in-itself, where Kant seems to go beyond the limits imposed by his own transcendental approach. Schopenhauer

further opened the way for a realistic, more specifically a psychological interpretation or misinterpretation of transcendental idealism; it was given greater prominence by such thinkers as Johann Friedrich Herbart and Jakob Friedrich Fries, and later by Wilhelm Wundt. This brought about a reaction and led to the reassertion of the transcendental approach by the Neo-Kantians at Marburg and by Rickert, Husserl, and Frege.

It is easy to find passages in the *Tractatus* that support a realistic interpretation. The whole first half seems to take it for granted. Consider:

2.141 A picture is a fact.

Since propositions, and thoughts, too, are pictures (3, 4.021), they, too, must be facts and as such part of the world. Language and thought thus appear to be just parts of the world. Language does have an outside. And that Wittgenstein here supports a realistic interpretation of language is hardly accidental: he needs it if he is to make sense of the picture theory and thus of truth. [74]

2.223 In order to tell whether a picture is true or false
we must compare it with reality.

This presupposes that something is given apart from the mediation of that picture, i.e. without requiring the mediation of language or thought, otherwise I could only compare pictures with pictures, never directly with reality. If the correspondence theory is to make any sense, reality must be given in some sense as transcending language. Wittgenstein's picture theory demands a realistic interpretation of language.

Yet once we have committed ourselves to such an interpretation there is no reason left to insist, as Wittgenstein does, on the isomorphism of picture and pictured fact, of language and reality. On the contrary, since reality on this view transcends language, we should expect some similarity between the two — otherwise language could not even offer us pictures of reality — but no isomorphism. The isomorphism of language and reality does, however, follow from the transcendental model. Since on this view language constitutes reality, there is no way for reality to transcend language or in any way, to elude its grasp; the form of language is the form of reality. Thus I have argued

---

[74] Here we have a difference between Wittgenstein and Frege that will become important in a later session. According to Wittgenstein thoughts are pictures and as such facts. Frege, on the other hand, insists that thoughts and facts posses a different ontological status.

that in spite of his realism, Wittgenstein also makes language constitutive of the world. That he himself was aware of this is shown by this remark from his *Notebooks*:

> Is the representation by means of unanalyzable names only one system? All I want is only for my meaning to be completely analyzed! (NB 17.6. 15)
>
> The demand for simple things is the demand for definiteness of sense. (NB 18.6.15)

This is to say, Wittgenstein's ontology is demanded by his view of language. In the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein posits the conditions that must be met if we are to speak in his sense meaningfully.

> Logic is transcendental. (6.13)

These and similar passages suggest that in the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein holds that there is no more comprehensive horizon than that provided by his sign language. Its limits mean the limits of the world (5.6). So understood language has no outside. For this reason there can be no more fundamental discipline than the inquiry into the logical structure of our language.

Part of this transcendental stance is Wittgenstein's attack on attempts to use psychology to supply logic with a foundation.

> 4.1121 Psychology is no more closely related to philosophy than any other natural science.

Psychology is classified as a natural science. The natural sciences describe what is the case, while philosophy exhibits the limits imposed on our understanding of what is the case by the logic of our language.

> Does not my study of sign-language correspond to the study of thought-processes, which philosophers used to consider so essential to the philosophy of logic? Only in most cases they got entangled in unessential psychological investigations, and with my method too there is an analogous risk. (4.1121)

This latter danger stems from trying to tie a logical investigation to a particular interpretation of reality, from introducing realistic, descriptive elements into what should be transcendental considerations.

Yet Wittgenstein is unable to consistently occupy a transcendental point of view. **Only if we assume that Wittgenstein is using a realistic model of language can we interpret truth as the correspondence of picture and fact; only if we assume that he is using a transcendental model of language can we defend the isomorphism of language and realit***y*, although in that case it becomes trivial. Wittgenstein needs both to defend his version of the picture theory. But the two models are incompatible.

One can try to remove this incompatibility by drawing a distinction between two different ways of speaking about language. We can consider language as a phenomenon in the world; this is a task for what Wittgenstein would consider "natural science"; here the realistic model is appropriate. Or we can consider it as constitutive of the world; this 'is a task for philosophy and here the transcendental model is appropriate. The latter approach can claim to be more fundamental than the former, although this may go unacknowledged.

In the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein draws a similar distinction between the "metaphysical subject," "limit — not a part of the world," and man as he appears in the world. (5.631.5.641) But he fails to draw such a distinction with respect to language. Had he done so, he would have had to give up his picture theory. As it was, he kept it, leaving the reader with what appears to be a fundamental confusion.

It is essentially the same confusion we could note already with Descartes. On one hand Descartes makes the subject the foundation of truth — this is implicit in the demands made by his method — on the other hand he tries to found truth in transcendence — this is implicit in his attempt to prove the existence of God. Both Descartes and Wittgenstein are led by their demand for clarity and precision to a logical atomism. In both cases this threatens a loss of transcendence. Descartes recognized the difficulties that lie hidden here and attempted to deal with them by appealing to God as a guarantee of truth. In the *Tractatus* we find no similar recognition. Wittgenstein here simply asserts his version of the picture theory without providing anything like a real defense; and even then it fails to safeguard transcendence. By insisting on the isomorphism of picture and pictured fact Wittgenstein bends reality to the

requirements of the ego. The idealist triumphs over the realist. [75]

[75] Cf, Karsten Harries, “Two Conflicting Interpretations of Language in Wittgenstein's Investigations," *Kantstudien,,* vol. 59, no. 4, 1968, pp. 397- 409.

6. Truth and Transcendence

1

Schopenhauer divides philosophers into two kinds: those who were made philosophers by life and those who were made philosophers by philosophy. Wittgenstein would seem to belong to the former, Heidegger to the latter. This difference shows itself in their first written work. While Heidegger is writing within a well-established tradition, dealing with problems that it handed to him, Wittgenstein is not burdened in this way. The originality and freshness of the *Tractatus* are due, in part at least, to Wittgenstein's ignorance of the traditional answers to many of the problems with which he was concerned. In spite of an early acquaintance with Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Representation* and careful study of the work of Russell and Frege, Wittgenstein was; able to philosophize almost *de novo*. At times the *Tractatu*s reminds one of the pre-Socratics or perhaps of Descartes. One has the same sense of witnessing a beginning.

And yet, this feeling is deceptive. Even if ignorant of much of academic philosophy, Wittgenstein, trained as an engineer, could not escape his age, an age shaped by that reduction of experience which found its first clear philosophic expression in Cartesian method. Before he was a philosopher Wittgenstein was already a Cartesian; Cartesian were the foundations of the science and technology he knew, Cartesian the origins of the nihilism of the age, which mirrored itself in the incredible popularity Schopenhauer then enjoyed. Having a philosopher's instinct for what is fundamental, Wittgenstein' s first attempts at philosophy could not but return him to the Cartesian foundations of his time.

Wittgenstein invites his readers to disregard historical connections. Thus in the preface to the *Tractatus* he tells us that it is a matter of indifference to him whether what he has thought has been thought before him by some other philosopher. Admirable as such willingness to think for himself is, by being so independent Wittgenstein not only runs the risk of reasserting what has already been said, but also, and this is more serious, of what has already been refuted. Thus the confusions between a realistic and a transcendental approach, which he fell into in trying to formulate his picture theory, were related to the confusions between a psychological and logical approach which all but

preoccupied philosophers at the turn of the century, among them Frege. When one compares Frege's and Wittgenstein's conceptions of truth, one is struck by the fact that Frege clearly recognizes just those difficulties that attend all correspondence theories and make Wittgenstein' s picture theory untenable. Of course, Wittgenstein knows that his and Frege's conception of truth differ; he even makes a few critical remarks designed to show where F'rege went wrong.[76] But these remarks remain on the surface. The foundations of Frege's and of his own conception remain unquestioned and unthought.

2

In "The Thought" Frege begins his attack on the correspondence theory with the observation that when we call pictures, representations, and thoughts all true, we throw together things which can and things which cannot be perceived. "This indicates that shifts of sense have taken place."[77] The truth of pictures has furnished the model according to which truth in general is interpreted. This model suggests that truth must be sought "in an agreement (*Übereinstimmung*) of a picture and the pictured."[78] *Übereinstimmung* is perhaps too strong a term in that it may suggest a demand that the picture be completely adequate to the pictured. This would eliminate the tension that must be preserved if pictures are to picture. Agreement must be only in certain respects. Wittgenstein would agree with this: "There must be something in the proposition that is identical with its reference, but the proposition cannot be identical with its reference, and so there must be something in it that is not identical with the reference. (The proposition is a formation with the logical features of what it represents and with other features besides, but these will be arbitrary and different in different sign-languages.)" (22.10.14) To understand a picture, to grasp its sense, we have to know its form of representation. To learn whether a picture is true or false we must compare it with reality. Frege makes almost the same point. "We should have to investigate whether it would be true that —

---

[76] Cf. especially 4.442, where Wittgenstein rejects Frege's assertion sign as logically meaning1ess; also 4.063 and 4.431. Cf. also Anscombe's defense of Wittgenstein' s criticism. *Introduction*, pp. 57 - 60, 102-107, 113 - 121.

[77] Gottlob Frege, "Der Gedanke," in *Logische Untersuchungen*., edt. and intro. Günther Patzig (Göttingen, 1966), p. 31. My translation.

[78] Ibid., pp. 31 - 32.

let us say — a representation and something real agreed in a specified manner. "[79] To discover whether a picture is *true* we have to discover whether it is true that picture and reality correspond. How is the second "true" to be understood? Again as correspondence? But does this not lead to an infinite regress? If in some cases truth can be understood as correspondence, e.g. the truth of pictures, this truth presupposes truth in a more fundamental sense. What is the meaning of this more fundamental truth? Frege does not give us a definition. And must not every such attempt fail? "For in a definition one furnishes certain characteristics. And in the application to a special case what mattered would always be whether it were true that these characteristics applied. Thus we would move in a circle."[80]

It seems difficult to disagree with Frege on this point. The meaning of truth is presupposed by all attempts to clarify it. Such clarification must therefore aim at something rather like Platonic recollection. We move towards something that in a sense we already have. Frege, too, attempts such clarification. He calls a thought (*Gedanke*) the sort of thing which can be true. "The thought is the sense of a proposition… The thought, not sensible in itself, clothes itself in the sensible dress of the proposition and thus is more easily grasped by us."[81] Thoughts are thus not part of the sensible world, nor are they tied to acts of thinking. Such acts, which psychology might investigate, could grasp a thought, but, as the word "grasps" suggests, **thoughts transcend thinking**. Their truth and falsity is independent of the individual who may take them to be true or false. We can grasp a thought without knowing whether it is true or false, indeed without even wondering about this, as we do when we understand the assertions of an actor. What then distinguishes thoughts from true thoughts?

Frege 's answer is somewhat puzzling: The true thought is a fact.[82] Given Wittgenstein's use of fact (*Tatsache*) this may seem difficult to accept. Wittgenstein had suggested that *Sachverhalt* is what corresponds to an *Elementarsatz* if it is true, *Tatsache* is what corresponds to the logical product of elementary propositions when this product

---

[79] Ibid., p. 32.
[80] Ibid.
[81] Ibid., p. 33.
[82] Ibid., p 50.

is true."[83] Ordinary usage would relate the two rather differently. *Tatsache* is that a certain *Sachverhalt* obtains. As Frege puts. it: "At any rate that we can never recognize a property of something without at the same time finding true the thought that this thing has this property, gives us something to think about. Thus with every property of a thing a property of a thought is connected, namely that of truth."[84]

Frege's article appeared in 1918, after Wittgenstein had finished the *Tractatus*. But such earlier articles as· "Funktion und Begriff" and "Über Sinn und Bedeutung" presuppose the same conception of truth, even if it is not argued in equal detail. Frege's thesis that the truth value of a proposition is its reference has one foundation in the same recognition that we cannot use the picture theory to account for the truth of thoughts. If we are to avoid the infinite regress mentioned above, there must be thoughts which claim our assent because they are what they are, i.e. facts, thoughts which have the true for their reference.

Such formulations leave us dissatisfied. What is the true? It doesn't help us too much to learn that Frege calls the true an object, a *Gegenstand*.[85] If we accept Frege's characterization of *Gegenstand* — *Gegenstand* is everything that is not a function, i.e. whose expression does not contain an empty place, there is no reason to quarrel with Frege. But this is not to say at all that the true is like what we usually call an "object" or "thing." On the contrary, for any thing to be given to us, we must have grasped a thought having the true for its reference. **Truth is a transcendental condition of the appearance of facts**.[86]

3

Compared to the *Tractatus* the work of the young IIeidegger, i.e. work written not just before Bei*ng and Time*, but before the end of the First World War, seems rather academic. The dissertation, *Die Lehre vom 'Urteil im Psychologismus*, is a rather typical

---

[83] Letter to Russell, 19. 8. 19.
[84] 'Der Gedanke," p. 34.
[85] Gottlob Frege, "Funktion nnd Begriff," in *Funktion, Begriff, Bedeutung*, ed. and intro Günther Patzig (GOttincon, 1966), p. 30.
[86] This, of course, is not Frege' s formulation and it may seem like a rather violent attempt to move Freee into the neighborhood of Heidegger. Nevertheless, it does seem to me to be implied by Frege's remarks on truth.

example of its genre. Here we have a bright young man who knows what his teachers expect and what is being talked about. With this, his first extended effort, lleidegger entered the struggle which was then being waged, apparently successfully, by Frege, by the neo-Kantians at Marburg, by Rickert and Husserl at Freiburg, against the "psychologists.'" In good dissertation fashion, Heidegger focuses on one issue, the doctrine of judgment, and critically examines its treatment by a number of these "psychologists" including Wundt, Brentano, and, Lipps.[87]

In his *Notes on Logic* Wittgenstein writes, "Distrust of Grammar is the first requisite for philosophizing."[88] The *Tractatus* is born of such distrust. Convinced that our language conceals its logical essence, Wittgenatein tries to show us how to construct a language that would reveal that essence.

Heidegger does not go this far. Yet he, too, insists that it is necessary to escape from the bonds of grammar (LU 37) if we are to unoover the logical essence of language. His contribution to this end is an analysis of the logical structure of judgment. Consider the statement, "the sky is blue," made in different circumstances, by a gardener perhaps and by a botanist, and then again by a lover or a child." Do we have in each case the same judgment? Or do the same words express a different judgment every time the situation of those judging changes? In *Die Lehre vom Urteil* Heidegger argues that in spite of such differences, we have to recognize that in all these cases there is something that remains the same, that is unaffected by changes in mood or situation. Heidegger calls this the sense (*Sinn*) of the different statements. "It is this sense which concerns the logician.

---

[87] The dissertation is preceded by a number of brief reviews and by one longer review article, "Neuere Forschungen über Logik," *Literarische Rundschau für das katholische Deutschland*, vol. 38, no. 10, cols. 465 - 472, no. 11, cols. 517 - 524, no. 12, cols. 565 - 570. In that article Heidegeger reviews recent logical studies, pointing to Husserl's "Prolegomena zur reinen Logik," *Logische Untersuchungen I,* as to the definitive refutation of psychologism. In the dissertation that refutation is taken for granted. Yet, although taken to have been refuted, psychologism is said to continue to dominate the discussion of' certain logical problems, most importantly that of judgment.

[88] *Schriften*, vol. 1 (Frankfurt, 1960), p. 189.

On this point Heidegger agrees with Frege.[89] Both take the sense *(Sinn*) of a statement to transcend the innumerable ways in which this sense can be grasped. Both insist that the realms of fact and sense must be sharply distinguished. To the latter belong Heidegger' s "judgments" as well as Frege' s " thoughts"; both judgment and thought mean the same thing: the sense of an assertion. Only this sense can be true or false. (LU 96,99) Already in his dissertation Heidegger rejects the traditional interpretation of truth as ada*equatio rei et intellectus,* but only in the *Habilitationschrift* is this rejection backed by a developed argument, an argument which, although directly taken from Duns Scotus, recalls Frege: suppose I compare the sense of a judgment (A) with some real state of affairs (B) which the judgment is supposed to picture. Does the comparison not itself constitute a further judgment (C)? And how are we to know the truth of C? By yet another judgment? If so, I cannot avoid an infinite regress. Furthermore, if I am to recognize the truth of A by comparing it to B, B must itself be known. But what makes this knowledge possible if not some judgment? If A itself, we have a tautology; if some other judgment (D) we have a second judgment which stands just as much in need of verification as the first. (KB 88-$9)

Heidegger's rejection of correspondence follows from his 'Kantian" stance, which forces him to deny that reality, as it is in itself is available to us. All we are given is appearance, reality mediated by judgment. It is thus impossible to establish the truth or falsity of our judgments by comparing them with some thing-in-itself.

---

[89] Heidegger calls attention to Frege in "Neuere Forschtmgen über Logjk," col. 467 - 468. "In diesem Zusammenhang möchte ich den Namen eines deutschen Mathematikers nicht unerwähnt lassen. Freges logisch-:mathematische Forschungen sind meines Erachtens in ihrer wahren Bedeutung noch nicht gewürdigt, geschweige denn augeeschöpft. Was er in seinen Arbeiten über "Sinn und Bedeutung", über "Begriff und Gegenstand" niedergelegt hat, darf keine Philosophie der Mathematik übersehen; es ist aber auch in gleichem Masse wertvoll für eine allgeemeine Theorie des Begriffs." "In this connection I do not want to leave the name of a German mathematician unmentioned. Frege's logical-mathematical investigations have in my opinion not yet been recognized in their true importance, let alone exhausted. What he has to say in his articles on "Sense and Reference" and on "Concept and Object" no philosophy of mathematics may overlook; but it is also and to the same extent valuable for a general theory of the concept."

If by embracing the transcendental position Heidegger avoids some of the confusions resulting from Wittgenstein wavering between the transcendental and the realistic approach, he has to face a problem that does not appear in the *Tractatus*: if we reject the picture theory, what interpretation of truth can we give? Heidegger begins to wrestle with this problem in his dissertation; the solution, sketched there reappears in greatly expanded form in the *Habilitationsschrift*, a solution that is now attributed to Duns Scotus. Heidegger begins his discussion of truth with the medieval thesis that like *ens* and *unum*, *verum* is to be counted among the transcendentals, that is to say *ens, unum*, and *verum* are coextensive. "Every object is one object. 'Every object is a true object. What is it that permits us to call it true?" (KB 81)

Truth implies a relation. This finds expression in the traditional correspondence theory, which relates *res* and *intellect*us. Similarly, to say of an object that it is true, is to place it in relation to knowledge. "*In so far as the object is object of knowledge it can be called true object.* It can be considered the fun*damentum veritatis*. ‘" (KB 81)

Still following Scotus, Heidegger distinguishes two basic forms of knowledge. On one hand we can simply apprehend an object. In the case of such a *simplex apprehensio* truth should not be constrasted with falsity, but with a lack of awareness.
As Descartes had said of simple natures, I either have the 'object before me or I don't. "Since at all times the given— in so far as it is given, becomes object, simple representing (*Vor-stellen)*, here perhaps better translated as objectifying) is also always *true*." (KB 84) On the other hand, truth as we generally understand it can be opposed to falsity. Its locus must be sought in judgment. Judgments alone can be said to be true in the usual and proper sense.

As was pointed out, all judgments are composite. The nature of this composition needs to be shown. If the synthesis of judgment is to be more than a mere collecting of disparate elements, the nature of these elements must be such 'that they demand each other. "Belonging together they demand the unity of the judgment." (KB 85) The relation that actually establishes this unity is expressed by the copula "is" or "est". "Is" cannot mean here' "exists" "Meant is rather the mode of reality (*esse yerum*) for which we now have the fortunate expression *Gelten* ." (KB 85) Unfortunately, it is difficult to

find a good translation for this key word. 'To say of something es *gilt* is to say that it counts, that it has weight and worth, that it is valid. What is "valid," is valid of some object. The copula thus does not simply tie elements of the judgment together; the relation is asymmetical: A is valid of B. "The sky is blue" thus means "being blue is valid of the sky." This relation is not simply asserted, but asserted to have weight; the synthesis is not arbitrary but has its foundation in reality.

But how is this tie to reality to be thought? We have already ruled out all appeals to correspondence. The locus of truth, it has been suggested, must be sought within thought itself. Yet this, Heidegger insists, does not dissolve reality into dream. What prevents this is precisely the phenomenon of validity or *Geltung*. Only the sense of a statement has *Geltung*, and that sense, as was pointed out, transcends the act of judgment. It presents itself to us, demanding to be acknowledged. This demand does not issue from the individual, but on the contrary, gives to sense a weight which is truly objective in that it depends in no way on the particular situation of him who is judging. It is this independence of the content of thought from the act of thinking, which led Descartes to interpret our ideas as having formal reality in so far as they are part· of psychic reality, objective reality in so far as they reach beyond our consciousness to transcendence. Our ideas, we can now say, have objective reality because they are valid, i.e. have *Geltung*.

Heidegger's thesis that judgments have *Geltung* corresponds to Frege's thesis that propositions have a truth value for their reference. To the polarity true-false corresponds the bipolar nature of *Geltung* which, Heidegger suggests, can be given a positive or a negative sign. (LU 106) We can say that x is valid of y, or deny its validity.

This account still provides us with too little: why do we affirm the validity of 2+2=4 while we deny it to 2+2=5? What makes the first judgment true and the second false? Heidegger only sketches a very general answer: the foundation of truth, he suggests, must be sought in the meanings that help constitute the judgment. The meaning-content (*Bedeutungsverhalt)* of what is given, the simply apprehended state of affairs (*Sachverhalt*) is the measure of the judgment's sense; from it it derives its objective validity (*Geltung*)." (KB 90) Once I have umderstood the different meanings

that are joined in the sense of the judgment, the validity of that judgment, be it positive or negative, asserts itself.

But does this also hold in the case of judgments like "the sky is blue"? Its sense seems to be quite clear. We know what would have to be the case for that judgment to be either true or false: the sky would have to be blue, and, we are tempted to say, we could tell by actually 1ooking at the sky. And yet, we said, this looking would already involve making the judgment, "the sky is blue." Given what has already been said, we have to admit that the judgment itself has not changed the second time. Still, it seems difficult to deny that it now stands in a closer relationship to reality.

Consider another context: a blind man says, "the sky is blue." To what extent does this blind man understand the sense of what he is asserting? To understand the sense of a statement, we have to know the meaning of the elements of that statement. Does a blind man know the weaning of "blue"? In some fashion, yes. He has heard others call certain things the sky, violets, the ocean — blue. He has learned much of the grammar of "blue." But if this is to say that he has really understood the meaning of "blue," meaning is used in a derivative sense; it has its foundation in what he has heard others say; he knows the place the word occupies in their language games, but this does not mean that he knows what it is to see blue things. We can thus distinguish two kinds of meaning: we can say we know the meaning of a word when we know the linguistic contexts in which it appears; in this sense a blind man might know the meaning of "blue"; but, were he to say, perhaps feeling the warmth of the sun, "the sky is blue'," this would show only that a convention had been learned. The point of that convention would remain obscure. To really understand this point, to grasp the sense of the statement, we must know the meaning of blue in another way. We must recognize what "blue" names, and this recognition presupposes a tie to impression. This is not to argue that the seen "blue" and the meaning "blue" are identical. The seen blue appears at some particular moment only to disappear again, while the meaning blue cannot be assigned a place in the world. It belongs to the realm of sense, not to that of facts. Yet the two are related. To become elements of thoughts, impressions have to be transformed. "Fundamentally nothing is more familiar than this first achievement of thinking; we only tend to overlook it, *because in the formation of. the language transmitted to us this has*

already been accomplished and thus appears to belong to the most readily taken for granted presuppositions, not any more to the proper work of thinking." (KB 146)[90]

But if the meaning "blue" has its foundation in such transformation, and thus in the recognition of some blue thing, we cannot argue for a general priority of meaning over sensation, but must insist that at the most fundamental level the two belong together. The recognition of blue already presupposes a judgment such as "the sky is blue." Judgment and sense impression must here be taken to be so intimately tied together that they cannot be divorced.

[90] Quoting Hermann Lotze, *Logik* (Leipzig, 1874), p. 14.

7. Heidegger's Logical Beginnings

1.

In judgment, Heidegger argues, we posit a determinate something: "Form is imposed on the material to be known, thus establishing order. The discrete components of this form of order are the categories. Not that these are taken as mere pictures from the real. The real furnishes so to speak, only the occasion (*occasio*), offers a starting point for the creation of ordering relations which have no adequate correspondence in the real" (KB 98). According to Heidegger, the objects constituted by our judgment, somewhat like Hertz' s models, have their foundation in a reality that they nonetheless do not adequately represent, if indeed we can speak of representations at all — for what reality is in itself, must, on this account, escape us. The real transcends appearance so radically on this view that, while it still can function as a ground, it seems incapable of providing us with a measure of the objects we constitute. We know that there is this transcendent reality, but not what it is. Heidegger expresses this by saying that reality offers the occasion for our constructions. How it does this is obscure; that we constitute this rather than that object remains finally inexplicable. Instead of Wittgenstein's picture theory, which makes reality and picture isomorphous, we have a suggestion that to know something is rather like making a work of art. Like the artist, the knower uses the material he is offered by reality to freely invent his work — or, so it seems, since we cannot point to what constrains him. Yet if there were no constraints at all, how could truth and falsity be distinguished in the case of judgments of fact?

Whereas Wittgenstein's picture theory provides so much mediation that transcendence is lost, Heidegger, here interpreting Duns Scotus and Thomas of Erfurt, offers us too little, so that transcendence threatens to become empty, a mere nothingness.

Only by being given definite form is the real recognized. "This ingression of reality into meaning is possible only if by means of the logical reality is somehow grasped, broken out of something, is differentiated, delimited, and ordered. What establishes order is always something like form. The material of the object world determines the meaning of these forms which thus can again be applied to it." (KB 97) Heidegger here makes the point that if we are to bridge the gap between reality and the

logical forms we use to order reality, these may not be arbitrarily imposed on reality. That we use the particular forms we do use must have its foundation in the material to be ordered. How this is to be thought remains a riddle, yet if we were to deny it, we would make the objects of experience into mere fictions.

Knowledge, according to Heidegger, is *Gegenstandsbemächtigung, Gegenstandsbestimmung*. The first suggests that to know is to overpower the object, the second that to gain such power I have to determine what this object is with which I am struggling. In this connection Heidegger quotes with approval Emil Lask who had argued that in knowledge logical form comes to a logically amorphous material. "The material is therefore to knowledge the underlying, what is 'given' to it, the basis of knowledge, that, on which it has to perform its work. The category, on the other hand, represents the merely logical addition, that which comes to the material substratum. "The true subject is therefore the material, the true predicate …the 'category'!" (KB 210)

Before we considered the judgment a synthesis of meanings; these meanings were made the measure of truth. Now we have come across a judgment that instead of joining logical meaning to logical meaning, as does, e.g. "green and red cannot be at the same place at the same time," appears to join logical meaning to what Lask calls the material substratum. Yet can this formulation be quite right? Must this material substratum not also be transformed into logical meaning if it is to enter thought?

Consider again the judgment, "the sky is blue." The adjective "blue" is joined here to an already determinate object, "the sky." The subject of the proposition is thus hardly the logically amorphous material substratum of Lask And it seems that a similar point could be made with respect to any noun. How, then, if at all, does the material substratum find expression in language?

We are given just a hint in Heidegger's discussion of Thomas of Erfurt's *Speculative Grammar*, then still attributed to Duns Scotus. Given our preceding discussion, what is needed is a part of speech that means matter without form. Thomas of Erfurt suggests that this is precisely the function of the pronoun, especially of the demonstrative pronoun. The pronoun "points towards an object as object. But what distinguishes it from the noun is that the pronoun fails to determine the content of the object as being this sort of thing and not another." (KB 199) Thomas of Erfurt derives

the meaning of the pronoun from the essence of prime matter, which is: to be indeterminate and yet determinable. Some of this is suggested by the phrase of the old grammarians that the pronoun means substance without quality. (KB 199) Still, it would be a mistake to think that the pronoun gestures towards prime matter without introducing further distinctions. Consider the pronoun "this." Taken out of context, its meaning remains empty. If this meaning is to become definite, we must furnish such a context. Concretely understood, "this" gestures towards a definite object, but without determining what this object is. (KB 202) This is to say, it gestures towards a definiteness that has not yet been mastered and that remains logically amorphous. Only the determinations provided by the predicate bring such mastery. It would thus seem that the most elementary judgment of fact is of the form "this is blue." The copula asserts that something is true of the subject, which is the ontologically definite, logically amorphous object towards which the "this" gestures.

We can still recognize a relationship between this theory and that of Wittgenstein. Wittgenstein's polarity picture-fact has been replaced by the polarity logic-reality. Instead of a picturing activity, we now have an almost artistic constructing, a transforming of reality by means of the logical. Both agree that judgments, by their very nature point to reality, where Heidegger would consider the realm of facts to be just one mode of the real. While Wittgenstein argues that the picturing relation that makes a picture into a picture belongs to it, Heidegger, following Lask, makes the subject the bearer of reality, while the copula asserts something of it; the predicate tells us what this something is.

According to Wittgenstein the proposition determines a place in logical space (3.4). The young Heidegger could have agreed with this. According to him, too, the proposition determines the logical place (KB 21) of the subject, which in a statement of fact ultimately is the "this" to which the predicate gives determination.[91] Just as Wittgenstein speaks of logical space, Heidegger speaks of "logischer Bereich." According to Wittgenstein we can show that there must be such a space, by pointing

[91] Cf. KB 21 - 22. "Es ist doch mehr als eine beliebte Ausdrucksweise der Logiker, von dem logischen Ort eines Phaenomens zu sprechen. Ihr liegt eine bestimmte, hier nicht weiter darzulegende Überzeugung von der immanenten, im Wesen des Logischen

out that in order to speak meaningfully our propositions must be conjunctions of names that name simple objects. We can liken these objects to co-ordinates. Their intersection determines a logical place. But not all co-ordinates are capable of intersecting, not every name can be joined to any other to determine a logical place. Thus that this area here cannot be both green and red allover is a truth that exhibits the structure of logical space.

Where Wittgenstein speaks of objects, Heidegger speaks of meanings. These meanings, too, have a form, which regulates *a priori* all possible conjunctions of meaning (KB 148). This enables us to establish an *a priori* grammar, such as the *grammatica speculative* of Thomas of Erfurt, which tries to exhibit the *a priori* functions expressed by such parts of speech as noun, pronoun, verb, or adjective. These different *modi significandi* or categories of meaning are the formal principles constitutive of classes of meanings. But our investigations do not have to remain this general. Thus we can examine the form of a particular meaning, e.g. the grammar of the word "red." Like Wittgenstein's logical space, Heidegger's logical realm is a structure of meanings. Equally well we could speak with Husserl of an eidetic space. All three would agree that our world fills only part of logical space, which has room for all possible worlds. Its mode of being must therefore be distinguished from the being of things in the world; we have to keep distinct ontic and logical investigations. Heidegger takes logic to be the "theory of theoretical sense," which includes the doctrine of the elements of sense (the doctrine of meanings); the doctrine of the structure of sense (the doctrine of judgment), and the doctrine of the differentiations of structure and their systematic forms (the doctrine of science)" (KB 160).[92] Sense, as the term is being used here, is constitutive

---

gründenden Struktur zugrunde, die es macht, dass jedes in den Bereich des Denkbaren überhaupt gehörende Phänomen seinem Gehalt nach einen bestimmten Ort fordert. Jeder Ort gründet auf räumlicher Besstimmung, welche Bestimmung, als Ordnung, selbst nur möglich ist auf Grund eines Bezugsystems. *Der Ort im logischen Sinne* fusst desgleichen auf *Ordnung*. Was einen logischen Ort hat, fügt sich in bestimmter Weise in ein bestimmtes Bezugssystem." "But it is more than a way of speaking popular with logicians that accounts for the fact that every phenomenon belonging into the realm of what is at all thinkable demands a definite place. Every place is founded in a spatial determination, a determination that, as an order, is itself possible only on the basis of a system of relations. *Place in the logical sense* similarly presupposes an order. What has a logical place fits in a determined way into a determined system of relations."

[92] This view recalls Lotze. Cf. *Logik*, especially the division of the first book into "Die

of, and thus transcends facts. If this thesis of the transcendence of sense is accepted, it follows that the psychologists' attempts to found logic in psychology are in principle mistaken. As Wittgenstein had emphasized, using a different vocabulary, psychology is just one ontic discipline among others.

2

Both Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* and the early work of Heidegger tend to take for granted the Cartesian reduction of experience to an awareness of objects. Yet especially in Heidegger's *Habilitationsschrift* we meet with considerations suggesting the need to rethink our Cartesian inheritance, although the historical nature of his topic prevented him from developing these hints. Heidegger touches on the twofold reduction underlying all attempts at a *mathesis universalis*. "The homogeneity of the mathematical realm has its foundation in *quantity*. The homogeneity of the realm of logical validity rests on intentionality" (KB 100). By taking whatever is real as an intentional object occupying a definite place in logical space we perform a first reduction of experience. If to be is to be an intentional object, then being has its foundation in the intending subject and transcendence is necessarily lost. For how can transcendence be given as intentional object? Transcendence, on this view, turns out not to be at all.

There is a first answer to this objection that in the end does not quite convince: to think, it was argued, is to grasp something that transcends the act of thinking. The transcendence of sense and the related phenomenon of validity force me to acknowledge that my thoughts refer beyond my consciousness. Thus 2+2=4 is not true only for me. The thought remains true regardless of how many would deny it. It is precisely this transcendence of the logical over the ontic, especially the psychological, which is said to be the foundation of genuine objectivity (KB 90). "Objective" here still means "for a subject," but "subject" now does not refer to the individual existing at a particular moment and in a particular place, but to the pure transcendental subject. This pure

---

Lehre vom Begriffe," "Die Lehre vom Urtheil," and "Die Lehre vom Schluss und den systematischen Formen."

subject is given in the awareness that we experience the world from a certain perspective within the world. To understand a perspective, as a perspective, I must already be in some sense beyond it. All awareness of perspective presupposes an awareness of what transcends that perspective. Thus, that I am not imprisoned in the here and now of impressions, but transcend it towards past and future and towards infinitely many other possible situations, has its foundation in my self-transcendence, which in turn is inseparable from the transcendence of the logical.

But **this transcendence is only formal.** The transcendental ego founds only possibilities. It does not exist, nor do sense and meaning. It would be quite consistent to admit this transcendence and yet to defend solipsism. To this use of transcendence we must oppose another: what we normally mean when we speak of transcendence and what I shall mean when I use the word without qualification is what we can call *material transcendence,* that is the transcendence of Kant's thing in itself rather than the transcendence of the categories or of the transcendental subject. This transcendence is just as effectively lost when I try to found objectivity in the pure subject as when I found it in my concrete consciousness.

To escape this loss we can appeal, as Heidegger does in the *Habililitationsschrift* to “the real," which is somehow transformed into objects and guarantees that these objects are not inventions but given. The **givenness of appearance** is necessary to constrain the constitutive power of the subject. It represents a last guise which material transcendence assumes. And yet, even in this guise transcendence seems questionable. How is the givenness of objects given? This is another form of the question posed earlier with respect to the *Tractatus*: how are we to distinguish between pictures, including thoughts, and pictured facts? How can we account for the givenness or the reality of the world? What is required is what we can call a double-intentionality. **If we understand the object as object of an intention, we also have to understand that intention as an intention to overpower the given.** To overpower here means to assign a place in logical space. The victory would be complete if all reality were transposed into the logical sphere. Were this to happen, reality would lose its character as something given. Only in our failure to fully overpower what confronts us, does transcendence reveal itself.

In the paragraph quoted above Heidegger speaks of another reduction: the homogeneity of the mathematical realm, he points out, has its foundation in quantity. For Heidegger, as for Cusanus, Descartes, and Wittgenstein, mathematics does not have its origins in the world of facts. As Cusanus puts it, mathematics is the product of the unfolding *mens* or mind, unencumbered by matter. Wittgenstein's and Heidegger 's views are not too different. Interpreting Duns Scotus, Heidegger assigns it a foundation in one of the categories, that of quantity, that is, in the understanding's mode of operation. To reconstruct the world in the image of mathematics is to reconstruct it in the image of thought; and if this reconstruction is taken to do full justice to reality, no room remains for even a shadow of transcendence, for even that last trace of it, which is givenness.

Heidegger shies away from this move, which lets us sacrifice heterogeneity to homogeneity. If I were to see two trees only as distinct and uniquely individual, I could not count them. "I could only say: the one and the other. They can be called two only, if the one and the other are, so to speak, projected into a homogeneous medium by means of a projection that preserves only the general determination of *being-a-tree*. This projection into a homogeneous medium thus means: the objects are considered in a *definite respect and only as such*. (KB 69) Heidegger concludes that scientific-mathematical knowledge should not be equated with all knowledge. Its tie to homogeneity makes it incapable of fully grasping empirical reality and especially the *historical* in *its individuality*. (KB 78)

A critique of the modern conception of reality is also hinted at in Heidegger's characterization of medieval analogy: "The constitutive elements of analogy are: a certain *identity* of meaning and yet a *difference* depending on its use" (KB 71-2). This is to say, where analogy reigns, homogeneity and heterogeneity intertwine. The modern conception of reality, which takes it to be objectivity, is necessarily homogeneous. It is incompatible with the medieval view, which demands degrees of reality, which are at the same time degrees of value, where the measure of both, reality and value, is provided by God. To our conception of experiencing which flattens out the world, Heidegger opposes here another, which takes the world to be an order of value and founded in transcendence. Such a view of experience cannot

express itself using Descartes' method. It requires an acknowledgement of the fact that we never know what is with precision. We only sort of know; we only have conjectures. The success of modern science has threatened to conceal this fact, although, as Nietzsche predicted, modern science is reaching a point where its fundamentally artistic character reveals itself more clearly.

3

Heidegger concludes his *Habilitationsschrift* with a few general remarks on "the problem of categories," remarks that suggest a certain dissatisfaction with his own logical investigations and point out a need for a more fundamental approach. As we have seen, Heidegger uses "category" to refer to the most general structures constitutive of objects (KB 232). These structures furnish the "elements and means of the interpretation of the sense of what can be experienced" (KB 229). But the objects of experience are not all of a kind. As was pointed out, there are different regions of being which must be understood in all their differences. We must take care not to make categories that are constitutive of only one particular region constitutive of reality as such.

But how are we to understand the assertion that the objects of experience are not all of a kind? Does this have its foundation in the differences between categories, or is it precisely the difference between the regions to be examined that calls for different categories. "The problem of categories" is thus the old problem of the relationship between form and matter, here appearing as the problem of the affinity of the logical and the real. **If categories are to be validly applied to reality, they cannot be simply imposed on reality.** That a particular category or meaning is used to give sense to experience must have its foundation in the experienced reality. Otherwise we will have divorced the logical and the real to such an extent that the latter could never be illuminated by the former. If this is accepted, it becomes misleading to call the material structured by means of the logical "amorphous." If we are to give some meaning to truth, the material must demand a particular form. This it can do only if it is already formed, even if that form is never

known as it is in itself, but only as mediated by the interpretations furnished by thought. We can thus contrast logical with a posited, although not available ontological form, and furthermore, these two cannot be completely separate but must have a common root. If this much is granted, we have to grant also that we must take a step beyond, logic if we are to throw some light on the problem of the relationship between form and matter.

> By remaining in the sphere of sense and sense-structure we shall hardly gain a final clarification of this question … It is impossible to see logic and its problem in their true light, unless the context of interpretation becomes metalogical. *In the long run philosophy cannot dispense with its proper optic, metaphysics*. For the theory of truth this means the task of a final metaphysical-teleological interpretation of consciousness. Something like value is already imbedded in consciousness, in as much as it is action, full of sense and realizing sense, which we have not understood in the least when we neutralize it in the concept of a biological facticity. (KB 235-6)

With these remarks Heidegger calls for a step beyond both the transcendental interpretation of subjectivity and a realistic, more specifically biological, interpretation. The latter is rejected because it cannot do justice to the sphere of meaning and value, remaining as it must in the sphere of facts. The former is rejected because it has reduced sense to a logical phenomenon, thus divorcing sense and value, just as it has reduced "living spirit" to transcendental subjectivity. Interesting is the phrase "metaphysical-teleological interpretation." "Metaphysical" refers to an interpretation that goes beyond the limits set, not only to a scientific, but also to a logical investigation. Perhaps we can say this: metaphysical thinking, as here understood, must lead us beyond the reduction of experience to theoretical knowledge on which both natural science and logic rest, although this is reading back into the *Habilitationsschrift* what was only to become explicit later, especially in *Being and Time.* "Teleological" refers again to that calling transcendence in immanence that we have been demanding, where in the

Habilitationsschrift Heidegger does not hesitate to identify this transcendence with God.[93]

The problem of categories, we said, is the problem of the relationship of form and matter. Yet by using the terms "form" and "matter" we leave this polarity too abstract. That the problem posed itself to Heidegger in a somewhat different way is suggested already by the few words in the preface to the *Dissertation* with which Heidegger thanks the church historian Heinrich Finke for having awakened in the ahistorical mathematician a love and understanding of history. Mathematics; and history mark here the same tension that finds expression in the problem of categories. Even at this time Heidegger tied reality to time and history. The problem of the relationship of form and matter takes thus the from of the problem of the relationship of the ahistorical realm of sense to historical reality. The term "living spirit" hints at Heidegger's projected solution to his problem. As spirit man is placed into history. "In the concept of living spirit and its relation to the metaphysical origin

---

[93] Cf. KB 38.. "Der Geist ist nur zu begreifen, wenn die ganze Fülle seiner Leistungen, d.h. seine Geschichte, in ihm aufgehoben wird, mit welcher stets wachsenden Fülle in ihrer philosophischen Begriffenheit ein sich fortwährend steigerndes Mittel der lebendigen Begreifung des absoluten Geistes Gottes gegeben ist." "The spirit can only be comprehended when all its different achievements, i.e its history, are preserved in it.; with this ever increasing plenitude in its philosophical conceptualization, is given a living conception of the absolute spirit of God. " The passage suggests Hegel and it is with an appeal for a renewed encounter with Hegel that Heidegger concludes the *Habilitationsschrift*. "Die Philosophie des lebendigen Geistes, der tatvollen Liebe, der verehrenden Gottinnigkeit, deren allgemeinste Richtpunkte nur angedeutet werden konnten, insonderheit eine von ihren Grundtendenzen geleitete Kategorienlehre, steht vor der grossen Aufgabe einer prinzipiellen Auseinandersetzung mit dem an Fülle wie Tiefe, Erlebnisreichtum und Begriffsbildung gewaltigsten System einer historischen Weltanschauung, als welches es alle vorausgegangenen fundamentalen philosophischen Problemmotive in sich aufgehoben hat, mit Hegel." "The philosophy of the living spirit, of active love, of the venerating closeness to God, a philosophy whose most general points of orientation could only be hinted at, especially a doctrine of categories guided by its basic tendencies, faces the great task of a principled confrontation with what, as far as comprehensiveness and depth, wealth of experience and conceptualization are concerned, most powerful system of a historical worldview, which as such has sublated in itself all preceding fundamental philosophical problematics, with Hegel."

we get a glimpse into its basic metaphysical structure, in which the uniqueness and individuality of acts are united with the universal validity (the being-in-itself of sense) to form a living whole. Objectively put, we have here the problem of the relationship of time and eternity, change and absolute validity, world and God, which on the level of theoretical science finds a reflection in *history* (formation of value) and *philosophy* (validity of value)" (KB 240).

We shall explore some of these suggestions further in a later session. In this session my concern was to exhibit the threat posed to transcendence, more precisely to material transcendence, by Wittgenstein's and Heidegger's Cartesian inheritance. In our next session an attempt will be made to show in greater detail the consequences of this inheritance for ethics.

8. Nihilism and Mysticism[94]

1

In the preface to the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein expresses his conviction that the problems that he had there tackled had been solved definitively; yet he adds an observation that seems to warn us not to take what has been accomplished too seriously: "And if I am not mistaken in this belief, then the second thing in which the value of this work consists is that it shows how little is achieved when these problems are solved." This is not to suggest that another philosopher could raise more important issues and thus do more than has been done here. On the contrary: this is all philosophy can do, which is to say, philosophy cannot really provide answers to the questions that move us; and the same is true of science. "We feel that even when all possible scientific questions have been answered, the problems of life remain completely untouched. Of course there are then no questions left, and this itself is the answer." (6.52) Only in this sense can philosophy answer the problems of life. And yet, answer is not quite the right word — the philosopher tries to dissolve rather than to answer the problems that confront us. This may seem like little, yet it is all, if we accept the lesson of the *Tractatus*, we can hope for.

This conclusion follows, not only from what Wittgenstein has to tell us about language in the *Tractatus*, but from that reduction of being to objectivity which is a result of the triumph of subjectivity in modern philosophy.

2

Consider once more the propositions that open the *Tractatus*:

1. The world is all that is the case.

1.1 The world is the totality of facts, not of things.

1.11 The world is determined by the facts, and by their being

---

[94] On Wittgenstein and the mystical see Russell Nieli, *Wittgenstein: From Mysticism to Ordinary Language,* State University of New York Press, Albany, New York, 1987, James R. Atkinson, *The Mystical in Wittgenstein's Early Writings* (Routledge, 2009) and especially Russell Nieli's critical review in *Notre Dame Critical Reviews*, https://ndpr.nd.edu/news/24116-the-mystical-in-wittgenstein-s-early-writings/.

all the facts.

What strikes one about these statements is that no reference is made to time. The world is viewed *sub specie aeternitatis* as a fully determined whole. This could be simply a matter of Wittgenstein's not having said something that he could easily enough have supplied; but the difficulty is more serious than that. It isn't simply a matter of adding something. What Wittgenstein tells us about the world makes it impossible to do justice to the openness of the future. Wittgenstein's world is just what it is; there are no indeterminacies, no fuzzy edges. Like the rest of his ontology, this determinism — which of course, given Wittgenstein's atomism can have nothing to do with a causal determinism — has its foundation in what is required if our propositions are to make sense: they must be either true or false; the principle of bivalence applies without restriction.

Already Aristotle had pointed out that to view the world in this way is to do violence to the openness of the future. My present assertion that this or that will take place tomorrow will turn out to be either true or false, but at this time it is neither. Using the language of Wittgenstein's picture theory one could say that the place in logical space to which this assertion points will perhaps be occupied by reality, but whether or not this will happen not only cannot be decided by us, but is in itself indeterminate. This indeterminacy of the future conflicts, however, with the subject's attempt to cognitively overpower the world and thus to become its foundation. The future can be mastered only by being robbed of this openness. Such inability to accept the openness of time and with it, that we are subjected to, rather than master of reality, has led priests and artists, philosophers and scientists to lead man beyond the world of time to another world, a world seen *sub specie aeternitatis***.** The *Tractatus* is part of this effort to escape from time.

But to deny the openness of the future in an attempt to spatialize time is to preclude all possibility of doing justice to the phenomenon of choice: precisely when we are faced with having to make a decision, the openness of the future and with it the precariousness and finitude of the human situation reveal themselves to us. By the same token, it prevents us from doing justice to the phenomenon of value. What has value is recognized to have a claim on us, but this claim cannot be such that it overpowers us so

that we are no longer free to respond. Values must demand our assent in such a way that this assent can be withheld. Where this element of choice disappears, values become necessities; instead of action there is meaningless passion. Only a philosophy that does not sacrifice the openness of the future to man's will to power can hope to do justice to the phenomenon of value.

This agrees with the assertion made earlier that value must have its foundation in material transcendence. For it is precisely the rule of time that renders us vulnerable and mortal and forces us to recognize that our dreams of transcending reality are just that — dreams.

3

That Wittgenstein's conception of the world in the *Tractatus* is such that value is banished from it can be shown in quite another way. One of the central theses of the *Tractatu*s is the atomicity of facts and propositions. "One elementary proposition cannot be deduced from another" (5.134). "There is no possible way of making an inference from the existence of one situation to the existence of another, entirely different situation (5.135). As was pointed out, Wittgenstein later found reasons to reject 5.134. But even if we were to revise the *Tractatus* accordingly and to insist that from what is the case we can deduce *to some extent* what cannot be the case, it still would be impossible to deduce from the existence of one elementary fact that of another. Even granting the later revision, Wittgenstein could still say that the belief in the causal nexus is a superstition (5.1361). Generalizing from this case we can say that it is in not possible to describe something that functions as the sufficient reason for the being of facts. Facts just happen to be, there is no reason for their being. And if this is true of facts, it must also be true of the world, the totality of facts. The world is groundless; all attemptsto found it in God or some God-substitute rest on a misunderstanding of our language. In the *Tractatus* the death of God follows as a point of logic.

Wittgenstein would probably have disliked this way of putting it. He is content to make a more modest claim: "6.432 How things are in the world is a matter of complete indifference for what is higher. God does not reveal himself in the world." This suggests that God may reveal himself somehow beyond the world. But if so, such revelation must

be beyond thought and language; and, "What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence" (7). I find it difficult to distinguish a God who no longer reveals himself in the world and speaks to us in silence from a nothingness which a reluctance to part with traditional comforts endows with divine attributes.

Let us not make the mistake and think that we can dismiss Wittgenstein's conclusion by dismissing his atomism and picture theory. All we need to banish God from the world is its transformation into the totality of objective facts. The being of such facts is necessarily groundless. Nor does it help to insist that the subject lacks the strength to constitute facts in the fullest sense of the word; that a vestige of transcendence remains as givenness. For this givenness is mute; it doesn't illumine why just these facts were given and no others. This "why" remains without an answer.

What is true of God is equally true of' value and meaning. "6.41 The sense of the world must lie outside the world. In the world everything is as it is, and everything happens as it does happen: in it no value exists — and if it did exist, it would have no value." Wittgenstein takes it to be obvious that for the world to have a meaning there would have to be some reason for its being as it is. The way the world is would have to betray something like an intention, but this has been ruled out by the way world has been understood in the *Tractatus*. In that world there is no room for divine intention, and even if there were, it would still be a superstition to believe that our intentions could in any way have an effect. Given the *Tractatus* we can rule out not only all teleological interpretations of the world, but any attempt to see the world in at least some of its aspects a' the product of the labor and the intentions of man. For Wittgenstein there can be no escape from the accidental.

4

Let us be careful here. While Wittgenstein certainly does say that no values are to be found in the world, this could mean little more than that there are no values in the sense in which there are facts and with this one would certainly have to agree. In spite of what has been suggested, Wittgenstein does not equate being and the being of facts. On the contrary, in the *Tractatus* and in the *Notebooks* we find recurring hints concerning "what is higher." There are suggestions that there is another dimension of being that

remains concealed as long as we see only that of facts. Wittgenstein hardly would have considered himseIf a nihilist. Thus in his early writings we find signs of a continued struggle to make sense of God, and a tendency to oppose to our encounter with facts another: the encounter with the mystical. How serious this interest was is apparent from a letter Bertrand Russell wrote to Lady Ottoline Morell after a meeting with Wittgenstein:

> I have much to tell you that is of interest. I leave here today [December 20, 1919, from the The Hague] after a fortnight's stay, during a week of which Wittgenstein was here, and we discussed his book [the *Tractatus*] everyday. I came to think even better of it than I had done; I feel sure it is really a great book, though I do not feel sure it is right… . I had felt in his book a flavour of mysticism, but was astonished when I found that he has become a complete mystic. He reads people like Kierkegaard and Angelus Silesius, and he seriously contemplates becoming a monk. It all started from William James's *Varieties of Religious Experience*, and grew (not unnaturally) during the winter he spent alone in Norway before the war, when he was nearly mad. Then during the war a curious thing happened. He went on duty to the town of Tarnov in Galicia, and happened to come upon a bookshop, which, however, seemed to contain nothing but picture postcards. However, he went inside and found that it contained just one book: *Tolstoy on the Gospels*. He brought it merely because there was no other. He read it and re-read it, and thenceforth had it always with him, under fire and at all times. But on the whole he likes Tolstoy less than Dostoyevsky (especially Karamazov). He has penetrated deep into mystical ways of thought and feeling, but I think (though he wouldn't agree) that what he likes best in mysticism is its power to make him stop thinking. I don't much think he will really become a monk — it is an idea, not an intention. His intention is to be a teacher. He gave all his money to his brothers and sisters, because he found earthly possessions a burden. I wish you had seen him [95]

[95] On Wittgenstein and the mystical see James R. Atkinson, *The Mystical in Wittgenstein's Early Writings* (Routledge, 2009) and especially Russell Niell's critical

That the thought of becoming a monk was more than a fleeting fancy is shown by the fact that in 1926 he inquired abut the possibility of entering a Benedictine monastery, only to be discouraged Father Superior,[96] presumably with good reason. As the reference to Angelus Silesius in the Russell letter suggests, Wittgenstein's mysticism has its foundation in the wonder that things are. Consider this line by the mystic poet Angelus Silesius, which Heidegger, too, liked to cite:

Die Ros its ohn warum; sie blühet weil sie blühet.

The rose is without a why; it blooms because it blooms.

As Wittgenstein puts it in the *Tractatus*: "6.44 It is not how things are in the world that is mystical, but that it, exists. "6.45 To view the world *sub* ***specie*** *aeterni* is to view it as a whole — a limited whole." The world presents itself to us in two different ways: *sub specie aeternitatis* and what one is tempted to call, even if Wittgenstein does not do so, *sub specie possibilitatis*.

By choosing the Latin phrase *sub specie aeterni* Wittgenstein ties himself to the tradition.[97] Traditionally to see the world *sub specie aeternitatis* is to see it not *in* time and space, but together *with*, and this implies in its transcendence over time and space (cf. 7.10.16). But Wittgenstein goes further: in the *Tractatus* time and space are called forms of objects (2.0251). By form of an object Wittgenstein understands "the possibility of its occurring in states of affairs… " (2.0141). Forms of objects are structures of logical space. This suggests the possibility of analogically extending the traditional formulation: to see the world *sub specie aeternitatis* is to see it not as lying in, but together with logical space (cf. 7.10.16, 6). If this is to be possible there

---

review in *Notre Dame Critical Reviews*, https://ndpr.nd.edu/news/24116-the-mystical-in-wittgenstein-s-early-writings/

[96] See Neill, Review.

[97] In the *Notebooks* Wittgenstein writes *sub specie aeternitatias*, following Schopenhauer (*Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, vol. I, par. 34), who in turn appeals to Spinoza's *Ethics*. The form *sub specie aeterni* is found in Nietzsche. Cf. Die *fröhliche Wissenschaft* III, 262: *Sub specie aeterni.* "A: 'Du entfernst dich immer schneller von den Lebeneden: bald werden sie dich aus ihren Listen streichen! ' -- B: 'Es ist das einzige Mittel, um an dem Vorrecht der Toten teilzuhaben.' A: 'An welchem Vorrecht?' —A: 'Nicht mehr zu sterben.'" *The Gay Science* III, 262: *Sub specie aeterni.* "A: 'You are distancing yourself ever more quickly from the living: soon they will strike you from their lists. — B: "It is the only way to partake of the privilege of the dead.' — A: What privilege? — B: Not to die any more.'"

must be a vision of the world transcending the limits imposed on us by the logic of our language. This agrees with the distinction Wittgenstein draws between knowing how and knowing that things are (6.44). To know *how* the world is, is to know what part of logical space it occupies; to know *that* the world is to know that some part of logical space is occupied. The latter leads us to think about that occupation, which is to say, it leads us to think about the mystery that something is given. Wittgenstein's sense of the mystical is an openness to what I have called material transcendence.

The second mode of vision is more easily understood. To see the world *sub specie possibilitatis* is simply to see it in the mirror of our thoughts and words, as lying in logical space. Generalizing and without using Wittgenstein's language, we can say: as reflection reveals the sphere of logical sense and lets us oppose to the way the world happens to be other ways it might have been, we see it as one of many possible worlds. *Sub specie possibilitatis* the world appears as groundless. That the world happens to be this rather than some other way remains inexplicable.

It seems likely that this distinction between two modes of vision suggested itself to Wittgenstein when reading Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Representation*.[98] Like Wittgenstein Schopenhauer distinguishes two modes of awareness:

> Raised up by the power of the mind, we relinquish the ordinary way of considering things and cease to follow under the guidance of the forms of the principle of sufficient reason merely their relations to one other, whose final goal is always the relation to our own will. Thus we no longer consider the where, the when, the why, and the whither in things, but simply and solely the what. Further, we do not let abstract thought, the concepts of reason, take possession of our consciousness, but, instead of all this, devote the whole power of our mind to perception, sink ourselves completely therein, and let our whole consciousness be filled by the calm contemplation of the natural object actually present, whether it be a landscape, a tree, a rock, a crag, a building, or anything else. We lose

[98] For a discussion of the influence of Schopenhauer on the young Wittgenstein see David Avraham Weiner, *Genius & Talent: Schopenhauer's Influence on Wittgenstein's Early Philosophy* (Associated University Presses, London 1992).

> ourselves entirely in this object, to use a pregnant expression; in other words we forget even our individuality, our will, and continue to exist only as pure subject, as clear mirror of the object, so that it is as though the object alone existed without anyone to perceive it, and thus we are no longer able to separate the perceiver from the perception, but the two have become one, since the entire consciousness is filled and occupied by a single image of perception. (WWR I, par. 34, pp. 178-179)

Schopenhauer points out that our tendency to view things as being merely for us has its foundation in our will to live and to assert our mastery over the world that confronts us. To do so we have to order what we encounter by subjecting it to the rule of the principle of sufficient reason. Characteristic of this mode of encountering the world is the inability to let things show themselves as what they are; instead they are assigned a place by our understanding. Schopenhauer does not take this place to be a place in what Wittgenstein would call logical space. He has something related, but richer in mind. The coordinates of his apace are determined by the where, the when, the why, and the what-for, i.e. it is a space determined by man's will to live. It is a pragmatic rather than a merely logical space. But Schopenhauer's and Wittgenstein's accounts have this in common: both see the particular thing as just happening to occupy a certain place, i.e. *sub specie possibilitatis*. It is just this way of seeing the world that is overcome when I surrender myself to the presence of some thing. In very Schopenhauerian terms Wittgenstein thus speaks of contemplating a stove: this may seems as unimportant activity; there are so many more important things to do; why focus on this particular object? We measure what we see by some pre-given standard of what is important and find it wanting. As Wittgenstein points out, when this is done the stove is seen as one of many objects I could have contemplated; but there is another way of looking where such considerations have no part. "But when I was contemplating the stove it was my world, and everything else colourless by contrast with it." (8.10.16) Schopenhauer speaks in similar terms of contemplating a tree.

> Therefore if, for example, I contemplate a tree aesthetically, i.e., with artistic eyes, and thus recognize not it, but its Idea, it is immediately of no importance whether it is this tree or its ancestor that flourished a thousand

> years ago, and whether the contemplator is this individual or any other living anywhere and at any time. The particular thing and the knowing individual are abolished with the principle of sufficient reason, and nothing remains but the Idea and the pure subject of knowing, which together constitute the adequate objectivity of will at this grade. (WWR I, 209)

Wittgenstein restates Schopenhauer's position when he defines the work of art as the object seen *sub specie aeternitati.*. (7.10.16) To see it in this manner is not to assign it a place in logical space, but simply to be open to its being. According to Schopenhauer the miracle of art is that it lets us look at things without asking anything of them. For this reason Wittgenstein can say that the beautiful makes us happy (21.10.16). Not that it grants us certain wishes, but it grants us freedom from our needs and wants and in this way frees us for the mysterious being of the other. Both find in the aesthetic an answer to nihilism. The nihilist sees the world *sub specie possibilitatis* and faces it with the impossible demand that it exhibit a sufficient reason for being as it is. As Nietzsche emphasized, the nihilist is a disappointed theist. By freeing us from our need to be given a ground, by letting us accept things in their groundlessness, art frees us from nihilism and at the same time robs a theism that takes God to be the ground of what is of its foundation.

Schopenhauer attributes this insight into man's double awareness of being to Plato. According to Plato our knowledge of fleeting appearances is coupled with an awareness of the inadequacy of such knowledge. The *eidolon* falls short of the *eidos*; appearance points to the form whose appearance it is. The problem that Schopenhauer takes to be at the heart of Plato's doctrine of forms is essentially the same problem that led Kant to introduce the thing-in-itself, which from the point of view of a purely transcendental philosophy proved only burdensome. If Schopenhauer is right Plato's forms do not provide a formal *a priori*; they have little to do with Kant's categories or with what we have called the sphere of logical sense. The relationship of *eidolon* and *eidos* is presupposed by the very idea of appearance, but this *a priori* is material rather than formal.

I have called the givenness of appearances the last vestige of transcendence. In

this sense, Schopenhauer and, following him, Wittgenstein, interpret aesthetic or mystical awareness as the awareness that things are. "The artistic miracle is that there is the world" (17.10.16,9). "It is not how things are in the world that is mystical, but that it exists" (6.44).[99]

5

This bifurcation of being and of awareness into two modes — the mystical and the factual, awareness that something is and knowledge of what is, — has its foundation in the rise of subjectivity and the resultant attempt to reduce being to objectivity, which lets us recognize transcendence only as the mystery that something is. It is thus hardly surprising to find a similar distinction worked out very clearly in the works of the 15th century cardinal Nicolaus Cusanus, where we meet with an early victory of modern subjectivity over medieval analogy. A new emphasis on reflection leads to an emphasis on the point of view of the knower. With the recognition of the perspectival character of knowledge the distinction between the world as it is in itself and as it presents itself to us appears. The knowing subject discover that the world is first of' all world for him and this world is one that he has constituted in his knowledge. To be sure," constitute" cannot mean "construct *ex nihilo*. "What is constructed is constructed out of what is given. Man's creation of his world is only a recreation; man is a second God, imitating with his creation that of God."[100] But it is important to see that everything in this finite human world has its measure in human understanding. In that world there is no room for God, no more than there is in that of Schopenhauer or Wittgenstein. Already Meister Eckhart emphasizes that if man is to find God he must look beyond creature language, which ties man to the finite, God dwells not in or beyond the world, but within that

---

[99] Cf. Wittgenstein's attempt to clarify the meaning of "absolute or ethical value" in "A Lecture on Ethics." Wittgenstein appeals to a certain experience: "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 inclined to use such phrases as "how extraordinary that anything should exist" or "how extraordinary that the world should exist." (*Philosophical Review*, vol. 74, 1965, p. 8). The experience described by Wittgenstein is closely related to what Heidegger calls the "fundamental question": "Why is there something rather than nothirg?"(WiM, 22 - 23) Heidegger takes this question from Leibniz's *Principes de la nature et de la grace*.

[100] Nicholas of Cusa, *De beryllo*, trans. Jasper Hopkins, *On [Intellectual] Eyeglasses,* Nicholas of Cusa: *Metaphysical Speculations* (Minneapolis: Banning, 1997), p. 794.

silence man bears within himself.

With this emphasis on the ontological gap separating the finite objective world from infinite divine transcendence, the hierarchical universe of the Middle Ages collapses. Between the finite and the infinite there is no proportion.[101] There are no steps that can carry us across this abyss. With Cusanus the separation of finite and infinite is not so complete as to destroy all connection. Cusanus, too, takes it to be obvious that appearances point beyond themselves. This reference to transcendence reveals itself in the inadequacy of our language. The names and descriptions with which we try to capture what is before us fail to do so.[102] To be sure, it is a tree I see as I glance out of the window, its leaves already changing, but "tree" says far too little. It tells you that what I see is not a stone or flower, but the word is not adequate to describe what is before me, although for most purposes such descriptions are quite adequate so that this inadequacy is not noticed. Still, this particular tree eludes me. I may of course use a finer net, point out that is an elm tree of a certain height and shape, I can go on and on, finding ever wore complete descriptions, and yet I can always conceive of an infinite number of trees besides this tree at which I am now looking which would fit such a description.

But how am I aware of this inadequacy? No more than Duns Scotus does Cusanus allow us to say that we are informed of it by the more adequate images we perceive. For ultimately, and to this extent Cusanus is a transcendental philosopher, my seeing cannot be divorced from a naming. The seen is always something measured with a human measure. I become aware of the different aspects of the tree only by in some sense naming them. The inadequacy of language is thus mirrored in the inadequacy of appearances. As I said earlier, appearances confront us as falling short of something. To this extent the picture theory is right.

The inadequacy of all names and of all experiences is determined by the nature of thought, which interprets reality by placing it in a context of meanings, and it does not matter whether this context is furnished by Wittgenstein's logical space or by

---

[101] Nicholas of Cusa, *De docta ignorantia*, trans. Jasper Hopkins, *On Learned Ignorance* (Minneapolis: Banning, 1981), I, 3, p. 52.
[102] Ibid., I, 1, p. 50.

Schopenhauer' s principle of sufficient reason or some analogous conception. In each case, to know what something is, is to know its place in a logical or linguistic realm that has room for this and countless other possible worlds. This place is never so fully determined that it could not also be occupied by some other very similar thing. The measures that we bring to reality, for instance when we call what is before us "a tree," are not designed to capture the individual in it individuality, but only in· certain respects which make it comparable to other objects. Again we meet with the rift that separates logic and reality. This rift expresses itself in a twofold inadequacy: just as the material presence of the object, its givenness, prevents thought from fully penetrating and subjecting it so that the victory it seeks eludes it, so by forcing what is to be known into our molds we prevent being from revealing itself to us as what it really is. Thus, according to Cusanus, language veils being by presenting it in the mode of the *aliud*, i.e. by relating it to what is other than it.[103]

As does Schopenhauer, Cusanus interprets Plato's forms as a material a priori. They provide what earlier I called ontological form. To see something as nothing other than what it is, is to see beyond the *eidolon* to the *eidos*. Cusanus calls this *eidos* the *non aliud*, the not-other. The *eidos* of this tree is nothing other than this tree itself. To this *eidos* only an infinite description of the tree that would leave nothing unsaid could do justice, a description that would be nothing other than the tree itself. While inaccessible to the finite intellect of man, this ideal description yet functions as the measure of our descriptions. This measure reveals itself to us when we recognize the inadequacy of all our descriptions, when we become learned about our ignorance.

Cusanus' speculations about the *non aliud* easily strike one as a kind of game. Why is the earth earth, he asks, and answers, because it is nothing other than the earth.[104] But this assertion of the identity of that which accounts for something and this something itself is informative. If we were to ask, why is the earth earth? and answer that something other than the earth caused it to be what it is, we could repeat our question with respect to this cause. Suppose I answer that the earth has its cause in a supposed form of earthness;

---

[103] Nicholas of Cusa, *De li non aliud*, trans. Jasper Hopkins, *On God as Not-Other* (Minneapolis: Banning, 1987), 2, p. 37.
[104] Ibid. 6, pp. 55-59,

again I could ask for the principle of that form. This questioning could continue until I arrive at a principle that is its own cause, which is what it is because it is nothing other than what it is. Cusanus thus takes the *non aliud* to be a more adequate characterization of the being of God than any other. It emphasizes the non-phenomenality of God by negating the very condition under which our language operates, the *aliud*. If we are to use language to reveal transcendence, language must be used in such a way that it turns back on and against itself, putting itself in question and throwing us beyond its limits.

But if the *non aliud* preserves the transcendence of God, it also establishes God as the presupposition of finite understanding. All appearances and names presuppose God as that at which they aim. God functions thus not only as the ground, but also as the measure of the finite.

As long as I see the object as falling into the space defined by my language, I see it *sub specie possibilitatis*: it could also be other than it is. To understand transcendence as the *non aliud* is to admit that the question: why is the world the way it is: ultimately receives no answer. Thus Cusanus' *non aliud* points to what Wittgenstein calls the mystical. The question: why is the world the way it is? cannot be answered because the question presupposes a dimension that rules out such an answer. As long as the world is seen *sub specie possibilitatis*, it cannot but seem accidental and its significance must escape us. But if man sees it, or any particular object, as nothing other than what it is, he has escaped from possibility. The "why" no longer arises. Rephrasing Kierkegaard's dictum we can say: purity of heart is to see one thing. It follows from this conception of the n*on aliud* that anything can become significant when encountered in a certain way: a tree, a cloud, an old roof, a dung heap or a stove, all can reveal themselves to us as being just what they are. As Karl Jaspers points out, the denial of possibility leads to transcendence: "Where I touch on reality without its transformation into possibility, there I touch on transcendence."[105] "Inquiring consciousness is bound by empirical reality. But transcendence is no binding reality; however, we notice … everywhere in reality something that, when grasped as empirical reality, no longer is what we experience. It is a reality which can be grasped only as the limit of empirical reality, but going beyond it; I

[105] Karl Jaspers, *Philosophie*, vol. 3 (Ber1in, 1932), p. 9.

stand before it turning silent."[106]

Again we meet with silence as the language of transcendence. And once more we must ask: how are we to distinguish this silence from a silence that reveals nothing. If there is a silence that reveals transcendence we have to be led to it; it won't do, to say nothing at all. And he who wants to lead us has to speak to us, but in such a way that in the end his language suffers shipwreck and opens us to silence.

[106] Ibid., pp. 7 and 9.

9. The Shipwreck of Philosophy

1

To demand objectivity it to demand that we free ourselves from our personal interests, which all too often cloud our sight. We should consider the facts, as they happen to be. To demand objectivity is to demand disinterestedness. But whatever we recognize as a value does not leave us disinterested. In Wittgenstein's logical space there is no room for value. And yet, the young Wittgenstein has quite a bit to say about value. This is shown by his comments on ethics and value, both in the *Tractatus* and in the *Notebooks*.

Consider the following two statements:

6.13 Logic is transcendental.

6.421 Ethics is transcendental.

Taken together they suggest a parallel between ethics and logic. But how is this parallel to be understood? 6.13 lends itself to a Kantian interpretation. We call transcendental what transcends experience because it alone provides for its possibility. In that sense Kant's categories are transcendental as is Schopenhauer's principle of sufficient reason.

Wittgenstein's thesis, that the limits of my language indicate the limits of my world (5. 6), suggest that the same is true of logical space. This may seem to conflict with 5.61 where the limits of the world are said to be also the limits of logic. But the conflict is only apparent: let us recall that Wittgenstein has defined world as the totality of facts. There facts are made up of atomic facts, these, in turn, of objects. Each object has a form that determines into what relations with other objects it can enter. In their entirety these objects constitute the substance of the world, that which remains invariant. In Wittgenstein 's sign language each object is to be represented by a name. By their grammar these names determine the structure of logical space, which is thus seen to depend on the substance of the world. In this sense the limits of the world, imposed on it by its substance, are the limits of logic. At one point Wittgenstein calls logic the mirror image of the world (6. 13). Perhaps this phrase is misleading: although the world mirrors itself in the medium of logic, logic itself mirrors only the substance of the world, not the particular constellation of facts which happens to make up this world; yet it does point

out that logic must have its foundation in what it mirrors. As was argued in the preceding session, if logic is to reveal the world it must have its foundation in it. Wittgenstein wants to hold two things: 1) the logic of our language is the presupposition of the world we know, and 2) for our understanding of the world to be more than an illusion there must be an affinity between the world and logic. The mirror that logic furnishes must be such that it can picture the world. As already pointed out, Wittgenstein accounts for this affinity by arguing for the isomorphism of the relation between name and object, fact and proposition. The difficulties which are raised by this move, which threatens to collapse the poles which at first were carefully set apart, have been pointed out.

The assertion that ethics is transcendental is more difficult to interpret. We should expect that Wittgenstein means to assert by this that, just as logic determines the limits of our world, so does ethics. Ethics, too, does not have to do with what facts there are, but with the way in which these facts present themselves to us. But in what sense is ethics a presupposition of the world?

In the *Notebooks* Wittgenstein suggests the following analogy: just as the representing subject is to the world of facts, so the willing subject is to the world of "meaning" in the sense of value (17.10.16, 3; cf. 4.11.16, 5). He adds the somewhat puzzling observation that only of the willing subject can we say that it really is, the representing subject is suspected of being a mere superstition, a philosophical construction, an empty illusion (4.8.16). In the *Tractatus* the thinking subject is said not to exist (5.631). What are we to make of this? Wittgenstein does not simply mean that there is no transcendental subject in the sense that there are facts, although this is true enough; as the transcendental condition of the being of facts, the subject cannot share their being; it is not anything and in this sense it is not. But all this is also true of the willing subject: in the sense in which facts are said to be, it, too, cannot be. And yet in the *Notebooks* Wittgenstein writes: "the willing subject exists" (4.8.16).

Perhaps Wittgenstein is just following here Schopenhauer, who had argued that only in the case of my own will am I given direct access to being itself; all else is encountered only as phenomenon, as objective appearance. But if we were to grant Wittgenstein that it is more legitimate to say of the willing subject that it is than of the representing subject, should we not also insist that the value-laden world constituted by

the will is more fundamental than the value-free world constituted by the representing subject? Yet Wittgenstein does not want to say this; repeatedly he asserts the independence of the world from the will (5.7.16; 6.373); the will encounters the world as something already completed (8.7.16). At one point Wittgenstein calls the world and the I two independent divinities (8.7.16). In all these formulations world does not mean the value-laden world constituted by the will, but the world of facts, which is what it is regardless of what attitude or stance we adopt. Only the will colors what in itself is meaningless.

A certain family resemblance between Wittgenstein's thoughts and the later views of Sartre, on the one hand, Ayer and Stevenson, on the other, is apparent. In each case we find a rejection of views that take value to be in some sense given. Facts are given and in this world of facts there is no room for value. This makes it necessary to give value a foundation in the stance the subject adopts towards the world (cf. 4.11.16). Common to all is the need to create room for the dimension of value, which has been threatened by the reduction of being to objective fact, by seeking to anchor it in some reality transcending the world of facts. In each case we find a turn to that being which, as already Descartes had recognized, resists this reduction: to the self. Thus Wittgenstein founds meaning and value in the will, Ayer and Stevenson in our subjective attitudes or feelings, while Sartre tries to establish man's freedom as the source of values, an attempt that must fail, since to know that I have freely chosen something that in itself is quite worthless as a value by which I am to live, is to have robbed that value of its validity. I cannot take some arbitrary object and simply, by the force of my will, elevate it into a value. If the object chosen does not already have a claim on me, the recognition of the hollowness of my act will defeat it. Yet Sartre does see, as Wittgenstein does, that given the reduction of the world to the totality of facts, the constitution of value must be groundless.

It is important to keep in mind that Wittgenstein's will is not in the world; it confronts the world as something already finished; in no way can it change the facts, it can only color them by its attitude. By divorcing facts and will as sharply as he does, Wittgenstein is also forced to divorce will from action. There is indeed a sense in which we can speak of the will being in the world: just as in the epistemological sphere

Wittgenstein distinguishes between the transcendental subject, the subject as limit of the world, and the subject as part of the world, so in the ethical sphere he distinguishes between a transcendental and an empirical will. But the empirical will is just another part of the world of facts and shares the meaninglessness of the world. The transcendental will, on the other hand, belongs to man in so far as he is a mere spectator, not only of the world, but of himself as a being in the world as well. There is no way in which this spectator can enter and participate in the affairs of the world. He can only assume an attitude, as spectator of a play in which someone else is acting his own part, can cheer or boo. Ethics is sacrificed to aesthetics. Or, if we accept Wittgenstein's analysis, ethics has been shown to be a part of aesthetics. Just as any object is beautiful when seen *sub specie aeternitatis*, so the good life is lived when the world is seen *sub specie aeternitatis* (7.10.16). We see the world *sub specie aeternitatis* when we no longer oppose to it some ideal, but simply accept the facts which make up our life as they are. The wise man has recognized the equivalence of all actions: it makes no difference what we do. This recognition is the secret of happiness.

As was Schopenhauer, Wittgenstein is still guided in his ethical reflections by a very traditional conception of what constitutes the end of man. For Wittgenstein, as for the entire Platonic-Christian tradition, to be happy is to be at one with oneself. But as PIato had insisted, such satisfaction is denied to man by time. To be free is to be open to possibilities. Possessing a future, man has to choose what he is to be. In order to do so he requires criteria to guide him. As long as the world could be understood as a meaningful order this posed no problem; knowing his place in the world man knew what he was supposed to do. But with the rise of subjectivity and the consequent reduction of the world to the totality of facts, the world became mute, while man could yet not escape the necessity of choice. While Sartre still believes that man can face the openness of the future and fling against it his own freedom, Wittgenstein takes a more traditional path. Following the tradition, he accepts that to be at one with himself man must escape from time and live in the present; "Only a man who lives not in time but in the present is happy" (8.7.16~3). But to live in the present man must escape from choice. The happy man does not face decisions. For to decide we have to weigh alternatives and face the future. Choice must give way to detached contemplation of what is. Instead of

measuring what is by what ought to be, instead of fearing or hoping for the future, the happy man just lives his life. He knows that there is no standard by which life could be found wanting.

2

It is difficult to accept this conclusion: too sharp are the discrepancies between it and what we know our situation to be. Whether we like it or not, we exist in the world, subjected by our body to the rule of time and death. And yet, the ethical observations in the *Notebooks* are more than ill thought through Schopenhauerian reminiscences. Not only do they make sense, given Wittgenstein's understanding of the world as the totality of facts; they also answer to a human need that has led again and again to similar answers. Nietzsche called this need the spirit of revenge: "This, yes this alone is revenge: the will's ill will against time and its 'it was."[107] Man takes revenge on himself because he cannot forgive himself being what he does not want to be. While we demand to be master of what is, the impossibility of meeting this demand is revealed by our temporal being. What now is, what we now are, will becomes something that was and is no longer; and whatever defenses we may invent to defend ourselves against what threatens us in the end are torn away. To escape from this man turns against all that ties him to time: will, desire, and his body. Philosophy's perennial idealization of the theoretical life is thus no accident, but one expression — and there are others, asceticism, e.g., or aestheticism — of man's inability to forgive himself his lack of power.

Attempts to defeat the power of time lead necessarily to a bifurcation of man: temporal man is opposed to another higher man. Aren't we all Platonists and dream Plato's dream of true being, of a home beyond time from which we have been cast and to which we must return. Wittgenstein, too, shares, in this dream. And yet, that it is only a dream is easily shown. Already the attempt to interpret the self as essentially a knowing subject confronting a world of objects leads to conclusions that cannot be accepted. Among these is the bifurcation of the human being into an empirical and a transcendental self. The empirical self is in the world, one of many things. The transcendental self is

---

[107] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Penguin Books, 1954), p. 252.

the limit of this world. But where am I? Which of these selves is the self that I am? One would like to answer: both! — Surely, I cannot deny that I find myself in the world; mine is not an angelic consciousness floating above coarse matter; I not only have a body, I am my body. And yet Descartes is also right, in reflection I can withdraw from the world and from my own body, raise myself above both. — Given Wittgenstein's, or for that matter Descartes' acceptance of the primacy of the subject-object polarity, this answer cannot be made sense of. My body is indeed one object among others; but precisely because of this there is no way of tying it more closely to the transcendental subject than any other object. How indeed is my body given to me as more mine than your body or any other object in the world? The rootedness of consciousness in a body remains for the Cartesian, the Kantian, or the Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus* not only a surd on which no light can be cast, but it is actually incompatible with the way the subject-object polarity forces us to distinguish between the transcendental and the empirical subject. A rift appears here within the self that cannot be bridged.

We can state what is the same point somewhat differently. As Wittgenstein himself points out, the objective world has no center. It is just this that distinguishes it from the world we experience. As a modern geographer, as opposed to, let us say, his medieval colleague, just because he happens to live in a particular place or country, does not emphasize this on his map of the world, so the objective thinker abstracts from that place which he happens to occupy. In both cases a commitment to objectivity leads to a homogeneous account of the world.

The world of our experience lacks this homogeneity. Wittgenstein recognizes this and the impossibility of doing justice to the heterogeneity of our world, given the type of account provided in the *Tractatus* (cf. 4.11.16). When, in the *Notebooks,* Wittgenstein tries to explain how it is possible for the world to be seen from a certain perspective dictated by man's place in the world, he resorts to the will, just as Schopenhauer had done. But with his interpretation of the will Wittgenstein moves closer to the traditional conception of the transcendental subject. By divorcing will and world, just as he had divorced transcendental subject and the world, Wittgenstein makes it impossible to use the will as he wants to use it, to account for the perspectival character of our experience. When Schopenhauer had insisted that man knows himself to be essentially

will, he had done so also to attack the traditional conception of man as fundamentally a thinking being. For Schopenhauer man is not a disembodied soul that happens to find itself imprisoned in some body. Man is essentially will or desire, and discovers himself to be such by discovering himself to be body. The body is objectified desire. According to Schopenhauer, too, the body is an object among other objects, but this object is experienced as the objectification of my desire. Thus it enables Schopenhauer to mediate between the thing-in-itself and appearance, between will and representation. The gap separating transcendental and empirical subject is bridged. Compared to Schopenhauer's conception of the will, Wittgenstein's constitutes a return to a more traditional Platonic-Christian position and to that bifurcation Schopenhauer had sought to overcome.

Schopenhauer's attacks on the traditional view of man go along with a refusal to see in detached 'objective' understanding the paradigm of human activity. For him such thinking is a derivative and somewhat artificial mode of behavior, as artificial as the conception of the human being as spirit. Before man seeks detached contemplation, he wants to live, to eat and procreate. For Schopenhauer, as for Nietzsche, thinking is only one weapon man uses in his attempt to master the world. Disengaged, objective thought presupposes other more engaged modes of encounter.

And yet, like Plato and like Wittgenstein, Schopenhauer dreams of a final satisfaction, of an escape from time, although he knows that such satisfaction is denied to man by what he is: for to describe man as essentially desire is to describe him as essentially lacking, dissatisfied, always ahead of himself in the future, full of hope and fear. It is this incompatibility between Schopenhauer's conception of man and his continuing acceptance of the traditional interpretation of man's end that leads to his pessimism. To this pessimism he finds only one answer: if man is condemned by his very being to suffering, then man must negate himself. While Plato could interpret man's movement towards satisfaction as a return to his essence, Schopenhauer sees this same movement as a denial of it. The key to man's self-destructive attack on himself is the overcoming of desire; to overcome desire man must acquire the objectivity to contemplate the facts without demanding anything of the world. Such objectivity is the secret of the artist, as Schopenhauer understands him.

With this conclusion, in spite of differences in their interpretations of the will, the Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus* and the *Notebooks* would agree. With Wittgenstein, as with Schopenhauer, objectivity is given an ethical, or more precisely, an aesthetic significance. Thus it is possible to understand the *Tractatus* in its entirety, not only the few propositions touching on ethical matters, as a guide to the "good life." By teaching us to see the world objectively, it frees us from pessimism. This is not to deny what was said above, that the stress on objectivity has its foundation in the will to power. That will demands that man be his own foundation, i.e., it demands that man be the author of 'what he needs to be himself.

But if man, by virtue of what he is, is lacking, incomplete, dependent on some reality that cast him into the world and in the end will destroy him, man's will to power will let him turn against that in himself which makes him a being in need, even if that something is his essence. As Nietzsche well knew, Schopenhauer's — and not only his turn to the wisdom of the East, to asceticism, to nothingness, has its roots in a disappointed will to power. This is also true of Wittgenstein: his reduction of the human being and the world does not simply constitute a misconception of our language and experience, although it involves that, as he himself was later to recognize; nor have we understood him when we view the *Tractatus* as being only a contribution to a special part of philosophy, i.e. to logic, although it is that, too. But more fundamentally it is an attempt to lead us to see the world rightly. To accomplish this Wittgenstein would lead us to the unquestioning acceptance of what is. Philosophy appears here as a weapon to destroy philosophy in the traditional sense, a philosophy which has its foundation in the attempt to establish what is as a meaningful whole by grounding it in a higher reality, be it God or some other absolute, be it the subject and by exhibiting our vocation in that world. By showing the groundlessness of all that is objectively given, Wittgenstein undercuts such attempts. In this sense the *Tractatus* is a nihilistic work: it shows that the place traditionally given to God is empty. Wittgenstein does still speak of God, but by God he would seem to mean little more than the mysterious givenness of the given. [108]

---

[108] Cf.. NB 1.8. 16. "How things stand is God. God is how things stand."
Cf. Eddy Zemach, "Wittgenstein's Philosophy of the Mystical," in *Essays on Wittgenstein's Tractatus,"* ed. Irving M. Copi and Robert W.Beard (New York, 1966),

Wittgenstein's rejection of traditional philosophy includes the *Tractatus,* since it, too, does not abide by the reduction of language to description of what is the case that it demands. Given that demand, its propositions, too, must in the end be recognized as meaningless. Only such recognition lets us acquire the objectivity that Schopenhauer demands; only it lets us become clear mirror of the world. God is sought in the silence that remains after the language of traditional theology and philosophy has suffered shipwreck.

---

p. 361: "Factuality lies at the basis of the whole *Tractatus*., and it is, if I am not greatly mistaken, what Wittgenstein names 'God.'"

10. Legitimacy and Limits of the Cartesian World Picture

1

The *Tractatus* belongs to and helps mark in a particularly concise way the Cartesian tradition. At the center of this tradition we have found the attempt to render the human being, in Descartes words, the master and possessor of nature, i.e .to give to what is a foundation in the subject. To do so the thinker must first free himself from his dependence on the world. This liberation is effected by reflection that lets him withdraw from the world, transforming him from a being, existing as part of the world, into the subject for whom the world is. But this withdrawal leads to and serves a renewed encounter with the world; only now this encounter takes the form of an attempt to appropriate the world, at first cognitively, by comprehending it, then by making it serve the subject's ends. By its reduction of what is to what can be grasped, Cartesian method makes the subject the measure of being, reducing being to objectivity, being for the subject. That reduction provides the key to Heidegger's understanding of the modern age as the age of the world picture.

In the end this project of making the subject the foundation of being must fail. Man is not the foundation of his being in the world; he has chosen neither place nor time; the world of objects, although constituted by the subject, is not freely established, but given. Transcendence cannot be eliminated, but remains as the givenness of what is. The failure of the attempt to found being in the subject shows itself in conflicts into which phi1osophy falls whenever it accepts the subject-object polarity as a foundation and yet tries to do justice to our experience. While that polarity leads towards transcendental idealism, experience forces us to recognize that realism, too, will not be dismissed.

Thus we have tensions between **transcendental** and r**ealistic interpretations** (1) of the **self**, (2) of **thought and language**, and (3) of **truth**.

(1) On one hand the self appears as limit of the world, where world is understood as the totality of objective facts. Since the being of objects is a being for consciousness, i.e. for a subject, the subject is established as the necessary condition for the being of objects. As transcendental subject the self transcends the world. Yet I cannot quite recognize myself in that transcendental subject, which confronts the world as a spectator

stands before a picture. I cannot deny that my body makes me part of the world. This makes it necessary to oppose to the **transcendental** the **empirical subject**, which has to be understood as just one of many objects. There would be no real difficulty if these two subjects could be neatly separated and I could treat the empirical subject as just another object. But to do so is to do violence to the structure of our experience. I am both, the transcendental and the empirical subject, and yet, as long as we try to remain within the limits imposed by the subject-object polarity, this "both" remains as mysterious as the interaction of mind and body in Descartes' pineal gland. Why is my body more "mine" than yours or indeed any other object? Aren't all objects "equidistant" from the transcendental subject? Is not all talk of linking the transcendental subject more to one object than to another ruled by the presupposed framework?

We can push still further and argue that as long as we accept the sharp separation of subject and object as constitutive of experience, self-consciousness remains an inexplicable mystery. If consciousness is of objects, then that of which we are conscious in self-consciousness must also be an object and as object fundamentally different from the thinking subject. It won't help to insist that it is the subject itself that is made the object of reflection. For behind this objectified subject a new subject will emerge which in turn will escape the grasp of my consciousness and this will be the subject that I am. No matter how I turn, such reflective iteration of consciousness only lets me catch other objects, never myself.[109] To overcome this difficulty we may want to insist on an immediate awareness by the subject of its own being. But even if we could make sense of such an awareness, this would still leave us with the insuperable gulf separating the subject understood as object and the subject immediately aware of itself. If we accept the subject-object polarity as our frame of reference — and it may well be rather inacceptable as such — we have to interpret that of which we are conscious in self-consciousness as the objectification or mediation of the subject I am, as for instance

---

[109] William Earle gives the example of "Paul Valery who spent ten years 'looking within,'" and "finally exclaimed in despair that whenever he turned his attention within he could hear nothing but the rumblings of his bowels." "'The Life of the Transcendental Ego, *The Review of Metaphysics*, vol.XIII, no. 1, 1959, p. 9.

Schopenhauer does when he interprets the body as the objectification of the will.[110] For this to be possible, experience must be not only of objects, but must reach beyond objects to what is only inadequately objectified, in this case to the subject that I am.

(2) A similar tension appears between **transcendental** and **realistic approaches to thought and language**. What was just said about the self, applies here, too. Like the subject, thought and language can be interpreted on one hand as constitutive of and thus as transcending the world, on the other as part of it. The former is supported by insisting that whatever is given is given within a logical or linguistic framework, the latter by pointing out that language is part of the world and as such subject to scientific investigation. To make language or thought fully constitutive of being is to destroy the meaning of truth. Like God the subject would create the world ex nihilo by naming it. Just as above we were forced to interpret the subject's knowledge of itself as object as mediating a more immediate self-awareness, so now we are forced to interpret our knowledge of objects as mediating an awareness of a transcendent reality. Buried in the tension between transcendental and realistic interpretations of thought and language is that between objective being and transcendence.

Given the discussion above, both, the necessity of introducing transcendence and the impossibility of making sense of it within an approach that reduces being to objectivity should be evident. This tension is a result of the failure of the attempted reduction of being to objectivity. Transcendence reveals itself in the awareness that things are.

(3) Closely related is a third tension, that between **a transcendental** and a **realistic interpretation of truth**. The realistic interpretation takes truth to be a relation within the world, e.g. a correspondence between picture and pictured or between our thoughts and what is the case. This presupposes a realistic interpretation of thought. But what about the presupposed understanding of the world? How are we to understand its truth?

The transcendental approach rules out such an interpretation; it makes truth **the groundless presencing of what is, mediated by logic**. *Esse est percipi* in the widest sense. And it won't help to try to save part of the traditional meaning of truth as

---

[110] Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, vol. 1, par. 18.

correspondence by arguing, admitting the transcendence of the given, that such constitution is only an establishment of what something is, which presupposes the material given. For why did we constitute the object as being this rather than that? Must this not have its foundation in the being of what we are trying to understand? But the rift separating objects and transcendence is too great to enable us to make sense of truth in this fashion.[111] There has to be some sort of **affinity** between transcendent and objective reality. Transcendence must be established not only as the ground, but also as the measure of appearance if we are to make sense of truth. This forces us to argue that appearances present themselves to us as inadequate representations that point beyond themselves to that reality which is both their ground and their measure. To admit this, however, we have to give up the Cartesian claim that our knowledge of reality can ever by clear and distinct. On the contrary, we must insist that it is attended by a shadow, by an awareness of that which has eluded us, which may perhaps be brought out more into the open by further investigation, yet all such attempts to arrive at more complete descriptions will only reveal new horizons of transcendence.

If, as has been argued, philosophy is beset by insoluble difficulties as long as it remains tied to the subject-object polarity, we should be able to trace these difficulties whenever a philosopher bases himself on a view of experience that takes that polarity for granted: so in Descartes' *Meditations* or in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, so in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* or in Heidegger's early works. Thus Descartes abandons his method to prove the existence of God, while Kant goes beyond the limits demanded by his transcendental approach with his insistence on the thing-in-itself. Heidegger runs into similar difficulties in his *Habilitationsschrift*. Wittgenstein's problems are more obvious. As I have tried to show earlier, in the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein fails to arrive at a coherent view of language and instead tries to move in two incompatible directions. We should consider in this connection once more his appropriation of Heinrich Hertz's picture theory. Hertz did use the picture theory to clarify the nature of scientific models, but he was willing to grant that such pictures had their foundation in a more fundamental encounter with reality. As Hertz recognized, a language like that used by the scientist

---

[111] This is essentially the same problem posed by Kant's attempt to ground the empirical affinity of the manifold in a transcendental affinity. (*Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, A 113)

demands other more fundamental modes of thought or speech that are not to be explained on the picture model. In this sense the transcendental interpretation does seem to exhibit a more fundamental dimension of language than can any picture theory. And yet, does such an approach not lead necessarily to a loss of reality?

As we have seen, Wittgenstein came to recognize the need for a distinction between hypothetical descriptions and other more fundamental ways of speaking. In the *Phi1osophische Bemerkungen* the language of the *Tractatus* reappears, not as something within our reach, but as the ideal of a phenomenological description of the world that would leave nothing unsaid. From what was said about the adequacy of descriptive language, it follows that such an ideal language would collapse language and reality. Once again we find ourselves in the neighborhood of traditional Christian thinkers who made divine creative knowledge the measure of human knowledge. And the proximity becomes even greater when we read in the *Philosophische Bemerkungen* that this ideal phenomenological language is *unfassbar kompliziert*, so complicated that it necessarily eludes our grasp. Given what we can comprehend, this language appears as an ideal measure, a regulative ideal, that our descriptions presuppose, but a measure that can never be fully grasped. If this is to make sense, it must be possible to use as a measure what finally eludes our grasp. What can be grasped is its form.

Precisely in this sense, I urged above, objective reality can be understood as the measure of appearance. As Wittgenstein does in the *Philosophische Bemerkungen*, we must give up the Cartesian dream of a world fully grasped by us. Reality exceeds our grasp. This is not to say that it is not known at all; it is rather to reject the Cartesian either-or; either we have fully adequate knowledge or we do not know at all. Thus in the *Philosophische Bemerkungen* Wittgenstein moves to a position closer to the pre-Cartesian *conjectura* concept of Cusanus. The end of modern philosophy resembles its beginning.[112]

---

[112] Perhaps the following analogy is appropriate: just as Cusanus' conjectural thinking occupies a middle ground between medieval analogy and Cartesian method, so the hypothetical approach of the *Philosophische Bemerkungen* occupies a middle ground between the "Cartesian method" of the *Tractatus* and the once again analogical thinking of the *Investigations*.

2

As long as we remain within the general framework provided by the subject-object polarity something like this conclusion, involving as it does a move beyond that polarity to transcendence, seems inescapable. Without completely objectifying it and thus without destroying transcendence, reality must be understood as measure and ground of appearance. Given the preceding discussion, it should be evident why such a view does greater justice to our experience than either objective realism or transcendental idealism can. Perhaps we can speak here of a transcendental realism.

But is it necessary to remain with that picture? How is that picture justified?

In the *Tractatus* no attempt at justification is made. Wittgenstein takes for granted that language is the totality of propositions (4.001) and even when viewed in this way our language is said to conceal its essence. But what is the essence of our language? An answer readily suggests itself: language is essentially the communication of sense. We all know that it is possible to make the same assertion in different languages and in our language in different ways; which words we use and in what order is not dictated by the sense of the assertion. To discover the essence of language we must therefore look beyond particular constellations of words to what remains invariant in different ways of saying the same thing, we could say, to what is not tied to the particular perspective of the speaker. In the *Tractatus* this leads to the attempt to develop a sign language that will enable us to state unambiguously what is the case.

But is it so obvious that language is essentially propositional and aperspectival? By now, owing in good part to Wittgenstein' s own later reflections, we are so likely to be convinced of the opposite that we may see here no more than the result of a one-sided diet, of a naive taking for granted of the paradigmatic character of assertion.

What Wittgenstein fails to provide in the *Tractatus* had been furnished twenty years earlier by Gottlob Frege in an essay, "Über die wissenschaftliche Berechtigung der Begriffsschrift." Frege sees his own development of the *Begriffsschrift* as another step in the liberation of man's reason from the "bodily and psychic conditions," a development

whose direction is indicated as soon as there is language.[113] By nature we are turned outward to sense impressions; yet we would misinterpret our situation were we to see it just as a passive dependence. We can move in the world, turn towards the pleasant, away from the unpleasant; beyond this we can manipulate our environment. While in all this man is still tied to his immediate situation, the invention of sensible signs makes it possible for us to make present what is "absent, invisible, perhaps non-sensuous.“[114] Only language frees man from bondage to his situation; and this independence from the limits imposed on man by his body is increased when we move from the spoken to the written word and again when the written word becomes a visual sign, which is appreciated as such and is not attended by an actual or mental saying of the word. Only language makes conceptual thought possible.[115] By giving to different, but similar things the same signs, we signify no longer the particular thing, but what is common to them, the concept; since in itself it cannot be perceived, a perceptible representative is necessary if it is to appear to us. Thus “the sensible discloses the world of the non-sensible,”[116] Language liberates reason from its corporeal setting and thus makes that self-transcendence of which we spoke earlier possible. When we see this liberation as part of the essence of language, it is easy to see why our language would have to be judged imperfect: it is still too tied to what Frege calls "bodily and psychic conditions;" it still doesn't serve reason alone or even adequately as a perfect language must do. As Wittgenstein was to do later, Frege thus sees the imperfection of language in the fact that “language is not so governed by logical propositions, that by following grammar we already assure the formal correctness of our train of thought.”[117] "The forms in which deduction is expressed, are so manifold, so loose and flexible, that without being noticed, presuppositions easily invaded them, which then, when the necessary conditions for the validity of the conclusion are adduced, are easily not mentioned.”[118] Even a Euclid, Frege points out, makes use of such unstated presuppositions. Not that the ordinary reader

---

113 "Uber die wissenschaftliche Berechtigung der Begriffsschrift,” in *Funktion, Begriff, Bedeutung*, ed. G. Patzig, pp. 94 - 95.
114 Ibid., p. 91.
115 Ibid., p. 92.
116 Ibid., p. 92.
117 Ibid., p. 92.
118 Ibid., p. 83.

would notice the lack; not only here would he find the attempt to state all that is being presupposed unnecessarily cumbersome. In most situations the context in which a statement appears absolves us from having to state what exactly it is that is being presupposed. But although undoubtedly convenient and even necessary to the easy functioning of our language, the suppression of presuppositions results in a lack of transparency. These difficulties are increased by the fact that too often we use the same word with different meanings. Again context, tonefall, and gesture usually make clear what is meant, although the philosopher is easily misled by such confusions.

Frege refers to the ontological argument which is said to rest on a throwing together of different meanings of the word "to be." [119] It should be emphasized that these imperfections of language are in an important sense necessary. Were we always to do justice to the demands of logic our language would become too rigid and much too cumbersome to be of use in the affairs of everyday life. "The emphasized defects have their foundation in a certain softness and changeability of language, which on the other hand are a condition of its ability to develop and its manifold serviceability."[120] Frege goes on to compare our language to our hand, which despite its versatility is found wanting in certain ways, a lack which makes it necessary to invent tools, artificial hands which can be used with a precision that is made possible by the rigidity of their parts. "Thus word-language is also inadequate. We require a totality of signs, from which all ambiguity is banished, whose strict logical form prevents content from escaping."[121] The Cartesian project of first giving up seemingly secure ground in order to gain greater security is unmistakeable, even if it appears now in a new linguistic key.

Given the task of constructing a language which would do greater justice to the requirements of our reason and the fact that "we cannot 'dispense ' with sensible signs altogether, what should we use as material for this language? Should we use auditory or visual signs? Frege rejects the former. To be sure, the spoken word offers certain advantages in that it is tied more closely to the texture of individual life. As we listen to another speak, his words reveal not only an objective

---

[119] Cf, Funktion und Begriff, *Funktion, Begriff, Bedeutung*, p. 36.
[120] "Uber die wissenschaftliche Berechtigung der Begriffsschrift," p. 94.
[121] Ibid., p. 94.

sense, but feelings and moods. The speaker sounds angry or patient or tired. Yet this is also a defect, especially if we keep in mind the liberating function of language: "This close fit of our audible signs to the bodily and psychic conditions
of reason has perhaps just this disadvantage, to keep the former dependent on the latter."[122] Compared to the auditory, the visual sign is "sharply limited and distinctly separate"— a phrase that recalls the Cartesian clear and distinct and also has a greater permanence — Frege grants that it is just this that makes them unlike our thought-processes.[123] Yet our task is not "to represent natural thought, as it has shaped itself in interchange with word-language;" our thought is all too natural; just this constitutes its defect. Frege sees it as his task to compensate for this deficiency, which has its foundation in the too close tie of language to the act of speech. Language has been interpreted here in such a way that a move towards something like Frege's *Begriffsschrift* or Wittgenstein's sign-language seems demanded by its essence**. Language appears as an instrument that enable us human beings to leave and transcend our particular place in the world.** This interpretation of language and what we called above the objectification of being belong together. In this conjunction the priority given to the eye rather than to the ear is significant. Seeing establishes a distance between the seer and the seen. I look at the other; in a sense I am here the aggressor. As Sartre argues, the look is a weapon of attack. "What is seen is possessed; to see is to *deflower*. If we examine the comparisons ordinarily used to express the relation between knower and known, we can see that many of them are represented as being a kind of *violation by sight*."[124] This contrasts with listening: to hear the other, the other must make him- or herself heard. I don't listen at, I listen to the other. Listening is dialectic as seeing is not. If an attempt were made to construct knowledge on the model of listening, we would never arrive at a conception that takes knowledge to be constitutive of the known. Transcendence would be safeguarded by the very metaphor used. Yet it is hardly an accident that seeing rather than listening came to govern our conception of thinking. Frege gives us a hint when he points out that the heard is far more tied to time. When we

---

[122] Ibid., p.. 94-95.
[123] Ibid., p. 95.
[124] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, tr. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956), p. 578.

hear we are less in control than when we see. The heard continuously threatens to vanish and thus to escape us.

3

Frege's essay is called not simply "Über die Berechtigung der Begriffsschrift," but "Über die wissenschaftliche Berechtigung der Begriffsschrift." He thus limits himself to the project of **science**. Given that project the development of a more transparent sign-language is justified. But one could ask whether this justifies us to insist, in view of that limitation, that such a sign-language does greater justice to the essence of language than our language can. Frege's essay, while it does not directly concern itself with providing such justification, does so at least indirectly. If Frege is rignt, the attitude of the scientist is not just one of many man could have, but that which does greatest justice to reason, where following Platonic tradition, Frege opposes reason to body and soul.[125] Like Cartesian method, Frege' s *Begriffsschrift* and Wittgenstein 's sign-languag are just further steps in the development leading towards the autonomy of reason.[126] This movement does not originate with Descartes, nor even, as Heidegger would have it, with the Greeks, who, "because the l*ogos* came into their philosophical ken primarily as assertion" took this "as their clue for working out the basic structures of the forms of discourse and its components." (SZ 165) As Frege suggests, it has its foundation in the being of language itself. And yet, this is not to say that this movement is to be interpreted simply as a working out of the essence of language, although we may be justified in describing it in terms of a working out of scientific language. But language has other facets that need to be considered, facets that Heidegger and Wittgenstein were to do much to bring out into the open. The attempt to use scientific language as a guide to the essence of language cannot be justified by an appeal to the being of language as such. That man moves beyond the language of the everyday in just this direction has its foundation rather in what Nietzsche calls "unser unablösliches Bedürfnis der Erhaltung," "our ineliminable need for self-preservation," which lets us oppose ourselves to

---

125 "Uber die wissenschaftliche Berechtigung der Begriffsschrift," pp. 94-95.
126 Cf. also Leibniz, "On the Universal Science: Characteristic," *Monadology and Other Philosophical Essays*, pp. 11 - 21.

becoming and lets us construct in opposition to it something enduring.[127] Using Nietzsche's phrase, we can call not only Frege' s *Begriffsschrift* and Tractarian sign language, but all propositional languages *Herrschaftgebilde*, structures that establish a sphere of domination. The primacy of assertion has its foundation in the will to grasp and hold fast what is.

[127] "Die Ausdrucksmittel der Sprache sind unbrauchbar, um das 'Werden' auszudrücken: "es gehört zu unserem *unablöslichen Bedürfniß der Erhaltung*, beständig die eine gröbere Welt von Bleibendem, von 'Dingen' usw. zu setzen." *Nachgelassene Fragmente*. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Kritische Studienausgabe*, ed.Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (München/Berlin, 1980), 13, p. 36

11. Two Conflicting Interpretations of Language in Wittgenstein's Investigations

1

With increasing clarity Wittgenstein recognized that the Cartesian dream of a world transparent to language cannot be realized.[128] A phenomenological language that does full justice to reality remains an unattainable ideal. More importantly, Wittgenstein came to suspect that the essence of language had been grasped too narrowly in the *Tractatus,* indeed, that the very search for an essence had been misguided. When we ask for the essence of language we ask: what makes language language and there is an expectation that it won't do simply to look at language in all its heterogeneity; this multiplicity must hide some simple structure. "*'The essence is hidden from*.us': this is the form our problem now assumes. We ask: 'What.is language',' 'What is a proposition?' And the answer to these questions is to be given once for all; and independently of any future experience.' (I 92) This essence, that is logic, "presents an order, in fact the a priori order of the world: that is, the order of *possibilities*, which must be common to both world and thought. But this order, it seems, must be *utterly simple*. It is *prior* to all experience, must run through all experience; no empirical cloudiness or uncertainty can be allowed to affect it — It must rather be of the purest crystal. But this crystal does not appear as an abstraction; but as something concrete, indeed, as the most concrete, as it were the hardest thing there is." (I 97) As Wittgenstein points out, when we present logic as the essence of language, we do so in a way that seems to preclude all possible challenge. To disagree, it seems, we have to reject what are supposed to be the very conditions of experience. What experience is is not questioned here. Once such questions are raised, instead of being the condition of the possibility of experience, logic appears to be the condition of only an idealized version of experience. We have an ideal of what language should be like. Wittgenstein likens this ideal to a pair of glasses the philosopher is wearing without ever getting the idea he might take the glasses off and thus see the world differently.

---

[128] Cf. Karsten Harries, "Two Conflicting Interpretations of Language in Wittgenstein's *Investigations," Kantstudien*, vol. 59, no. 4, 1968, pp. 397- 409.

As: long as we cling to this ideal we make a demand that cannot be realized. As I have pointed out, there cannot be totally adequate description. The search for such adequacy leads to ever more intricate descriptions that demand still further intricacies. Compared to this ideal language, the language that we do have is, as Wittgenstein says, like a broken spider web which we are supposed to fix with our fingers. (I 106)

The more we look at our language, the more we realize not only its distance from the demanded ideal, but also how much there is in our language to which that ideal fails to do justice. What we call language does not possess the kind of unity that was demanded. Consider the many ways in which we use language. "But how many kinds of sentence are there? Say assertion, question, and command? There 'are countless kinds; countless different kinds of use of what we call 'symbols', 'words', 'sentences'. And this multiplicity is not something fixed, given once for all; but new types of language, new language games, as we may say, come into existence, and others become obsolete and get forgotten. (We can get a *rough picture* of this from the changes in mathematics.)" (I 23) In the *Investigations* the demand for homogeneity, rooted in a one-sided emphasis on assertion, is given up. Language is as heterogeneous as our lives. Given up is also the attempt to give language an a-temporal essence. Instead Wittgenstein now emphasizes the temporal and spatial character of our language: "We are talking about the spatial and temporal phenomenon of language, not about some non-spatial, non-temporal phantasm." (I 108) Much of this recalls Schopenhauer and Nietzsche and their attack on Platonism. Just as Schopenhauer had emphasized that man is not essentially spirit that happens to find itself imprisoned by the body in a particular place and time, so he argued that human thinking has to be understood within the larger framework of man's will to live. As Schopenhauer embodied the Cartesian self, so Wittgenstein in the *Investigations* embodies Tractarian thought.

This embodied thought is inseparable from our language, where the word "embodied" is perhaps still too tied to Platonism, suggesting as it does that thought expresses itself in language as the soul expresses itself in the body. But this is misleading. Just as Schopenhauer insisted that apart from the body man is nothing, so we

have to insist that, apart from language, thought is nothing.[129] Language, again, cannot be divorced from human activity. The key to language and thought is not furnished by disinterested contemplation, but by life in all its complexity. This is suggested by the term "language-game." "Here the term 'language-game' is meant to bring into prominence the fact that the *speaking* of language is part of an activity, or a form of life." (I 23)

2

Given our definitions of realistic and transcendental, this last statement seems to suggest that the Wittgenstein of the *Investigations* is a realist. Language is to be interpreted as part of something larger, an activity in the world. A realistic view of language is indeed implicit in the way in which Wittgenstein introduces his notion of a language-game.

> Let us imagine a language for which the description given by Augustine is right." [Augustine appears here as representative of a picture theory of language somewhat like that advanced in the *Tractatus.*] The language is meant to serve for communication between a builder A and his assistant B. A is building with building-stones. There are blocks, pillars, slabs, and beams. B has to pass the stones, and that in the order in which A needs them. For this purpose they are using a language consisting of the words 'block', 'pillar', 'slab', 'beam'. A calls them out; ' — B brings the stones which he has learned to bring at such-and-such a call. Conceive this as a primitive language." (I 2)

Language appears here as instrument serving human beings and their work. But to describe something as an instrument is to presuppose some understanding of the context in which the instrument is used. **The instrumental interpretation of language is a form of the realistic.**

To be sure, the view of language advanced in (2) is hardly one Wittgenstein

---

[129] Cf. Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 374. "The problem of language is exactly parallel to the problem of bodies, and the description which is valid in one case is valid in the other."

would advocate — on the contrary, it is advanced only to be rejected. This language fits the Augustinian or the Tractarian position — words name things — and it was just the inadequacy of that view that led Wittgenstein to develop the more adequate view of language found in the *Investigations.*

But how does Wittgenstein understand this inadequacy? The resources of the language in (2) are shown to be too limited. It is inadequate in its scope and does justice only to a "narrowly circumscribed region." (I 3) **We are misled if we take it to apply to all of language**. This remark is interesting for it suggests that important aspects of the picture theory are retained. We can put it this way: What Wittgenstein shows in the *Investigations* is that the way in which language relates to reality is far more complicated than he had believed. The picture theory is thus attacked not because of its realism — in the *Investigations* Wittgenstein recognizes these difficulties no more than he had in the *Tractatus* — but because of its too simplistic account of the relationship between language and reality. To remedy this deficiency and to lead us to a better understanding of the richness and. variety of language-games Wittgenstein develops and complicates the language of (2). From words signifying objects the emphasis shifts to language serving a way of life. It is in this context that language is said to be part of an activity. (cf. I 2-23)

It is evident that languages of the type we are considering here must be, regardless of their scope, in at least one fundamental way unlike the language-games in which we ourselves are caught. To imagine the former we have to imagine a horizon that transcends language, e.g. a situation, an activity, a way of life; language has an outside. No such wider horizon is given in the case of language that determines the limits of our world. To imagine such a horizon we would have to be beyond these limits; i.e. they would not be limits for us. To fully understand the language in (2) is to know also that such a language cannot offer me a final horizon. We can indeed imagine, as Wittgenstein invites us to do in I 6, "that the language of par. 2 was the whole language of A and B; even the whole language of a tribe." But I cannot imagine it to be my whole language. To the language that limits my understanding the realistic model cannot do justice. This is not to say that there is anything wrong with the realistic model; but we have to realize that it enables us only to understand language as a phenomenon in the

world, never as that in which alone reality is disclosed to us. Thus a scientific observer of language need have no misgivings about using this model; his approach to language as a phenomenon among phenomena even necessitates it. But this approach lacks a foundation until we answer the question: how is the more comprehensive horizon in terms of which language is to be understood disclosed? If this disclosure, too, depends on language, it is clear that this language must possess a fundamentally different status than the language of which the scientist speaks.

One sometimes meets with arguments that rest on a failure to distinguish the realistic from the transcendental interpretation. Consider, e.g. Wittgenstein's thesis in the *Tractatus* that it is logically impossible for two colors to be at one place in the visual field. (6.3751) Against this it has been urged that Wittgenstein is mistaking here the grammar of a particular language for the logic of language; what he says may well be true of our language, but may there not be others?[130] In support one can appeal to *Investigations* xii "'If anyone believes that certain concepts are absolutely the correct ones, and that having different ones would mean not realizing something that we realize — then let him imagine certain very general facts of nature to be different from what we are used to, and the formation of concepts different from the usual ones will become intelligible to him."

This seems to suggest that what in the *Tractatus* is called "logically impossible" is impossible only with respect to the grammar of a particular language-game, and there could well be others. It has its foundation not in eternal truth, but in linguistic convention. Or, perhaps, what was thought to be a logical truth turns out to have its origin in human construction.

With respect to statements like 6.3751 such arguments are inadmissible. If by "particular language-game" we mean a language-game that helps to determine the limits of my world, then I cannot imagine real alternatives to it. If 6.3751 has its foundation in the grammar of a language which helps to determine the limits of my world, it cannot be undercut by me by trying to relativize that language. No such

---

[130] Cf. Ernst Konrad Specht, *Die sprachphilosophischen und ontologischen Grundlagen im Spätwerk Ludwig Wittgensteins*, *Kantstudien*, *Ergänzungshefte* 84 (Köln, 1963), pp. 131-139.

language can be interpreted on the realistic model, and yet, to relativize is to presuppose such an interpretation.

Similar considerations apply in the following case: someone asks us to think of the Eskimos and of their way of life which forces them to be attentive to aspects of their environment that we would not notice; we should expect this to be reflected in their language. They are caught in language-games different from ours — we live in different worlds. But do we? To make this point we have to use a realistic model to make sense of two different, equally valid perspectives, the transcendental model to show that these perspectives determine the limits of the worlds of the speakers, and we have to forget that this is what we are doing. One cannot speak of two equally valid perspectives and at the same time maintain that one of these constitutes a limit beyond which we cannot go. To understand how the other language differs from our own we must have the resources to do justice to this difference, even if we usually don't use them — We live in the same world after all.

Such confusions between the realistic and the transcendental model arise quite easily whenever the Cartesian ideal of a universal, logical language, invariant with respect to the point of view of the speaker, has given way to an emphasis on ordinary lived language. It is the latter which is now said to constitute the limits of my world, not some artificially constructed ideal language. This shift from an ideal logical to ordinary language parallels the shift from the transcendental subject to the embodied self. In both cases the transcendental approach is not given up: ordinary 1anguage and the body are still considered transcendental conditions of experience. At the same time the realistic model suggests itself quite naturally: while no one would seek the transcendental subject or logical space in the world, the body and ordinary language are quite obviously in the world and as such available for scientific description. At this point the differences between philosophy and science, between the philosopher and the psychologist, the philosopher and the linguist, threaten to blur or disappear altogether. This disappearance, however, rests on a confusion: even if we admit that the human being is essentially in the world, we have to distinguish between a realistic and a transcendental interpretation of his being in the world. On the realistic interpretation man's perspective is one of many possible perspectives; on the transcendental interpretation this perspective is fundamental

in a way in which no other can be. As Wittgenstein points out in the *Tractatus*, I, my language, and my world belong together and constitute limits beyond which I cannot go. The shift from the sign-language of the *Tractatus* to ordinary language should not lead us to overlook the force of this position.

3

There is indeed a good reason for wanting to temper the transcendental model of language with the realistic. It appeared already in our discussion of Descartes: to say with the transcendental model that language constitutes the world of experience is to run the risk of rendering language activity pointless. Just as in the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein uses the realistic model to account for the sense of propositions, for the possibility of distinguishing true from false presuppositions, so he uses it in the *Investigations* to distinguish language-games that have a point (*Witz*) from those that do not. Consider 142: "And if things were quite different from what they actually are — if there were for instance no characteristic expression of pain, of fear, of joy; if rule became exception and exception rule; or if both became phenomena of roughly equal frequency this would make our normal language-games lose their point. The procedure of putting a lump of cheese on a balance and fixing the price by the turn of the scale would lose its point if it frequently happened for such lumps to suddenly grow or shrink for no obvious reason." Our language-games presuppose a certain regularity, a certain order among things. If no such order were to correspond or, perhaps better, to answer to the language-game in question, it would lose its point.

This view can be understood as a development of the picture theory of the *Tractatus*. In the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein insists that to have a sense pictures must be either true or false. The picture either agrees with reality or not; it is right or wrong. This version of the picture theory is later modified. "The proposition, the hypothesis, is coupled more or less loosely with reality. In the extreme cases there is no longer a connection, reality can do whatever it wants to without coming into conflict with the proposition: in that case the proposition, the hypothesis is meaningless." (PB 282) Wittgenstein no longer insists here hat the proposition or hypothesis must be either true or false; it can be sort of true. "'The hypothesis stands in a looser relationship to reality

than that of verification." (PB. 284) The isomorphism of picture and fact has been given up. All that is necessary for our propositions (about reality) to have sense is that our experience *in some way* is more in agreement with them than not." (PB 282)

In the *Philosophische Bemerkungen* we still find an emphasis on descriptive language; in the *Investigations* this is corrected. Wittgenstein now insists that there are many other ways in which language can relate or fail to relate to reality. The picture theory is stretched to a point where we can recognize it only with difficulty. Yet one important aspect of it is preserved: language may or may not relate to reality; when it fails to relate language idles; it loses its point. The realistic model is retained.

It is indeed from such attempts to explain how language relates to reality that the realistic interpretation gets its strongest support. To make sense of truth and related notions we have to posit something at which our speaking and thinking aims or into which it ties, something that transcends our linguistic activity. For this the transcendental model makes no allowance.

Wittgenstein also speaks of *Witz* in a somewhat different context:

> Imagine a language-game in which someone is ordered to bring certain objects which are composed of several parts, to move them about, or do something else of the kind. And two ways of playing it: in one (a) the composite objects have names, as in (15); in the other (b) only the parts are given names and the wholes are described by means of them. (1 60)
>
> Suppose for instance that the person who is given the orders in (a) and (b) has to look up a table coordinating names and pictures before bringing what is required. Does he do the same when he carries out an order in (a) and the corresponding one in (b)? — Yes and no. You may say: 'The *point* of the two orders is the same. I should say so too. But it is not everywhere clear what should be called the 'point' of an order. (Similarly one may say of certain objects that they have this or that purpose. The *essential* thing is that this is a lamp, that it serves to give light; — that it is an ornament to the room, fills an empty space, etc., is not essential. But there is not always a sharp distinction between essential and inessential. (I 62)

These passages suggest that we understand the point of an order or description when we understand what is essential and what not. This is to say, the overt linguistic performance contains essential and inessential elements, just as some of the rules of chess are essential and others less obviously so or not at all — it is for instance not essential that white move first.

A distinction between what is essential and inessential in language is found already in the *Tractatus*; "4.002 Language disguises thought; so much so, that from the outward form of the clothing it is impossible to infer the form of the thought beneath it, because the form of the clothing is not designed to reveal the form, of the body, but for entirely different purposes."

The sign language of the *Tractatus* is to reveal the thought that ordinary language hides. It is to provide a clear picture of the world. In the *Philosophische Bemerkungen* this view, although modified, is retained. Although the demand for a phenomenological language, a language fully adequate to reality, is given up, it functions still as an ideal. We come as close as we need to this ideal by taking a careful look at how the language we ordinarily speak works: "An understanding of what is essential to our language if it is to represent and what is inessential, an understanding of what parts of our language are idling wheels, amounts to the construction of a phenomenological language." (PB 51) Implicit in this observation is the belief that ordinary language hides a deep structure that can be exhibited. "Every time I say this or that representation could also be replaced with this other representation, we take a further step towards the goal of grasping the essence of what is represented. (PB 51) By such exercises in paraphrasing or translation[131] I discover what in what I say is independent of my way of saying it; in this way I go beyond the limitations of my linguistic point of view to what is essential. I move from my language towards a universal language, from *my view* of the world towards *the* world. The ideal that Wittgenstein sought to realize in the *Tractatu*s is here still present.

In the *Investigations this* ideal, although it has become far less important, still makes an appearance:

---

[131] Paraphrase and translation should however not be equated here. Many propositions are easily translated into another language, but difficult to paraphrase. Take "God is love."

> 531 We speak of understanding a sentence in the sense in which it can be replaced by another which says the same; but also in the sense in which it cannot be replaced by any other. (Any more than one musical theme can be replaced by another.)
>
> In the one case the thought in the sentence is something common to different sentences; in the other, something that is expressed only by these words in these positions. (Understanding a poem.)

There are thus situations where the point of what is said becomes clearer when I try to paraphrase it or state it in some other language. In such cases, too, the point of what is said is explained by appealing to a sense beyond what was actually said. To recognize the point of what is said is to recognize that at which the speaker is aiming. This may or way not be well expressed by what is actually said. By saying it in other ways and in other languages we may move closer to it. Again language derives its meaning from something that transcends it.

That it is the universal dimension of language that enables us to understand the point of more ordinary language is suggested by 206: "The common behavior of mankind is the system of reference by means of which we interpret an unknown language."

What enables us to learn a foreign language or to translate from one language into another must be something that ties these languages together. It is identified here with the common behavior of mankind. It provides the horizon that encloses all languages that it is possible for us to understand. Thus it furnishes what I called "the formal transcendence of sense" with a foundation in the world.[132] By certain exercises in translation one could try to distill a language that would be neutral with respect to the particular perspective of the speaker, a kind of Cartesian or Tractarian Esperanto that would do greater justice to the universal essence of language than any ordinary language can.

We have to remember, however, that in the *Investigations* Wittgenstein denies that we can do justice to the point of all language games in this way. The universal aspect

---

[132] That the formal transcendence of sense is in need of such a foundation would of course be denied by any pure transcendental philosopher.

of language represents only one pole. Poetry indicates the other. Unfortunately Wittgenstein has little to say here about poetry and how poetic speaking comes to have a point. He does, however, suggest that to understand the point of a poem we have to pay attention to the particular constellation of the words employed by the poet. Translation destroys the point of poetry. Perhaps we should consider the poet, and also the philosopher, as inventors of new ways of speaking.

> 400 The 'visual room' seemed like a discovery, but what the discoverer really found was a new way of speaking, a new comparison; it might even be called a new sensation.
>
> 401 You have a new conception and interpret it as seeing a new object. You interpret a grammatical movement made by yourself as a quasi-physical phenomenon which you are observing. (Think for example of the question: 'Are sense-data the material of which the universe is made?')
>
> But there is an objection to saying that you have made a 'grammatical' movement. What you have primarily discovered is a new way of painting; or, again, a new meter, or a new kind of song.—"

We could also speak of what in the *Tractatus* is called a "form of description." Mechanics, e.g. determines a certain form of description by stipulating that "all propositions, used in the description of the world must be obtained in a given way from a given set of propositions — the axioms of mechanics. It thus supplies the bricks for building the edifice of science." (6.341) Similarly we can construe sense-data talk as an invitation to reconstruct the world out of statements of the 'this red now' variety. And does not a new way of painting landscapes let us see the world in a new light? To see something in a new light presupposes that there is something to be seen; it is not to construct what is seen out of nothing. If the point of poetry is to let us see the world in a new light, in this case, too, we have to use the realistic model to see how language can have a point.

4

The realistic and the transcendental model appear side by side in the

following observation:

> 492 To invent a language could mean to invent an instrument for a particular purpose on the basis of the laws of nature (or consistently with them); but it also has the other sense, analogous to that in which we speak of the invention of a game.

The first characterization is based on the realistic model. Language is here taken to have its foundation in the law of nature. It is like a tool or technique that we use to master our environment. The second characteristic points in a very different direction. To compare language to a game is to move away from the realistic model. Games need have no point beyond themselves; they require no justification. To liken language to a game is to suggest its autonomy. There are many passages in the *Investigations* that similarly suggest that there is no wider and more fundamental horizon than that provided by ordinary language. We can point to them in support of the transcendental model. This is especially true of those passages in which Wittgenstein attacks traditional philosophy.

> We must do away with all *explanation*, and description alone must take its place. And this description gets its light, that is to say its purpose — from the philosophical problems. These are of course not empirical problems; they are solved, rather, by looking at the workings of our language, and that in such a way as to make us recognize those 'workings: *in despite of* an urge to misunderstand them. The problems are solved, not by giving new information, but by arranging what we have always known. Philosophy is a battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language. (I 109)

Implicit in this observation is a belief that it is impossible to come to a better, more adequate disclosure of reality than is provided by the language that we already possess. There is no wider horizon. Far from providing such a horizon, traditional philosophy is thought to have lost contact with reality by letting language idle.

> 116 When philosophers use a word — 'knowledge', 'being', 'object', 'I', 'proposition', 'name', — and try to grasp the essence of the thing, one must always ask oneself: is the word ever actually used this way in the language-game which is its original home?

> 118 Where does our investigation get its importance from, since it seems only to destroy everything interesting, that is, all that is great and important? (As it were all the buildings, leaving behind only bits of stone and rubble.)
>
> What we are destroying is nothing but houses of cards and we are clearing up the ground (*Grund*) of language on which they stand.

Wittgenstein clings here to the old Cartesian conviction that there is some ground on which to stand, although this ground is no longer sought in clear and distinct ideas, but in ordinary language. But language can furnish such a ground only as long as it is not interpreted on the realistic model, for that model demands that there be a wider and more fundamental frame of reference that has a better claim to be considered a ground. Only on the transcendental interpretation can language function as a ground.

5

Both the realistic and the transcendental model present serious difficulties. Some of these have been suggested, both in this session and in our discussion of the *Tractatus*. The realistic model is incapable of providing us with a foundation. We can always point to a wider framework in terms of which language is interpreted and raise the question: how is this framework given? Does the disclosure of this framework not also require language? And does this not mean that there must be a more fundamental approach to language than that provided by the realistic model? No language interpreted on the realistic model can furnish us with a foundation or ground. On such an interpretation of language Wittgenstein's attack on traditional philosophy is baseless. Certainly ordinary language, when interpreted in this way, does not furnish the base that Wittgenstein needs to launch his attack. Instead it invites a move beyond ordinary language to something more fundamental.

The transcendental model also runs into difficulties. While it makes possible, even demands, that we view language interpreted in this way as a ground, it lets us lose sight of the fact that language can relate or fail to relate to reality. But language ties us into the world; it does not fully constitute the world. How, for instance, can the transcendental model make sense of discovery or invention? What sense can it make of

dialogue that causes our horizons to widen or open up? Or of linguistic change?

If both the realistic and the transcendental model run into difficulties, they can also be defended with good reasons. They have their origin in two, seemingly opposite demands that we must make of language.

1. If language is to be meaningful it may not be fully constitutive of reality. It must be about reality or hook into it as 'Wittgenstein's language-games do. *Reality must transcend language.*

2. We cannot step outside language. That about which language is supposed to be is itself never given apart from language. *Language is transcendental*.

In the *Investigations* Wittgenstein is sensitive to both demands. As a result he wavers between a realistic and a transcendental approach. Taken as a whole the *Investigations* lead us in incompatible directions. Yet this incompatibility points the way towards a more adequate understanding of language than either the realistic or the transcendental model can provide.

12. Ordinary Language as Ground

1

Let me begin by summing up the conclusion of the preceding session. Both the realistic and the transcendental model, I suggested, present serious difficulties. Some of these have been suggested, both in the past session and in our discussion of the *Tractatus*.

The realistic model is incapable of providing us with a foundation. We can always point to a wider framework in terms of which language is interpreted and raise the question: how is this framework given? Does the disclosure of this framework not also require language? And does this not mean that there must be a more fundamental approach to language than that provided by the realistic model? No language interpreted on the realistic model can furnish us with a foundation or ground. On such an interpretation of language Wittgenstein's attack on traditional philosophy is baseless. Certainly ordinary language, when interpreted in this way, does not furnish the base that Wittgenstein needs to launch his attack. Instead it invites a move beyond ordinary language to something more fundamental.

The transcendental model also runs into difficulties. While it makes possible, even demands, that we view language interpreted in this way as a ground — after all, it claims to have room for all possible worlds — it lets us lose sight of the fact that language can relate or fail to relate to reality. But language ties us into the world; it does not fully constitute the world. How, for instance, can the transcendental model make sense of discovery or invention? What sense can it make of dialogue that causes our horizons to widen or open up? Or of linguistic change?

If both the realistic and the transcendental model run into difficulties, they can also be defended with good reasons. They have their origin in two, seemingly opposite demands that we must make of language.

1. If language is to be meaningful it may not be fully constitutive of reality. It must be about reality or hook into it as 'Wittgenstein’ s language-games do. **Reality must transcend language.**

2. We cannot step outside language. That about which language is supposed to be is itself never given apart from language. **Language is transcendental.**

In the *Investigations* Wittgenstein is sensitive to both demands. The transcendental approach is presupposed by his critique of philosophy.

2

Un-Wittgensteinian though it may be, it is possible to show that in the *Investigations "*philosophy" is given at least three, rather distinct meanings:

(1) The traditional one — philosophy as the attempt to exhibit the essential structure or the essence of being, language, the world, human being.

(2) Philosophy as the critique of (1) — in this sense Wittgenstein would consider himself a philosopher.

(3) Philosophy as the invention of a new way of seeing. Philosophy here is placed in the neighborhood of poetry.

I discussed the paragraph in which Wittgenstein hints at the third in the preceding session and I shall return to it later on; in this session only the first two meanings shall concern us.

It is interesting to ask why there should be a need for a critique of traditional philosophy. It will hardly do to answer: because it is wrong; for suppose we were to grant this and to admit that far from being the servant of truth the philosopher is only, as Aristophanes presented Socrates, a servant of the clouds, engaged in idle speculations, why should we not let him enjoy his innocent and playful excursions? It isn't always necessary to stamp out error. Some errors are too unimportant and harmless to worry about; and idle speculation, like a vacation, may bring relief from the humdrum of everyday life. And some errors may even allow millions to find meaning in life. Or is philosophy perhaps not so innocent? Does it perhaps constitute a danger?

Wittgenstein does not call it that, but he does think it an obsession of which he wants to rid himself and others. "The real discovery is the one that makes me capable of stopping doing philosophy when I want to" (I 133). Wittgenstein would seem to have experienced philosophy as a disease or an addiction of which we must be cured. Wittgenstein even hints at a connection between this disease and the darkness of the time — otherwise he could not suggest in the Preface that his investigations might cast some light into this dark and needy age, although, given its darkness, he does not think it likely.

Wittgenstein would thus seem to agree with Nietzsche and Heidegger who tied the darkness of this age to traditional, more specifically Platonic-Cartesian metaphysics. But what, if any, is this connection?

Before we can answer this question, we have to consider in more detail the nature of Wittgenstein s attack on traditional philosophy. Wittgenstein characterizes traditional philosophy, including his own earlier efforts, as the search for the essence of language (I 92), of experience, of all things (I 89). Such a search would not be necessary if the philosopher did not believe this essence to be concealed by what appears to us (1 92). Our language is thought to have its measure in something higher that it expresses only inadequately. His knowledge about this higher dimension makes the philosopher a critic of ordinary language and the associated language-games and their imperfections.

But in spite of its honorable ancestry, which leads us back to Plato and beyond, how can this view be justified? Wittgenstein's critique of traditional philosophy rests on a conviction, never actually defended, that no justification can be given. Our language is said to be in order as it is; we are not striving after some ideal. Wittgenstein thus shifts the burden from ordinary language to philosophy. It is the philosopher who is now asked to justify his use of language. To justify (*begründen*) is to point to that in which what is to be justified has its foundation (*Grund*). The only foundation Wittgenstein admits is ordinary language. With this foundation metaphysics has lost touch. Wittgenstein seeks to recover it in the language we actually speak:

> 124. Philosophy may in no way interfere with the actual use of language; it can in the end only describe it.
>
> For it cannot give it any foundation (*begründen*) either.
>
> It leaves everything as it is.

Wittgenstein knows that man can leave or lose his home in ordinary language. Were this not so, language could never idle or go on a holiday (I 398). He also knows that it is this establishment of a distance separating the thinker from ordinary language and life that makes him a philosopher. Consider Descartes, reflecting and doubting the reality of a world that is being torn apart by war — and this is not an atypical situation: in our own time much philosophizing seems similarly unrelated to and unconcerned about the issues of the day. Should we then criticize the philosopher? Or should we rather

criticize those who would tie philosophy so closely to the world as to destroy it. Descartes, at any rate, sees such detachment not as a deficiency on the part of the philosopher, but as condition of his being a philosopher at all. The philosopher is willing to surrender the ground that has supported him more or less, in order to gain more certain ground. But has philosophy ever found this ground? The *Investigations* betray a conviction that all such attempts have failed and that what was lost can be regained only by returning to that mode of life and discourse from which the Cartesian philosopher has departed.

But why would man ever leave his home in ordinary language? Why do human beings become philosophers? Wittgenstein suggests that the philosopher is misled by the appearance of language. As Frege points out, by its nature language liberates us from the particular situation. Were it not for this fact that linguistic signs can be used in different, although in some respect similar situations, language would be superfluous. That man can use language presupposes some distance between him and his situation; similarly it presupposes a contrast between the heterogeneity of our life and the relative homogeneity of our language. Yet while essential to language, this contrast is confusing and easily exaggerated when language is divorced from the larger contexts of which it is part.

> Of course, what confuses us is the uniform appearance of words when we hear them spoken or meet them in script and print. For their *application* is not presented to us so clearly. Especially not, when we are doing philosophy! (I 11)

It was Wittgenstein's own earlier failure to recognize the importance of the contexts in which linguistic expressions are used, which led him to his logical atomism.

By divorcing language from its setting the philosopher generates problems and interpretations that bear small relation to our life. Consider a word like "subject." What is its meaning? A student of philosophy, especially one just initiated into its rites, might well find it easy to come up with an answer that places the word in a nexus of similarly abstract terms. This would show that he had learned a particular language-game some philosophers like to play. But what is its point? How does it relate to our life? Where is its home?

Where, does "subject" have its home? In vain do we search our language.

"Subject matter" comes to mind, "subject and predicate," "The king and his subjects," but how does all this relate to the philosopher's talk about subjects? I think we have to admit that the meanings of "subject" that appear in our language no longer stand in a living relationship to the meaning of the same word when it is used by a philosopher who, e.g., contrasts subject and object. Undoubtedly all these meanings point to a common root, but this root is no longer a living part of our language. Of course, we could go to an etymological dictionary to unearth it; still, given our language, the philosopher's use of "subject" is generally rootless.

In an attempt to guard against an idling of language we may try, as Heidegger does, to trace the word back to its origins.[133] Thus Heidegger tells us that *subjectum* is the Latin translation of the Greek *hypokeimenon*. As the Greek suggests, the word refers to something underlying, e.g. to substance as the bearer of attributes. As such *subjectum* is originally not a name for the being of the self, but simply for being. "Up to Descartes and still within his metaphysics, being is, in so far as it is a being, sub-jectum." (HW 98) Only after Descartes does the term come to refer first of all to the being of man. Heidegger explains this shift in terms of the demand that things be given a ground or foundation. "The pre-eminence of a special, because essentially unconditioned *sub-jectum* (as ground of the underlying) derives from man's claim to a *fundamentum abolutum inconcussum veritatis*.," to an unshakable foundation of truth (HW 98). Beginning with Descartes an attempt is made to establish not God, but the conscious human being as that ground. With this *subjectum* comes to mean first of all the being of man. The *ego cogito* appears as that which is and furnishes a foundation. Along with this interpretation of the self as *sub-jectum* goes an interpretation of knowledge as *vorstellend*, as objectifying. V*orstellen* here means to place something before the subject and thus to secure it. It thus belongs to what we called a grasping rather than a listening knowledge; instead of an openness to what presents itself, there is the rule of

---

[133] Cf. Martin Heidegger, "Die Zeit des Weltbildes," *Holzwege* [abbreviated in the text as HW] (Frankfurt/M: Klostermann,1977), pp. 98-103: "The Ages of the World Picture," *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt (New York: Harper, 1977), pp. 147-153. Heidegger, "Nietzsche's Wort 'Gott ist tot,'" *Holzwege*, pp. 224-228; "The Word of Nietzsche" "God is Dead,'" *The Question Concerning Technology,* pp. 88-91.

aggression.[134] "*Das Vorstellen* forces everything together into the unity of what is thus objective." (HW 100)

What have we learned from this excursion? Have we led the word "subject" back from its metaphysical to its ordinary usage? Hardly, not even to past ordinary usage. And yet its meaning has become clearer. We have learned that the choice of *sub-jectum* to name being goes along with a particular interpretation of being: being is interpreted as the underlying. By interpreting the conscious self as s*ub-jectum* in the fullest sense, the self is made the foundation of what now becomes objective being. By providing a short history of the changing meaning of "subject" Heidegger sketches the triumph of reflective man over reality. This triumph colors the present meaning of "subject." "For man has risen into the selfhood of the *ego cogito*. With this rise all beings become objects. As the objective, being is drowned in the immanence of subjectivity. The horizon no longer shines with its own light. It is now only the point of view posited in the will to powers positing of value. " (HW 241)[135]

Heidegger' s history of the word "subject" also tells us something about philosophy. Already the first step Heidegger traces has little to do with ordinary language. The philosopher appears as someone who chooses to forsake ordinary language in order to express something that cannot be expressed as long as he remains caught within it. The distance that separates philosophical from ordinary language can be given a twofold interpretation:

1) as a distance that is necessary if we are to see beyond appearance to essence,

2) as a distance that lets us lose our home in our life-world without offering us anything in return that would compensate us for what has been lost.

But does this tell us why some human beings become philosophers? Our

---

[134] "Vorstellen meint hier: von sich her etwas vor sich stellen und das Gestellte als ein solches sicherstellen. Dieses Sicherstellen muss ein Berechnen sein, weil nur die Berechenbarkeit gewährleistet, im voraus und ständig des Vorzustellenden gewiss zu sein. Das Vorstellen ist nicht mehr das Vernehmen des Anwesenden, in dessen Unverborgenheit das Vernehmen selbst gehört und zwar als eine eigene Art von Anwesen zum unverborgenen Anwesenden. Das Vorstellen ist nicht mehr das Sichentbergen für… , sondern das Ergreifen und Begreifen von…. Nicht das Anwesende waltet, sondern der Angriff herrscht." (HW 100). For a translation see "The Age of the World Picture," p. 149.

[135] For another translation, see "The Word of Nietzsche" "God is Dead,'" p. 107.

discussion of the meaning of subject has suggested that we cannot simply follow Wittgenstein and see in the philosopher someone who is misled by language. The move away from ordinary language appears not to be an accident, but is intended. The philosopher chooses to give words a special meaning to remedy the inability of ordinary language to express what he wants to express. And what is this? Wittgenstein uses the word "essence" to point at it. Words like "foundation" or "ground" point in the same direction. Philosophy begins when man refuses to accept things as they offer themselves in all their fleeting and confusing variety and looks beyond them to cope with confusion and time. Using a Heideggerian term we can say that man because a philosopher because he is in his very being guilty. Heidegger calls man "guilty" because, although he demands to be his own foundation, he is unable to be that foundation. So understood, guilt has its foundation in pride, more precisely, in the necessary failure of the project of pride. Pride makes it difficult for man to accept that it must come to grief. It thus leads to attempts to negate as best we can those conditions that force us to recognize our essential guilt. The search for the essence, ground, or foundation of what is, is at the same time a search for conditions that enable man to grasp himself more firmly than his life in the everyday world lets him do. We are now in a position to see more clearly why Wittgenstein is right to call philosophy an obsession. It is not simply that we are easily "bewitched" by language (I 109), but we demand greater security than our language and the associated way of life provide, we have an urge to move beyond ordinary language to what is taken to be more essential, an urge that will seize on all those aspects of our language that will lend themselves to such use. We want to be bewitched.

And yet, and here Wittgenstein would appear to agree with Nietzsche, the search for this essence has yielded nothing. "'There is no essence in itself," Nietzsche writes.[136] Essence is something perspectival. Indeed, by asking, as Plato already did, for conditions that would enable man to be in the fullest sense of the word, to be rather than to become,

---

[136] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Kritische Studienausgabe*, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (München/Berlin, 1980), 13, p. 302-303; cf. "Aus dem Nachlass der Achtziger Jahre," *Werke in drei Bänden*, ed. Karl Schlechta (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1966), vol. 3, p. 752. cf. p. 487. *Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1968), No. 625, p. 334.

man makes an impossible demand. For man, to be is to exist in time, ahead of himself in the future, behind himself in the past. To be is to be unto death and no flight to essence can undo its power. The Platonic project is impossible; yet nonetheless it is a project on which man will again and again embark. Again and again he will attempt to make sure of God, by bribing him, by knowing his secret, by making God his debtor, or failing in all this, by trying to occupy God's place. Yet all such attempts can only veil what dooms them from the very beginning to failure: man's own nature as a being in time. To the extent that he is subject to the snake's promise, *eritis sicut Deus*, man is, as Sartre calls him, a vain passion.

We considered Wittgenstein's hint of a connection between the disease that is philosophy and the darkness of our age. What has been said here would suggest, on the contrary, that there is no special connection between the two. Rather human beings, simply by virtue of what they are, are vulnerable to the spells of Plato's muse, who is also the snake of Paradise. Yet, as our first session should have shown, there is such a connection and we have hinted at it here with the ·discussion of "subject." One could interpret history as a series of attempts to secure man's place in the world: religion, magic, also philosophy, are attempts to secure the transcendent; war, love, family, and state serve the effort to secure others; to secure nature human beings invent tools, build dams, machines, turn scientists. In each case there is an opponent, an outside that is to be mastered and made fast. To engage in this struggle is to recognize the reality of the other. But the inevitable failure of our attempts to secure our place easily leads to the constitution of more secure, if unreal environments. Following Kierkegaard and Nietzsche we could call such establishment aesthetic construction or art, provided that we do not confine the term to what is ordinarily called art, but recognize that there are elements of such construction in religion, in myth, in philosophy, even in science.[137] To say that there is a special connection between modern philosophy and the darkness of our age, is to say that our age has gone further towards art so understood than others, that

---

[137] Cf. Nietzsche, *Die Geburt der Tragödie*, "Versuch einer Selbstkritik, 2," *Kritische Studienausgabe*, vol. 1, pp. 13-14. *The Birth of Tagedy and the Case of Wagner*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1967), pp. 18-19. See also Ernst Cassirer, *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, 3 vols., trans. Ralph Manheim (New Haven: Yale University Ores, 1965).

ours is in Kierkegaard's sense an aesthetic age, and that modern, Cartesian philosophy has played an important part in this development. Modern philosophy, and this is hardly an original point, has its origin in the Cartesian dream and by derivation this is also true of modern science and technology.

Yet man not only wants to be the foundation of his being in the world; more fundamentally he wants to be. And if pride leads to a loss of reality we can expect pride to cast a shadow harboring the suppressed demand for reality. That revolution in recent philosophy that begins to announce itself in Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Representation* has its foundation in just such a bad conscience. With it man attempts to pay his debt to reality. Wittgenstein's *Investigations* have their place in that development.

In that he continues to look for a ground Wittgenstein remains quite traditional. He is not willing to grant that our existence is groundless. Only its ground is not to be found beyond or beneath the world, but in our ordinary language-games. Thus that ground has always been available. Having lost that ground in their life of reflection philosophers have just been looking in the wrong place. Wittgenstein, too, is a philosopher and he, too, participates in the traditional search for a ground, only what is put in the place formerly occupied by Plato's forms' or the Christian God or the idealists' absolute subject is new: **ordinary language.** The *Investigations* recall Nietzsche 's, " I am afraid we are not rid of God, because we still have faith in grammar."[138]

---

[138] Nietzsche, Götzendämmerung, "Die Vernunft in der Philosophie," 5, *Kritische Studienausgabe*, vol. 6, p. 78. *Twilight of the Idols*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, The Portable Nietzsche (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1954), p. 483.

13. No Place for Freedom

1

Does ordinary language offer us something like a ground on which to base our judgments and decisions? This would mean that there is nothing fundamentally wrong with such a language — and the same would have to be said of the form of life to which it belongs. Of course, Wittgenstein does not deny that given a certain language-game or form of life, we will call some actions good, others bad, and often we will be able to give reasons for our judgment. Think of the way we speak of a bad move in chess. The rules do not tell us what piece to move. We have to choose. Soon enough we will know whether we have made a good choice. The point of the game is clear enough. It allows us to evaluate our performance.

But how close is the analogy between playing the game of chess and playing the game of life? Can we similarly evaluate decisions we make in our lives? What is the point of the game of life? Or is this game and the associated language-game beyond meaningful criticism? Consider once more the example of playing chess. We can readily imagine circumstances where we might criticize and other circumstances where we might welcome someone's decision to play chess. We might thus say: this is no the right time; there are more important things to do. Or we might welcome our child's decision to play chess rather than play some video-game. And we would be able to give reasons in support for our judgments. But these reasons, Wittgenstein could point out, presuppose some more comprehensive language-game in which we are caught up and which are therefore take for granted. But should we identify that language-game with ordinary language? Is it beyond question? Does ordinary language furnish us with anything like firm ground?

Consider the language of our neighbors, of our mass media, of our politicians. To understand it is to gain insight into a form of life. To accept it without question is to know what matters, where our place is, and knowing our place, we know what we are supposed to do. But we only have to watch and listen to Fox, CNN, and MSNBC to question what is being presupposed I each case. Ordinary language would seem to be open enough to allow for these different positions. But is this not to say that the rules of

ordinary language are too open to allow us to decide who here is right or wrong? Can we rely on a more robust common sense to decide the matter? Does our language provide us with such a common sense? If not, I what sense can it be said tonprovide the philosophe with something like a ground (Grund).

Consider some extreme examples —the language of a politician that justifies murder by calling it a patriotic duty or a health measure; or the language of an Eichmann as reported by Hannah Arendt in her recently much criticized *Eichmann in Jerusalem*.[139] In such cases, too, particular language-games are associated with particular forms of life. But does this mean that the philosopher cannot criticize them? Are we stuck with such responses as: of course, "in our language this is called murder, but they call it a patriotic deed." Or consider the Greek distinction between Greeks and barbarians. To the educated Greek it was evident that there was an essential difference. Are we justified in presupposing our language-game and assume that it places us on firm ground? That our language-game is not universally accepted is evident. Examples from distant and unfortunately not so distant, all too recent history are easy to find. Just consider the faith -based rhetoric of ISIS. Or should we perhaps deny that such convictions that challenge our common sense are good examples of ordinary language? On what grounds.

Consider the special jargon introduced by the Nazis to hide from others and perhaps from themselves the criminality of their actions. Of course, when the matter is put this way, we are already saying that they had something to hide, i.e. that the language they were inventing was precisely language invented to hide something and thus not ordinary language in Wittgenstein's sense. There is no doubt much truth to this. But are we not taking the superiority of our point of view too much for granted here? What right do we have to do so? After all, the special language-game played by the Nazis did constitute an integral "part of an activity, a form of life," even if we feel that we must reject that form of life. Thus it seems undeniable that many a committed Nazi thought he was merely doing his duty, when we would like to insist that his duty lay in quite a different place. To accept ordinary language as a ground is to admit that such feelings cannot be justified to one who happens to be playing a different language-game. If we

---

[139] Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Penguin Classics, 2006)

believe that dialogue is not altogether impotent in such situations, must we not believe that there is some perhaps not altogether inaccessible domain, but lying beyond whatever language-game we happen to be playing to which we can appeal to criticize our prejudices and work out our differences.

2

Perhaps Wittgenstein's one-sided choice of examples led him to overlook how questionable the ground provided by ordinary language is. Thus he neglects the whole area of decision and choice. But having to make decisions is very much part of everyday life. What is distinctive about this domain is that here the future presents itself most insistently as future. Wittgenstein does consider orders, questions, expectations, and the like, and all of these recognize the openness of the future in some sense: orders may not be obeyed, questions may go unanswered, expectations may remain unfulfilled. But generally such openness is circumscribed by the rules of the game in question. Consider once more the example of playing chess. Often it is easy to decide what would be a bad move. The first few moves are thus often quite routine. The players know already what to expect and how to respond. But the more interesting the game, the more difficult the choice. We may well have to make a move without being convinced that it is indeed the right move. We are at sea, but we must go on. That is part of what makes the game exciting. Still the point of the game is clear enough and determines what would be good and what would be bad moves, although frequently we will be able to recognize that only in retrospect.

But can we generalize from this example to what we can call the game of life? Is there something similar to the point of the game here? Many ethicists, a utilitarian, for example, might answer in the affirmative: That action is the right one, say, that best promotes happiness; and he might add that happiness here should not be understood to mean that of the individual, but what counts is the happiness of the greatest number. If you question this, our ethicist might reply that you are not thinking ethically. But what grounds this reply? Looking at America today, is that answer supported by the reigning common sense? Is that how most of us act? Is it even the way most of us really think we should act? Just as Wittgenstein came to wonder whether, given what the *Tractatus*

demanded of really saying something, anyone had ever really said anything, so we may wonder whether, given the ideal posited by such an understanding of morality, anyone ever managed to act morally. Whatever can be said in support of the utilitarian position, it is not supported by the way we act. Perhaps it receives a bit more support from the way we, especially some of us philosophers, talk. But if so, does this not suggest that such talk is losing contact with our actions, that is to say, that it provides another example of what Wittgenstein calls the idling if language? That is to say, the analogy of the game of chess and the game of life is not very close. The point of the latter remains ill defined and leaves us at sea. Just that has led human beings to philosophy. Recall Wittgenstein's remark in the *Philosophical Investigations* statement with which I began this course: philosophical problems are said by him to have the form "I don 't know my way about." (I 123)

Think of a Platonic dialogue such as the *Euthyphro*. The dialogue shows that whatever common sense or ordinary language then reigned in Athens did not furnish the Athenians with a very firm ground. Questioning that supposed ground. Socrates transcends it. Such questioning is an expression of his freedom, a freedom to which he would lead Euthyphro, who, however, as the dialogue shows, resists and seeks security and comfort in what he has not thought through but come to take for granted.

Or consider the following example, which could have come from a reader's letter asking for personal advice in one of our newspapers:

"Dear X, I do not know what to do — I am not married, but am expecting a child. My family urges me get an abortion. Is abortion murder?" Ordinary language does not furnish such a person, caught between a traditional religious upbringing and our modern world with a ground; on this point it no longer offers very clear answers because the meaning of "human being" and with it that of "murder" has become blurred. Where does human existence begin and where does it end? It won't do here simply to describe ordinary language and participate in the associated actions.

To generalize: we may not rest content with merely describing our language, we also have to evaluate it, perhaps prescribe what it is to be, and if such prescription is not to be arbitrary and meaningless it must be coupled with a responsible critique of language as it is presented to us. **The evolution and critique of our language is itself an**

essential part of it. Because of this openness, which again and again will let individuals lose their way and leave them at sea, ordinary language naturally leads to philosophy. Consider once more Wittgenstein's remark that philosophical problems have the form "I don 't know my way about." (I 123) The sharp difference Wittgenstein sees separating ordinary language and philosophy, understood by him as an idling of language, stems not so much from a careful look at language as from a desire for security that lets him insist on a ground or framework that would make decision making quite unproblematic and thus enable us to escape from insecurity of the human situation.

3

In no way do I want to deny that it is often quite useful to bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use. Wittgenstein is quite right to insist that there is something terribly artificial about many of the traditional problems of philosophy. But the history of philosophy can hardly be reduced to a history of such pseudo-problems. Consider once more the kinds of questions Socrates asked. Was he not right to question Euthyphro's use of "piety," Laches ' use of "courage," Thrasymachus' use of "justice"? Are we not right to question Eichmann's use of "duty"? Or is it all just a matter of expressing societal or personal preferences? If Wittgenstein had been content to point out that academic philosophy has too often preoccupied itself with pseudo-problems, there could not be an objection. But with his demand that we accept ordinary language as a ground he went beyond this. When we look at ordinary language in all its variety — and the conversations of our neighbors or what we find in a newspaper are a better guide to it than the examples Wittgenstein provides — do we really recognize here a ground we can trust or do we discover what we find to be in need of questioning?

To question is to search for firmer ground. The questioner does not know where to go. This is especially true of the questioning of the philosopher. Wittgenstein is quite-right when he suggests, recalling Aristotle's account of the origin of philosophy in *aporia*, that philosophy has an important source in not knowing one's way, in not being sure how to act. One of, indeed perhaps the fundamental philosophic question is: what shall I do? But this same question also poses itself wherever an individual faces a genuine decision. To have to decide is not yet to have made up one's mind, to be unsure

about where to go. As long as the human being is busily engaged in the world, following a prescribed route, as long as human beings have to work to satisfy their needs and language serves their purposes, they may be able to avoid raising such questions, at least as long as nothing unforeseen happens that derails him and throws him off his path. We raise such questions when life releases us for a moment, so when we are at leisure, as Aristotle suggests, free from the demands from the everyday, but also when some event shatters what seemed to have been securely established. **Freedom requires that there be some distance between the individual and his form of life and the related language-games; this distance may let what perhaps was accepted without question appear questionable and in need of justification.**

Wittgenstein has no hope for such justification and because he has no hope he can see in the demand for it only a source of augmented unhappiness, a disease or obsession from which we humans, from which certainly he, Wittgenstein, needed to be cured.[140] The happy' man does not measure what is by what he should do. This belief, first expressed in the *Notebook*s and the *Tractatus* appears to have been retained in the *Investigations*. Only whereas in the earlier work we are advised not to ask for a justification or meaning of the world but simply to accept it as it offers itself to us, in the *Investigations* we are told the same with ordinary language and the associate activities. The mystic has turned conservative.

4

We are now in a position to see more clearly in what sense Wittgenstein's *Investigations* mark the end of traditional philosophy. If, as I have suggested, philosophy has one foundation in the question, where shall we go? then such philosophy comes to an end when this question is no longer asked. This happens when man no longer questions his way, when he has despaired of finding a justification of what he is

---

[140] Cf. this statement by Adolf Hitler: "Providence has destined me to become the greatest liberator of humanity. I free human beings from the coercion of a spirit that has taken itself for its end, from the dirty and humiliating self-tortures inflicted by a chimera called conscience and morality and from the demands of a freedom and personal autonomy only a very few were ever able to meet." *Conversation with Herman Rauschning*, cited in Joseph Wulf, *Die Bildenden Künste im Dritten Reich, Eine Dokumentation* (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1966), p. 12.

doing. Nihilism gives rise to the dream of a second innocence that allows human beings to simply live without having to question the meaning and direction of their lives, that is, "without being condemned to do philosophy." At least this is how I understand his confession: "The real discovery is the one that makes me capable of stopping doing philosophy when I want to." (I 133)

We can see now that there is a sense in which Wittgenstein remains a Platonist even in the *Investigations,* which at first appear to be an attack on just about everything Plato ever stood for. But like Plato's, Wittgenstein's thinking has its origin in a desire for security. This forces him, as it forces every Platonist, beyond time. For we can do justice to the future and to man's freedom only by acknowledging that man's situation is precarious and that in an important sense there is no firm ground to stand on. That experience is part of the experience of freedom. Wittgenstein refuses to accept this. He continues to insist that there must be such a ground, even if to do so he has to do violence to freedom. Already in the *Notebooks* and in the *Tractatus* he rules out the possibility of meaningful decision: in the end it does not matter what we do. The wise man realizes this and does not oppose an ideal image of what should be to what is. If man is to be happy, he may not measure the world by some ideal, but must simply accept the facts as they are. The facts which wake up the world constitute a given that man cannot and therefore should not try to change.

In the *Investigations* we find a similar position, only now what is to be accepted is no longer the totality of facts. The sign-language of the *Tractatus*, which furnished something like a ground, is replaced with ordinary language. In both cases, to establish language as a ground, Wittgenstein has to provide a transcendental interpretation of language. But if we are to do justice to our freedom we cannot ascribe a transcendental status to ordinary language. For to do justice to choice and decision, we must acknowledge that we human beings are not so immersed in our world or in ordinary language as to be unable raise ourselves above it and to oppose ourselves to it. In the *Investigations* this is indeed recognized; were it not possible, language could never idle. But Wittgenstein sees in this opposition only a disease that he sets out to cure. **He is struggling against the consequence of the fall, which set man free and thereby made him insecure.** Only if wan can envision the possibility of giving a new direction to our

life and to the lives of those with whom we find ourselves, are we free. It is not enough to admit, as Wittgenstein does, that language-games change. We have to know that we can help bring about such change for good reasons. But this is possible only if we can appeal to some wider horizon than the horizon provided by the language-games in which we are caught up. Only this wider horizon opens up ordinary language and makes genuine decision possible. In this connection a look at Noam Chomsky's *Cartesian Linguistics. A Chapter in the History of Rationalist Thought* (New York and London, 1966), proves helpful. Chomsky' s emphasis on creativity and freedom leads him to insist on the boundlessness of language. Precisely because of its formality, the deep structure that according to Chomsky is common to all languages does not constitute a confining prison.[141]

[141] Cf. Noam Chomsky, *Cartesian Linguistics. A Chapter in the History of Rationalist Thought* (New York and London, 1966). Chomsky' s emphasis on creativity and freedom leads him to insist on the boundlessness of language. Precisely because of its formality, the deep structure common to all languages does not constitute a confining prison.

14. Language and Fundamental Ontology

1

Like Wittgenstein, Heidegger came to recognize the inadequacy of views that he had once taken for granted. In *Being and Time*, too, we find an attack on the traditional interpretation of language (where Heidegger is thinking especially of Descartes), which, misled by a one-sided emphasis on assertion, seeks the essence of language in logic; and if the turn to ordinary language is not explicitly made by Heidegger, there are certainly strong hints of it.

Yet these parallels are hidden by more obvious dissimilarities. To single out just two: in *Being and Time* Heidegger does not give as central a place to language as does Wittgenstein; only a few short sections are devoted to it. More striking is the difference in style: even if in places Heidegger pushes the language of traditional philosophy to its limits and at times even beyond them — so when he coins new technical terms, on the whole the language of this book remains in the tradition of academic philosophy. Heidegger thus dedicated the book to Edmund Husserl "in friendship and admiration" and claims to be following his phenomenological method. In explaining this method Heidegger appeals to Kant quite explicitly (SZ 31). *Being and Time* is thus a late offspring of transcendental idealism. It represents as much a step within that tradition as a step beyond it, despite Heidegger's insistence that he is engaged here in a more fundamental investigation. It is important to see in what sense this claim is justified and in what sense not. **In just what way is Heidegger's fundamental ontology more fundamental than traditional ontology?**

We can approach this question by recalling the end of Heidegger's *Habilitationsschrift*, which still belongs to Heidegger logical phase, but with its conclusion points beyond it. Heidegger calls there for a move beyond both objective realism and transcendental idealism, for a philosophy that would lead beyond the subject-object polarity and thus beyond the primacy of representation and assertion. Just this *Being and Time* attempts to do. By pointing out that objective experience is arrived at by a reduction of a richer experience, Heidegger provides traditional ontology, based as it is on the primacy of objectivity, with a foundation, while at the same time pointing out its limits.

Let us try to put the difference between Heidegger's fundamental ontology and traditional ontology more precisely. Following Kant and the Kantians Heidegger sees the exhibition of categories, of the fundamental structures constitutive of beings, as the task of

ontology, which thus could be said to exhibit the essence of reality. In this sense Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason,* but also Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* and Heidegger's *Dissertation* and *Habilitationsschrift* are still contributions to traditional ontology, while the *Investigations* and *Being and Time* are not. In *Being and Time* the problems of categories receives scant attention. It is rather presupposed. His earlier ontological investigations provided Heidegger with a problem demanding a solution. Categories were defined as structures constitutive of the objects man encounters, which, as objects, are essentially for a subject. When this is said, however, a particular interpretation of our encounter with beings is taken for granted. But as long as this is the case, ontology must lack an adequate foundation. Are we justified in what we take for granted? To what extent does the subject-object polarity do justice to experience? In what if any way, is the theoretical attitude privileged? Ontology is given the necessary foundation only by a more fundamental investigation that questions the mode of encounter that traditional ontology has too readily taken for granted and places it in a larger context. This context is furnished only by an analysis of what in the *Habilitationsschrift* is called living spirit and now is understood as man's dwelling in the world in all its complexity. **Instead of inquiring into the structures constitutive of the things we encounter, Heidegger now tries to exhibit the structures constitutive of the encounter.** These structures are the **existentials** of *Being and Time.* ***Categories* are related to *existentials* as *ontology* is related to *fundamental ontology*.**

It is possible to push such questioning further. What, we can ask, is the foundation of the encounter between human beings and things? What is it that has cast us into the world? There are obvious answers to such questions. We might point to parents or make reference to evolution. But such answers only defer the fundamental question. Why should we human beings be at all? Why is there something rather than nothing? Such questioning leads beyond fundamental ontology to the question of Being. Ontology, fundamental ontology, and thinking about Being: these are the three stages of Heidegger's development. *Being and Time* occupies the second, although with the missing third part of volume one of *Being and Time*, as initially projected, it opens itself to the third. This is to say, fundamental ontology is itself in need of a foundation that *Being and Time* as we now have it fails to furnish. As Paragraph 8 makes clear, *Being and Time*, as we have it, represents only the first third of a

work Heidegger not only did not, but, as he came to recognize, was unable to complete.[142]

2

Heidegger's move beyond or, perhaps better, beneath the subject-object polarity leads him to a new determination of the being of human being, of the essence of what Heidegger calls *Dasein*. Consider our relationship to the world. Are we in the world as matches are in a box? Am I just one of many things? Any traditional transcendental philosopher would question this. Of course, we are in the world; our body assigns us a definite place. But I am also the being for whom this body and all the other things that make up my world are. As the being for whom objects are, i.e. as subject, man transcends the world.

Heidegger finds this answer unsatisfactory. Still using the language of traditional ontology we can try to put what Heidegger is after by saying: Dasein is neither object nor subject; we do greater justice to it when we call it the relationship between the two (SZ 132). But while Heidegger is willing to admit that this is a more promising interpretation of human being than that provided by traditional ontology, more promising in that it guards against misunderstanding the self by making it into that peculiar substance, the subject, emphasizing instead that it is better expressed as the *in between* separating subject and object, the reader is left to wonder what in this case is meant by "subject" and "in between.'" If "subject" does not refer to the being of man, what does it refer to? Does it refer to anything at all? Is the subject a human construction? And as long as we remain uncertain about the meaning of "subject," how are we to understand the "in between" separating subject and object?

As it stands, this determination of the being of man as the "in between" separating subject and object is indeed unsatisfactory. It can, however, help us to find the way leading beyond traditional ontology. To begin with, it calls into question a philosophizing that begins with two different kinds of entities, subjects and objects, which are first given and then related to each other. What we must begin with is rather the relationship, being-in-the-world. What is prior Heidegger asserts, is the "in between." This formulation still takes for granted an objective interpretation of experience. At the same time it calls attention to a peculiar feature of experience: all experience is polar; it is marked by the opposition of the self and something other than the self, of subject and object. The object has to appear as in some

---

[142] See SZ, par. 8, pp. 39-40. Also Karsten Harries, "The Antinomy of Being and the End of Philosophy," forthcoming in *Division III of Being and Time: Heidegger's Unanswered Question of Being*, ed. Le Braver, to be published by MIT Press.

sense “opposite", as ”standing over against." Opposition, otherness, is a necessary condition of objectivity. We imply this when we characterize the being of Dasein as “in between.” Consciousness implies something like distance, a certain openness.

What is this “gap” that puts things at a distance? It can't by anything, for if anything is to be given, this gap must be presupposed. In this sense we can call it a nothingness.

Similarly we cannot interpret what the tradition has termed the subject as just another thing. As a condition of objectivity, it, too, cannot be anything and in this sense, it, too, must be said to be nothing. As Wittgenstein recognized, a subject will not be found in the world understood as the totality of facts as a thinking thing. Science can know nothing of such a subject. Heidegger's hypothetical formulation of the being of man as a being in between serves thus to dissolve a more substantial understanding of the being of man.

Wittgenstein argues for a similar dissolution in the *Notebooks*. “This is the way I have travelled: Idealism singles men out from the world as unique, solipsism singles me alone out, and at last I see that I too belong with the rest of the world, and so on the one side *nothing* is left over, and on the other side, as unique, *the world*. In this way idealism leads to realism, if it is strictly thought out." (NB 15.10.16) The transcendental subject dissolves into nothingness, and yet this nothingness remains as the transcendental condition of experience or as the limit of the world of objects. Only because there "is” this openness can there be a disclosure of beings. Consciousness is thus the place where an opening emerges within being that lets being reveal itself to itself. Heidegger points to this place by likening human being in the world to a forest clearing.

Nothing has been said so far that forces us to depart from the traditional interpretation of experience as objective. On the contrary, we took this interpretation for granted. It furnished us with our point of departure. But do phrases like "opposition” or "standing over against" capture the nature of our relationship to things? To some extent they surely do, yet usually I find things not so much standing over against me, as myself, engaged, in the midst of things. Dasein, Heidegger points out, is essentially *Insein*, being-in. With this determination we take an important step beyond the earlier description of it as the "in between" separating subject and object, and other formulations derived from it. We now do justice to the fact that the world is not so much like a picture before which we stand, but. more like a house in which we dwell. Bei*ng and Time* seeks to exhibits the structure of this dwelling in the world.

3

This formulation is still inadequate in that it preserves the presentism of traditional ontology and thus distorts our experience. Instead of speaking of Dasein as being in the world it might be better to speak of it as journeying through it. To exist is to be on a journey. I am, Heidegger suggests, always going somewhere, doing something, engaged in certain projects, ever open to different possibilities. Our understanding is first of all and most of the time not a detailed noting of what is the case, but a making use of, a caring for, a handling and appreciating. Our understanding cannot be divorced from the situation in which we find ourselves and again, by situation we do not mean here the facts that confront us, but a way of finding oneself situated in the world.

Rather like Wittgenstein, Heidegger appeals to the fact that we sometimes use "*etwas verstehen*," to understand something, to mean "*einer Sache vorstehen können*" "*ihr gewachsen sein*," to be up to what is at issue, to be on top of things. (SZ 143, cf. I 150)

The word "*können*," "to be able to," points' to a possible way of being. If I should want or should have to do something, I will be able to. Understanding thus anticipates a possible future way of being. To understand in this sense is to project oneself towards future possibilities. This running ahead to the future is constitutive of understanding — the contrast with the traditional interpretation is evident.[143] This changed interpretation of understanding goes along with a changed interpretation of being. For the tradition, what is is first of all the present fact. Being is understood, as *Vorhandenheit*, somewhat unhappily translated as presence-at-hand. "At-hand" suggests greater proximity to the body than the German *vorhanden,* a word so familiar that its constituent parts, *vor* and *handen* are hardly noted. What is *vorhanden* is simply there; no reference is made to a handling or use; the reference to the body, while there, has been obscured.

---

[143] Heidegger's appeal to ordinary language differs in one important respect from Wittgenstein's. "Wir gebrauchen zuweilen in ontischer Rede… ," "we use at time in ontic discourse," he writes, thus preserving the traditional distinction between ontic and ontological, between the factual dimension and the structures constitutive of that dimension. Ordinary language can give us clues; it does not provide a ground that we must leave as it is.

Heidegger, on the other hand, takes a tool for his paradigm, e.g. a hammer. The things we meet with first of all and most of the time are things we use, equipment. Paper and pencil, chair and desk, home and street, they all serve and receive their meaning from a way of life. To understand what they are is to understand what they are good for and how we use them. Heidegger uses the term *Zuhandenheit*, readiness-to-hand to refer to the mode of being of the things we encounter "proximally and most of the time."[144] They are to hand, there to be used. This again suggests that their being depends on what we are up to, on our intentions. This changed conception of understanding leads Heidegger to offer a new interpretation of meaning or sense. "*Sinn ist das durch Vorhabe, Vorsicht und Vorgriff strukturierte Worauf des Entwurfs, aus dem her etwas als etwas verständlich wird*. "Meaning is the 'upon which' of a projection in terms of which something becomes intelligible as something; it gets its structure from a forehaving, a foresight, and a fore-conception. " (SZ 151) This should be contrasted with Heidegger's earlier analysis of sense. On the earlier view, to know the sense of something is to understand its place in logical space. Now to know the sense of something is to understand its place in a space defined by our project. Both logical space and this project space have this in common: they open up a realm of possibilities, raising the question of how the two are related.

These three terms, *Vorhabe*, *Vorsicht*, and *Vorgriff* make clearer what Heidegger has in mind. The verb *vorhaben* mans to intend, the noun *Vorhaben* intention, where intention can mean both, the act of intending and what is intended. By using the rather unusual *Vorhabe* Heidegger stresses the act. To say that our interpretations have their foundation in a *Vorhabe* is to say that our interpretations presuppose an already established context of interpretation that has its foundation in what we are up to. What we are up to lets us look for

---

[144] The expression "zunächst und zumeist" is used by Heidegger to indicate descriptions of the everydayness of Dasein. Cf. SZ 370. "Wir gebrauchten in den vorstehenden Analysen oft die Ausdrücke 'zunächst und zumeist'. 'Zunächst' bedeutet die Weise in der das Dasein im Miteinander der Öffentlichkeit 'offenbar' ist, mag es auch 'im Grunde' die Alltäglichkeit gerade existenziell 'überwunden' haben. 'Zumeist' bedeutet die 'Weise, in der das Dasein nicht immer, aber in der Regel sich für Jedermann zeigt." "In our analyses we have often used the expression 'proximally and for the most part'. 'Proximally' signifies the way in which Dasein is 'manifest' in the 'with-one-another" of publicness, even if 'at bottom' everydayness is precisely something, which in an existentiell manner, it has 'surmounted'. 'For the most part' signifies the way in which Dasein shows itself for Everyman, not always, but 'as a rule'.

something. What I am looking for lets me overlook one thing and seize another. It is this looking for something that Heidegger has in mind when he speaks of *Vorsicht*. In ordinary usage *Vorsicht* means caution. Again, this time by using the in this context unusual indefinite article,[145] Heidegger makes it impossible for the reader to take the word for granted, forcing him to think about the word and its constituents *vor* and *Sicht*. *Vorsicht* is a looking ahead to what is relevant. What is relevant is founded in what we are up to. What we are up to determines how we will interpret what is before us.

Vorgriff means anticipation. To understand something we must already have anticipated what sort of thing something is going to be. This is true even when we are surprised by what we see. That we are surprised presupposes a context of expectation. Interpretation is thus for Heidegger never a presuppositionless grasping or describing of what is. There can be no pure description. All description is interpretation and as such, has its foundation in the way a particular individual understands himself and his place in the world, what matters, and what is to be done. This is also true of philosophy, more specifically of the interpretations Heidegger offers us in *Being and Time*. They, too, have their foundation in a "factical ideal" (SZ 310).[146] It would seem that Wittgenstein would agree with this thesis that all interpretation has its foundation in a particular way of life. If so, we have to ask how, given such a critique of pure description, Wittgenstein can return to it when he advocates that the philosopher simply describe language. The traditional ideal of neutral description reappears in the *Investigations* and still guides the philosopher. But if our thinking is always tied to a project and thus ahead of what presents itself to us, must we not also reckon with this when we try to formulate what constitutes the proper activity of the philosopher? Must the philosopher not

---

145 "Die Auslegung gründet jeweils in einer Vorsicht, …" (SZ,150)

146 "Aber liegt der durchgeführten ontologischen Interpretation der Existenz des Daseins nicht eine bestimmte ontische Auffassung von eigentlicher Existenz, ein faktisches Ideal des Daseins zugrunde? Das ist in der Tat so. Dieses Faktum darf nicht nur nicht geleugnet werden und gezwungener Weise zugestanden, es muss in seiner positiven Notwendigkeit aus dem thematischen Gegenstand der Untersuchung begriffen werden." (SZ 310) "Is there not, however, a definite ontical way of taking authentic existence, a factical ideal of Dasein, underlying our ontological Interpretation of Dasein's existence? That is so indeed. But not only is this Fact one which must not be denied and which we are forced to grant; it must also be conceived in its positive necessity, in terms of the object which we have taken as the theme of our investigation."

recognize that his own thinking can also not be divorced from a larger context? It, too, receives its meaning from a project that lets the philosopher look ahead and anticipate and may blind him to aspects of what is before him and open his eyes to others. To understand a philosopher in a more than superficial sense is to understand that project. I suggested that Wittgenstein‘s own philosophizing illustrates this. His insistence on pure description and the related tendency to overlook the role played by the future in our experience are themselves founded in an attempt to find peace for his restless soul.

Taken together *Vorhabe*, *Vorsicht*, and *Vorgriff* constitute what Heidegger calls the *Vorstruktur* of Dasein. This is to say, interpretation always receives its direction from and is circumscribed by what has already been understood in some way. Our understanding moves in a circle in that in a sense it is always in some sense already where it still wants to go. Wittgenstein's language-games exhibit this circular structure: to play a language-game is to anticipate what might possibly come. What is to come has in a sense already been taken care of: a place for it has already been provided in he space of possibilities opened up by the game in question. It follows from this view, that if there is to be radical novelty, a new language-game must arise. Yet we have to be careful here: how is such a new language-game related to already established ones? We have to take care not to destroy the continuity of life. The new language-game must fit in with those that together constituted our life up to this point. Novelty can never be absolute. Room for it must have been provided by the language-games that we were already playing.

15. Discourse and Language

1

Heidegger is not content to oppose to the traditional interpretation of experience his own richer account. He also tries to sketch the reduction that underlies traditional ontology. I use "reduction" not only to suggest that something has been left out, but also that something has been preserved, perhaps distilled. To say that traditional ontology rests on a reduction is not to say that it turns sense into nonsense; traditional ontology does make sense, especially if we keep in mind the restrictions put on its scope by the fact that it rests on a reduction. Similarly to reduce language to assertions is not to render it meaningless; it is only to restrict and thereby focus our scope. The reduction has its point.

What is the meaning of assertion? Heidegger gives us three characterizations.

(1) Assertion means first of all *Aufzeigung*, It points to something, singles it out. It shows what something is by assigning it a place in the space defined by a language-game e.g., "this is a hammer."

(2) Assertion means predication. The subject picks out something, while the predicate limits and focuses our attention and lets us see it as this and not that.

(3) Assertion is *Mitteilung*, communication. To make an assertion is to let another see what I see. To make an assertion is to share our understanding with another. It thus presupposes a supra-individual perspective, a public language.[147]

---

[147] In this connection Heidegger returns to the phenomenon of validity (*Geltung*), which had occupied so much of his attention earlier. Only now he calls it a *Wortgötze*, a linguistic idol, suggesting in rather Wittgensteinian fashion that language had misled him and others to lookfor what since Lotze had often been considered an *Urphänomen*, a not further reducible phenomenon. Heidegger singles out three elements in the traditional understanding of *Geltung*:

1. First of all, validity does not depend on the psychic state of him who is judging. An assertion remains valid, regardless of who may or may not be actually making it. Validity has thus an ideal being, where ideal is used to emphasize its independence from the psychic process. Validity transcends space and time.

2. Since validity is not tied to a particular place or situation it is not perspective-bound. It is in this sense objective.

3. What has validity claims our assent.

"Die drei herausgestellten Bedeutungen von ‘Gelten’, als Weise des Seins von

Tieing these three characterizations together, Heidegger arrives at the following definition; Aussage is *mitteilend bestimmende Aufzeigung*. Assertion is "*a pointing-out which gives something a definite character and which communicates*." (SZ 156) Being a mode of interpretation, what was said about the structure of interpretation has to apply to assertion, too. It, too, must be witness to a particular project. But what is this project in the case of assertion?

Heidegger notes, as Wittgenstein does, that what philosophers take to be paradigmatic assertions hardly make an appearance in ordinary language. Consider Heidegger's own example: "the hammer is heavy." A certain thing is given a predicate. "In concernful circumspection there are no such assertions 'at first.' But such circumspection has of course its specific ways of interpreting, and these, as compared with the 'theoretical judgment' just mentioned, may take some such form as "The hammer is too heavy', or rather just 'Too heavy! " 'Hand me the other hammer!'" (SZ 157) The difference between the first example and these expressions is evident: the latter presuppose the context of an activity; only in this context do the words receive their specific meaning. It is just this context that is bracketed in the case of theoretical assertion. 'The hammer that originally is understood as something to use, as being-to-hand, now becomes the subject of an assertion, a 'subject at-hand' possessing a certain property." (SZ 158) To understand something as it is, means thus something quite different, depending on the level of our understanding.

It remains to be shown in more detail how the transition from *Zuhandenheit* to *Vorhandenheit* is to be made.[148] Let us emphasize again what is expressed by the term

---

Idealem, als Objektivität und als Verbindlichkeit, sind nicht nur an sich undurchsichtig, sondern sie verwirren sich ständig unter ihnen selbst. Methodische Vorsicht verlangt, dergleichen schillernde Begriffe nicht zun Leitfaden der Interpretation zu wählen." (SZ 156) "The three significations of 'being valid' which we have set forth —the way of Being of the ideal, Objectivity, and bindingness not only are opaque in themselves but constantly get confused with one another. Methodological fore-sight demands that we do not choose such unstable concepts as a clue to Interpretation." This observation questions Heidegger's own earlier investigations.

[148] In *Being and Time* Heidegger is rather too ready to divide all beings other than Dasein into *Vorhandenes* and *Zuhandenes*. He does so only by stretching the meaning of *Zuhandenes* to such an extent that it threatens to

Zuhandenheit: things are encountered initially not as neutral facts but in our daily careful concern for them as things to be used. "The less we just stare at the hammer-thing, and the more we seize hold of it and use it, the more primordial does our relationship to it become, and the more unveiledly is it encountered as that which it is — as equipment. No matter how sharply we just look [*Nur-noch hinsehen*] at the 'outward appearance' [*Aussehen*] of Things in whatever form this takes, we cannot discover anything ready-to-hand." (SZ 69) *Zuhandenheit* is said to be "die ontologisch kategoriale Bestimmung von Seiendem wie es 'an sich' ist." "Readiness-to-hand is the way in which entities as they are 'in themselves' are defined ontologico-categorically." (SZ 71) Fundamental ontology with its investigation into the structure of the way human beings find themselves in the world first of all and most of the time, forces us to revise the traditional determination of being as objective. A new ontology is put in place of the old.

Thought provoking is Heidegger's use of *an sich*. When we speak of some thing as it is in itself we mean that thing as it exists apart from the filters through which human beings see and understand them. Following Kant we understand thus the thing in itself as transcendent being, i.e. as being not constituted by transcendental subjectivity. Heidegger uses "an sich" in quite a different sense to indicate that *Zuhandenes* does not rest on a prior *Vorhandes*, which, by being placed into a context of use, is transformed into *Zuhandenes*.[149] Instead of founding being-to-hand in being-at-hand, as traditional ontology would do, Heidegger inverts priorities, as Wittgenstein does, in a different way.

But if being-at-hand is derivative, how does this derivation take place?

---

become empty. Cf. his discussion of nature (SZ 70), where he speaks of nature, relying on poetic clichés, as "was webt und strebt," speaks of "Blumen am Rain," {flowers on the hedgerow." "Quelle im Grund," "speinghead in the dale." Does Heidegger's analysis of equipment or Zeug do justice to their being, as is suggested? Or do we have here a mode of being that needs to be clarified, but that differs from both *Vorhandenheit* and *Zuhandenhei*t. In "The Origin of the Work of Art" Heidegger provides such clarification.

[149] Cf. Heidegger's definition of phenomenon: "das *Sich-an-ihm-selbst-zeigende*, das Offenbare"(SZ 28), "*that which shows itself in itself*, the manifest." It thus would seem impossible to arrive at a more fundamental interpretation of being than is provided by *Zuhandenheit*. Cf., however, fn. 151 below.

Heidegger's thesis that the hammer is most genuinely understood by him who uses it gives us a clue. When something happens that prevents us from using a tool that we are used to using, it may suddenly intrude itself on our consciousness, not as something to be used, but rather as something that is not to hand. We look in the usual place; the hammer isn't there; or it is broken and useless. For a moment we have ben derailed. We look around. A distance appears, separating us from our situation, a distance that isn't there as long as we are caught up in our activities. Imagine yourself driving and suddenly you come to what looks like a traffic sign, only it is a traffic sign you have never seen before, let us say a black diamond followed by an exclamation point. An important sign, no doubt; otherwise, why the exclamation point. We do not know what to do with the sign, and this not knowing what to do lets us see shape and color of the sign as we would never see them, were we looking at one of the familiar signs. "The helpless way in which we stand before it is a deficient mode of concern, and as such it uncovers the being-just-present-at-hand-and-no-more of something ready-to-hand" (SZ 73). Whenever something presents itself to us in such a way that the context of the accepted and expected has not already taken care of it, a distance is established that reveals the other in its pure presence.

Aestheticians, most explicitly Edward Bullough, have used the related conception of aesthetic distance to understand the essence of aesthetic appreciation. It involves, Edward Bullough argues, a bracketing of what with Heidegger we can call *Zuhandenheit*. "It has a *negative*, inhibitory aspect — the cutting out of the practical side of things' and of our practical attitude to them — and a *positive* side, the elaboration of the experience on the new basis created by the inhibitory action of distance."[150] We can call this negative aspect the aesthetic attitude. As Bullough describes it, this attitude opens our eyes; it lets us see. It isn't only art and the artist who invite us to assume this attitude. Nature, too, does so when it presents itself in such a way that we are unable to fall back on the accepted and expected — think of how fog or the unusual light of a late afternoon sun can force us to look at familiar and therefore overlooked objects.

Heidegger has something related in mind when he speaks of a *Störung der Verweisung,* of "when an assignment has been disturbed" (SZ 74). If the aesthetic attitude is understood in terms of such a dislocation, science and philosophy, too, may be said to have

---

[150] Edward Bullough, "Psychical Distance as a Factor in Art and an Esthetic Principle," *A Modern Book of Aesthetics*, ed. Melvin Rader (New York, 1952), p. 404.

their foundation in the aesthetic attitude, i.e. they begin with a distance that pushes things away from us. To put the same thought differently: they all have their beginning in losing one's way. Only while art keeps us standing in wonder before what is, philosophy tries to move from wonder to reflection and explanation. One way of overcoming this *Störung der Verweisung* is to again find one's way by establishing a new context of interpretation. Yet philosophy remains philosophy only as long as it retains that sense of wonder in which it has its origin. To assert that philosophy cannot be replaced by science or any other interpretative discipline is to assert that we dwell in the world without final security. Again we are led back to Wittgenstein's thesis that philosophical problems have the form: I have lost my way. But we have to beware of separating too sharply knowing one's way and having lost one's way. As soon as what is to be done becomes in any way problematic, man has to that extent lost his way. Freedom is possible only for a being uncertain about his way. Only where there is such uncertainty can decisions be made.

The reduction of which we have spoken appears thus in a new light. It has its foundation in the human condition itself, more precisely, in human freedom. That distance, which is the foundation of objectivity, is the same distance that establishes man as not only bound to, but also as transcending his situation. Here, too, we can speak of man being essentially in between, in this case in between the transcendental subject and his being as embodied self, engaged in and part of the world. To try to seek the essence of man on either side and to consider the other derivative is to make him either into an angelic consciousness or to reduce him to a mere thing. Challenging Wittgenstein we have to insist that losing his way is not only a threat to man, but is also essential to his being. By his very nature man is in search of rather than in firm possession of his place and all attempts to insist on the latter threaten to lead to a dehumanization of man. In this sense the *Investigations* and the style of philosophizing it advocates poses a threat to our humanity, as does any claim to provide final security.

For the same reason we must resist an interpretation of *Being and Time* that would have us understand *Vorhandenheit* only as the result of a reduction of *Zuhandenheit* and this reduction only as a loss. To be sure, something is lost: what man has lost is his place in the world. But this loss is compensated for by a gain. Without this loss we could make no sense of freedom. Nor could we make sense of the pursuit of truth. If we see, as we must, freedom as an essential part of man's nature, we must also insist that it is impossible for things to present themselves to human beings as the things they are only in the mode of *Zuhandenheit.*

Rather we have to insist that they possess at least two faces, that they reveal themselves both as *Zu-* and as *Vorhandenes* and must do so for man to be man. We must, however, admit that this is not clearly stated in *Being and Time*. On the contrary, when Heidegger speaks of *Vorhandenheit* as founded in a **Defizienz** *des besorgenden Zu-tun-habens mit der WeIt*, in "a *deficiency* in our having to do with the world concernfully" (SZ 61) or calls *Zuhandenheit* "*die ontologisch-kategoriale Bestimmung von Seiendem wie es 'an sich' ist*" (SZ 71) "the way in which entities as they are 'in themselves' are defined ontologico-categorically," he seems to be closer to Wittgenstein's position than to what is advocated here.[151] Yet there are other formulations that suggest that Heidegger recognizes the irreducibility of the tension between *Vorhandenheit* and *Zuhandenheit*. Thus he writes, "*Das In-der-Welt-sein ist als das Besorgen von der besorgten Welt benommen*." "Being-in-the-world, as concern, is fascinated by the world with which it is concerned. (SZ 61) But *Benomme*n means not so much fascinated, as numbed, befogged. This may hint that from the very beginning being reveals itself to man in a way that presupposes the possibility of encountering it as just being-at-hand. The reduction of which we have been speaking is not a transformation, but a *Freilegung*, "a laying bare" (SZ 71) of that mode that is now established as possessing priority over all others. " When concern holds back [*Sichenthalten*] from any kind of producing, manipulating, and the like, it puts itself into what is now the sole determining mode of Being-in, the mode of just tarrying alongside … [*Das Nur-noch-verweilen-bei*…] This kind of Being towards the world is one which lets us encounter entities within the world purely in the way they look (*eidos*), just that; *on the basis* of this kind of Being, and *as* a mode of it, looking explicitly at what we encounter is possible." (SZ 61)

Given the reduction of being-to-hand to being-at-hand Heidegger 's interpretation of assertion as an "abkünftiger Modus der Auslegung", as "a derivative mode of interpretation" (SZ 157) is evident. But just as we had to be careful not to turn the

---

[151] It is possible to question the priority of *Zuhandenheit* with the following argument:

1. In the beginning of his analysis Hcidegger makes clear that he uses everyday being in the world for his guiding thread. Dasein and things are to be interpreted as they appear *zunächst und zumeist*, "proximally and most of the time." (SZ 43, 50)
2. Using this guiding thread, the being of beings is discovered to be *Zuhandenheit*. (SZ 66-67)
3. *Zunächst und zumeist* Dasein is subject to *das Man*, to "the they." (SZ 126)
4. As such it is essentially covering up phenomena. (SZ130)

traditional emphasis on being-at-hand' so completely around as to see in being-at-hand a distortion of being that misses all that is essential, so we have to beware of seeing assertion only as a mode of speaking that distorts. There is misleading distortion in this sense only if assertion is mistaken for the whole of language — as if we had somehow understood the essence of language when we have dealt with assertion. There is a place for assertion, and not only for assertion functioning as a living part of ordinary language, but also for the assertions made by one who, like the philosopher, stands before the world in wonder. The philosopher's use of language neither violates the essence of language nor does it do full justice to it.

2

Heidegger's discussion of language shows the extent to which he is still tied to traditional ontology. Traditional ontology, it was suggested, looks for the structures constitutive of beings, fundamental ontology for the structures constitutive of human being-in-the-world. In both cases a distinction can be made between an ontic and an ontological investigation, where ontic investigations are concerned with the way things as a matter of fact are, while ontological investigations are concerned with the structures constitutive of these facts. In Heidegger's discussion of language this distinction appears as the distinction between *Sprache* and *Rede*, between language and discourse. "Das existenzial-ontologische Fundament der Sprache ist die Rede." The existential-ontological foundation of language is discourse or talk" (SZ 160). But as Wittgenstein's *Investigations* lead us to wonder, does this distinction not have its origin in the Cartesian reduction of language that lets us look for an essence of language behind or underneath our language? To ask for the essence of language is to ask for that which makes language language, regardless of the particular language that we happen to speak. This presupposes that our ordinary language is not a transcendental condition of our experience. Our thoughts reach beyond our language to other possible languages.

And yet Heidegger's thought leads him in the other direction. The distinction between *Rede* and *Sprache*, which at first seems so evident, tends to evaporate and in Heidegger's later works is dropped. In *Being and Time* there are signs that point towards this later development. "*Die Rede ist mit Befindlichkeit und Verstehen existenzial*

gleichursprünglich….Rede ist die Artikulation der Verständlichkeit .... Die befindliche Verständlichkeit des In-der-Weltseins *spricht sich als Rede aus.*" "Discourse is existentially equiprimordial with state-of-mind and understanding. …Discourse is the articulation of intelligibility... The intelligibility of Being-in-he world which goes with a state-of-mind — *expresses itself as discourse*" (SZ 161). Language is constitutive of being-in-the world. But I am in the world always as this individual in this particular situation. Language may not be divorced from this. The essence of language is not something transcending particular situations; rather language is essentially as differentiated and variform as our situations. It seems thus misleading to oppose to our language its essence, as if this were a core we could reach by eliminating from our language all that is inessential. If the distinction between *Rede* and *Sprache* is to make sense, we must not interpret *Rede* as referring to the core; rather we have to draw a distinction between two ways of approaching language: on one hand we can interpret it ontologically, as constitutive of our being-in-the-world, on the other hand ontically as a vehicle of expression produced by us and like all our products part of the world. This is suggested by Heidegger. Compare these definitions of *Rede* and *Sprache:* " Die befindliche Verständlichkeit des In-der-Weltseins *spricht sich als Rede aus*", "The intelligibility of Being-in-he world *expresses itself as discourse*," and "Die Hinausgesprochenheit der Rede ist die Sprache", "'The way in which discourse gets expressed is language." (SZ 161) At first the two statements seem so close as to lead one to wonder just what the distinction is. The difference between *spricht sich aus* and *Hinausgesprochenheit* gives a clue. *Sich aussprechen* means "to say all one has to say; *hinaussprechen* suggests that what is said is sent out into the world and thus made part of it and public. "Sprache" is thus within the 'world and as such we come across it as we come across other beings-to-hand (*Zuhandenes*) (SZ 161); as such it can be considered, by means of the objective reduction, as a being-at-hand (*Vorhandenes*) and subjected to scientific description and analysis.[152] That the distinction between *Rede* and *Sprache* should not lead us to split language into an essential and an accidental part is emphasized

[152] Cf. "Logos (Heraklit, Fragment 50)," *Vorträge und Aufsätze* (Pfullingen: Neske, 1954), 220-221, where Heidegger contrasts this common and correct understanding of language as expression with a more fundamental understanding of language as an assembling and revealing of the being of all that is.

by Heidegger when he writes: "Die Rede is existenzial Sprache," "Discourse is existentially language" (SZ 161). This is to say, the essence of language is not to be sought beyond our language, but is that language. Heidegger adds as an explanation that this must be so, "weil das Seiende, dessen Entschlossenhei sie bedeutungsmässig artikuliert, die Seinsart des geworfenen, auf die Welt angewiesenen In-der-Welt-seins hat'", "because that entity whose disclosedness it articulates, according to significations, has, as its kind of Being, Being-in-the-world, which in every case maintains itself it some definite way of concernful Being-with-one-another" (SZ 161). By separating the essence of language from language, we' would separate also the essence of man from the concretely existing individual, as for instance the Platonist does when he seeks man's true home beyond time and the world in a realm where all is and nothing becomes, where there is neither possibility nor freedom.[153]

To interpret *Rede* as *Sprache* is to interpret it as belonging to a being who finds himself in the world together with others. "Reden ist das 'bedeutende Gliedern der Verständlichkeit des In-der-Welt-seins, dem das Mitsein zugehört, und das sich je in einer bestimmten Weise des besorgenden Miteinanderseins hält." "Discoursing or talking is the way in which we articulate 'significantly' the intelligibility of Being-in-the-world. Being-with belongs to Being-in-the-world, which in every case maintains itself in some definite way of concernful Being-with-one-another" (SZ 161). Discourse is thus constituted by listening (*Hören*), to one another (*aufeinander-hören*) and to the world — to the cars going by, to the wind, the ringing of the telephone. Given this interpretation, it follows that logic cannot provide us with a full understanding of language. It is in this context that Heidegger calls for the liberation of grammar from logic. Yet, unlike Wittgenstein the *Investigations*, in *Being and Time* he still seeks to uncover the *a priori* fundamenta1 structure of language. We can call this fundamenta1 structure the grammar of language. If we do, we can say Heidegger wants grammatical analysis to take the place of the logical investigations of traditional analysis.

Yet one has to be careful — and this returns us to the problem with which we began this section: in what sense can we speak of the *apriorische Grundstruktur von*

---

[153] An analogous point can be made about the body. Just as "discourse is existentially language, the human being is existentially body; the explanations are identical.

Rede? The phrase is Kantian. *Grundstruktur von Rede* reminds one of the Kantian form of judgment. No doubt, general structures can be pointed out; such an ordering is not only possible, but inevitable. Even Wittgenstein, much as he tries to resist the temptation to take such groupings too seriously, cannot but point to such structures, e.g. when he invites us to imagine a language-game made up of orders or questions. By doing so he creates a model that focuses our attention on how part of our language works. He shows us its structure. But we should not view this part as if it were like the stone of a mosaic and as if our language were the mosaic made up of such stones. We can grant Heidegger that we can search for and exhibit the general structure of language, but his own analysis leads us to question in what sense the more general is the more fundamental. Heidegger's analysis or language in *Being and Time* also seems to suggest that our ordinary language is not in need of a foundation; it is the foundation.

Yet this suggestion must be questioned and examined.

16. Idle Talk

1

That ordinary language does not provide us with a secure ground, but stands in need of questioning, is implicit in Heidegger's distinction between authentic and inauthentic discourse, between *Rede*, a speaking that reveals what is spoken of; and *Gerede*, idle talk that takes it for granted and thus hides it.

Consider how we read a newspaper: of course we understand what we read, but this understanding does not force us to face up to it. Were this not so, we could not read newspapers as quickly as we do. Horrorstruck we would remain with the first page. As it is we read, hardly moved, about another senseless killing, another terrorist attack, another earthquake in the Near East, thousands dying of Ebola in Africa, passing from one topic to the next, all in a few minutes, between cups of coffee and before going off to work. And why should we be moved? Isn't it always the same story? Of course these things are horrible, of course we deplore them, but there is so little we can do — and we have more important things to attend to — "Could I have another cup of coffee, please" — compared to such realities what we read about remains pale and distant. The words before us conceal more than they reveal. This is not to say that anything is being hidden from us. We may very well have been told all the important facts.

But even if the facts are new, the words we read are familiar. This familiarity places itself like a protective veil before the described events so that we only half-notice them. We do take note of what we read; we may even be concerned and interested. But our concern does not go very far; our interest is not tied to further action. We are voyeurs rather than actors. We want to see and learn, but we lack the patience to really appropriate what we see. Or rather: we do not want such appropriation.

But what do we want? Why is there this desire to be informed, about movie stars and politicians, about Nigeria and the Ukraine, about the latest crime and the latest astronautical feat? Little of this information leads to future action; information has become an end in itself. "The care of seeing is essential to man's Being" (SZ 171), Heidegger tells us, providing a variation of the Aristotelian "all men by nature desire to know." Seeing and knowing should not be understood here as serving some other end.

they are their own reward. Adapting Wittgenstein's expression we can say: language and understanding have gone here on a holiday. And why such holidays? Why do we go on holidays? To relax, to find diversion, to escape from the burden which each human being is to himself.

It isn't only when reading a newspaper that language envelops us in familiarity and by being taken for granted conceals what is said. 0f many of our conversations the same can be said. How often do we speak, not because there is something to be said, but because we are expected to say something, and so we speak of this and that, of the weather, of friends, of the marital problems of Mr. X —what we are talking of matters little.

Think of cocktail parties — It sometimes happens at such a party that just when one has taken a timid first step towards genuine conversation, the hostess appears to ward off this danger to her party. She is right: there is indeed something about genuine conversation that threatens to destroy the pleasant atmosphere created by a successful cocktail party. Genuine discussion takes effort and time; also a kind of ruthlessness that doesn't sacrifice the matter under discussion to the rules of polite conversation. The kind of comfortable security provided by party talk, this at best effortless being with others, often helped by a little, or perhaps not so little alcohol, is incompatible with dialogue that forces the individual to think and speak for himself, thus isolating him and confronting him with the difficulty of saying with clarity what is to be said. Parties demand idle talk, talk that envelops us and lets us feel at home with others. And would it not be cruel and in bad taste to destroy this pleasant sense of togetherness by insisting on genuine understanding?

The power of idle talk stems from its ability to let us feel at home. By permitting ourselves to be enveloped by it, we become sure of our place in the world, even if our sense of security is groundless. “The Being-said, the dictum, the pronouncement [*Ausspruch*] — all these now stand surety for the genuineness of the discourse and of the understanding which belongs to it, and for its appropriateness to the facts. And because this discoursing has lost its primary relationship of-Being-towards the entity talked about, or else has never achieved such a relationship, it does not communicate in a primordial manner, but communicates rather by following the route of *gossipping* and *passing the*

word along. What is said-in-the-talk as such spreads in wider circles and taken on an authoritative character." (SZ 168-169)

This suggests what authentic discourse must be like: it must preserve its primary relationship of-Being-towards the entity talked about. But just how are we to understand this primary relationship? When I point to some cow I see and call it a cow, would this be an example of authentic discourse?

How are we to tell when we hear or read something whether the words are idle talk or authentic discourse?

> And indeed this idle talk is not confined to vocal gossip, but even spreads to what we write, where it takes the form of scribbling' [*das "Geschreibe*"]. In this latter case the gossip is not based so much upon hearsay. It feeds upon superficial reading [*dem Angelesenen*]. The average understanding of the reader will never be able to decide what has been drawn from primordial sources with a struggle and how much is just gossip. The average understanding, moreover will not want any such distinction and does not need it, because of course, it understands everything. (SZ 168-169)

Idle talk is understood by Heidegger as essentially groundless. But such groundlessness, it turns out, pervades understanding from the very beginning.

> The groundlessness of idle talk is no obstacle to its becoming public; instead it encourages this. Idle talk is the possibility of understanding everything without previously making the thing one's own. If this were done, idle talk would founder; and it already guards against such a danger. Idle talk is something anyone can rake up; it not only releases one from the task of genuinely understanding, but develops an undifferentiated kind of intelligibility, for which nothing is closed of any longer (SZ 169)

First of all and most of the time we are all subject to idle talk.

> This way in which things have been interpreted in idle talk has already established itself in Dasein. There are many things with which we first become acquainted in this way, and there is not a little which never gets beyond such an average understanding. This everyday way in which things

> have been interpreted is one into which Dasein has grown in the first instance, with never a possibility of extrication. In it, out of it, and against it, all genuine understanding, interpreting, and communicating, all re-discovering and appropriating anew, are performed. (SZ 169)

But does all language then not become *Gerede*? Consider

> "Idle talk is the kind of Being that belongs to Being-with-one-another itself Das Gerede die Seinsart des Miteinanderseins selbst." (SZ177)

How then are we to think of authentic discourse? What might an authentic conversation be like? Heidegger fails to provide us here with examples of authentic discourse. Can there even be such examples?

As this suggests, idle talk should not be understood too narrowly as a particular abuse of language. We are indeed most likely to speak of idle talk when an individual just talks in order to talk, investing little in his or her words. But Heidegger gives the expression a far wider meaning. Not only does he suggest that we are subject to idle talk from the very beginning; he also insists, in spite of his own use of the adjective "inauthentic," that the expression "idle talk" is not used in fundamental ontology in a derogatory sense (SZ 167), although in ordinary usage it certainly does carry that sense. "Terminologically, it signifies a positive phenomenon which constitutes the kind of Being of everyday Dasein's understanding and interpreting."[154] (SZ 167) To be with others is to be caught up in idle talk. To make oneself understood one has to speak as one

---

[154] Cf. however SZ 196 and SZ 310 - 316, where Heidegger makes clear that his *existenzial* analysis of authenticity must have its foundation in an *existenziell* stance that makes authenticity part of an ethical ideal. In this context it is important to remember that *Being and Time* initially follows the guiding thread of the *zunächst und zumeist*. Within these limits *Gerede* must be given priority. The analysis develops, however, to a point where it becomes evident that this does not lead to a primordial understanding of the phenomenon of language. "Eines ist unverkennbar geworden: *die bisherige Analyse des Daseins kann den Anspruch auf Ursprünglichkeit nicht erheben*. In der Vorhabe stand immer nur das *uneigentliche* Dasein und dieses als *unganzes*." (SZ 233) "One thing has become unmistakable: *our existential analysis of Dasein up till now cannot lay claim to primordiality*. Its fore-having never included more than the *inauthentic* Being of Dasein, and of Dasein as *less* than a *whole*." This makes it necessary to repeat the earlier analysis on a more fundamental level. On this level it is impossible to uphold the priority of *Gerede*.

speaks. As Wittgenstein points out : there can be no private language. Being with others man is constantly losing himself to these others. (SZ 177) This loss cannot be avoided, just as we cannot exist without idle talk. To live and work with others we must join in their language-games. We can't stop to weigh every word, but must take our language for granted and accept established usage. Most of the time our language does indeed appear to us as a ground; to this extent Wittgenstein is right. But, Heidegger would counter, this is not to say that when language has been understood in this way, full justice has been done to it. We have grasped only one of its dimensions, reflecting only one dimension of human being-in-the-world, our being with others. If human beings were only actors in language-games that assign them a part, if these games furnished them with world interpretations that they could not but accept there would be no need to go beyond idle talk. But life is not this simple. Man is not only with others, he also is able to transcend himself in his being-with-others. As such he can put himself, and especially his way of existing as member of a community, in question; can demand that he see or understand for himself. Indeed he must do so if he is not to be authentically himself.

2

We can gain or lose ourselves only because our own being does not confront us as an already established fact, but as a task. We can refuse to face that task, letting others define our being. We can also seize it and establish ourselves what we are to be. Such establishment can never be an altogether free choosing of our essence, but is limited by how we find ourselves in the world, embodied and thus subject to the rule of space and time, vulnerable and mortal. Heidegger calls our attention to this when he speaks of Dasein's **guilt**. Our usual understanding of guilt involves the ideas of **authorship** and **negativity**. To be guilty is to be author of a lack. Thus we call someone guilty if he did what should not have been done or if he failed to do what should he-we been done. (SZ 282). Heidegger has something quite different in mind when he makes guilt constitutive of human being. Guilt, in Heidegger's existential sense, may not be understood as consequence of some action. Man is guilty in being his own foundation, but in such a way that he remains in the hands of facticity and nothingness. Man is guilty because he has eaten of the tree of knowledge, but not of that of life. This use of guilt shares with the

ordinary understanding an emphasis on authorship and negativity. Man is said to be guilty because he is called upon to be author of his own being, and yet cast into the world, subject to death.

What Heidegger means by “authentic” has to be tied to this conception of authorship. To say that man is called upon to be author of his own being is to point out that we are not as things, as trees or animals, are, but for us to be is to be involved in the constitution of our being. To be sure, although we shape, we do not create our place in the world. We have been cast there, not by a god who has assigned us a part, but by an opaque fate. How we decide to be is thus not only a choice of what we are to be, but also a way of relating to what he is. "These entities, in their Being, comport themselves towards their Being” (SZ 41). How I am myself is not determined by what is; we can seize ourselves in different ways; thus we can choose to define what we are in response to the particular claims made on us by our situation, including especially other persons; but we can also choose to exist as just another member of a group; or again as outsiders, living self-consciously besides the accepted and expected. In the latter cases we exist in such a way as to let others “define what we are to be, losing ourselves and our authorship, "And because Dasein is in each case essentially its own possibility, it can, in its very Being 'choose' itself and win itself; it can also lose itself and never win itself; or only 'seem' to do so. But only in so far as Dasein can be authentic — that is, something of its own (*sich zueigen*), can it have lost itself and not yet won itself. As modes of Being, authenticity and' inauthenticity (these expressions have been chosen terminologically in a strict sense) are both grounded in the fact that any Dasein whatsoever is characterized by mineness" (SZ 42-43). To exist authentically means thus *sich zu eigen haben*, to own oneself.

If Heidegger is right, inauthenticity is not like some disease that comes over man, but his normal way of being. And yet, Heidegger also wants to say that inauthenticity is not something that just happens to characterize Dasein. Our being is such that it invites us to run away from what we are, more precisely from our guilt. Man is guilty, we said, because, alhough demanding of himself that he take charge of his life, he is neither his own foundation nor the foundation of his world. To acknowledge one's guilt is to face up to and to accept the failure of the project of pride. If man is to grasp and possess what he

is, i.e. if he is to exist authentically, he has to accept his guilt.

Heidegger names the call to authenticity **conscience**. Again conscience must not be understood in the ordinary sense, e.g. when we speak of having a bad conscience because of some particular deed or omission. **Conscience**, too, belongs to the existential structure of Dasein. In the call of conscience man calls himself to resolve to be himself. In conscience the being of man, which continually threatens to slip away from him, reasserts itself. "Conscience is the call of care from the uncanniness of Being-in-the-world — the call which summons Dasein to its ownmost potentiality-for-Being-guilty" (SZ 289). The call of conscience is thus not a call from some beyond, calling man back to his real home; rather conscience is the call of care "aus der Unheimlichkeit des In-der-Welt-seins," "from the uncanniness of Being-in-the-world." That is to say, when our being-in-the-world is interpreted as a being at home in the world, a more fundamental not being at home is covered up. Inauthenticity is a weapon against this original homelessness. It is precisely inauthentic Dasein that finds itself assigned a place by and at home in the world. The call of conscience leads us back to an awareness that this world is not really our home, but a place where we dwell precariously, never quite sure of what should be our place or vocation.

Calling Dasein to acknowledge its guilt, conscience calls in dread, above all in the dread of death. The finality of death forces me to acknowledge how inescapably my life is my own and how inescapably I am delivered over to nothingness. In dread of dread we hides from ourselves the always approaching darkness, turning away from it to the present; to the daily routines that repeat themselves without real past or real future; to enjoyment deep enough to let us forget that it lacks eternity; to the bloodless, but timeless spheres of philosophy and science; perhaps to God. And most frequently we run to others. Against the force of death man puts the power of community. This may take the form of the Christian expectation that as members of God's kingdom we need not fear the sting of death and the loss of community: our loved ones are not dead, they are waiting. If there is no hope for this heaven, we may seek comfort, as Hegel would have us do, in the community of the spirit that liberates us from this material prison and unites us with

the great individuals of the past;[155] or we may flee to history, to the state, to the family; to idle talk; or to love. Community and death are antagonistic forces. How impotent are words, gestures, actions to preserve the community with one who is dying. Can love create a communion strong enough to defeat the power of death? If, as Heidegger says, to be for man is to be unto death, are not all attempts to establish a genuine community vain?

3

If Heidegger is right, such dreams constitute a running away from what we are. But can this be he right? Is Heidegger perhaps guilty of exaggerating the importance of death, and related to this, the importance of *Jemeinigkeit*, of the fact that my life is inescapably my own? Nietzsche was struck by how small a place death has in our everyday existence.[156] Heidegger would of course grant this and like Nietzsche he would seek the reason for this in a refusal to think the thought of death. Our constant running away from death is for Heidegger but a further sign of the prevalence of inauthenticity. But the later Nietzsche would have questioned this. Does the refusal to think the thought of death not perhaps have its foundation in a recognition that life is more worth thinking about? Can we turn the matter around and see in Heidegger's preoccupation with death a running away from life?[157]

---

155 Cf. the very end of the *Phenomenoloy of the Spirit*.

156 Cf. *Die Fröhliche Wissenschaft* IV, par, 278. “Es macht mich glücklich zu sehen, dass die Menschen den Gedanken an den Tod durchaus nicht denken wollen. Ich möchte gern etwas dazu tun, ihnen den Gedanken an das Leben noch hundertmal denkenswerter zu machen.” “It makes me happy to see that human beings absolutely refuse to entertain thoughts if death. I would like to contribute something toward making them consider thoughts of life still a hundred times more worth entertaining” Schopenhauer considers the faith in the indestructability of our essence the "tröstliche Urglaube der Menschheit,” “the comforting primordial faith of humanity," a faith that has been covered up by the extreme individualism of our culture. Cf. *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, vol. 2, chapters 41 and 44.

157 How does Heidegger come to tie authenticity to death? Presupposed is the rather traditional tie of authenticity to entirety: authentic Dasein possesses itself in its entirety. Heidegger discovers the foundation of this entirety in death, which thus becomes Dasein's final end, not only in the sense of termination, but in the sense of telos. Like Plato, Heidegger idealizes being at one with

For another opposed interpretation of death we can turn to Schopenhauer. Schopenhauer sees much of what Heidegger sees. And yet, and Schopenhauer makes this point with special force in his "Metaphysik der Geschlechtsliebe,"[158] "The Metaphysics of Sexual Love", the claim that my own death has on me is only one claim. To view it as having the kind of primacy Heidegger gives to it is to overlook that the same body that makes us mortal, also makes us into sexual beings. To affirm himself as this sexual being man has to recognize himself as belonging to a larger order. We find ourselves acting not only as individuals, but as members of the species. How for example, are we to understand a mother sacrificing herself for the sake of her children? She chooses not to be, so that those to whom she has given birth can continue to be. Sex, as Schopenhauer understands it, is much more than an instrument that we use to amuse ourselves and others. It would almost be more correct to call us the instrument of our sex, which ties us to our species. Given such an interpretation, the individual who, as Heidegger's authentic person does, takes his own death to be the final court of appeals, living a life inescapably his own, could be said to exist inauthentically.

I don't want to argue here for either interpretation. I only want to point out that Heidegger' s emphasis on death is open to challenge. And since his understanding of authenticity cannot be separated from his interpretation of the phenomenon of death, to challenge the latter is also to challenge the former. More difficult to challenge is his insistence that to be for man is to exist unto the future.

4

We began this session by trying to understand the distinction between *Rede* and *Gerede*, between authentic and inauthentic discourse. This distinction has to be seen in the context of Heidegger's discussion of authenticity and inauthenticity. Using Heidegger's interpretation of death as a key, I have tried to show that authenticity is tied

---

oneself, and this idealization lets him, too, become a teacher of an *ars moriendi*. See Karsten Harries, "Death and Utopia: Towards a Critique of the Ethics of Satisfaction," *Research in Phenomenology*, vol. 7, 1977, pp. 138-152. Reprinted in *Radical Phenomenology*, ed. John Sallis (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press, 1978), pp. 138-152.

[158] *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, vol. 2, chapter 44.

to a being alone, even when with others. This returns us to the question: does, on Heidegger 's view, man's membership in a community doom him to inauthenticity? **Can Heidegger give an account of an authentic being with others**?

Heidegger does insist that being-with-others is as fundamental as being-in-the-world. I find myself in the world with others. "Auf dem Grunde dieses mithaften In-der-Welt-seins ist die Welt je schon immer die, die ich mit den Anderen teile. Die Welt des Daseins is Mitwelt. Das In-Sein ist Mitsein mit Anderen" (SZ 118). “By reason of this with-like Being-in-the-world, the world is always the one that I share with Others. The world of Dasein is a with-world. Being-in is Being-with Others." From this it follows that man's care for his own being must essentially be a care for himself as he is with others. To be open to what we are we must also be open to those who share our world. My care for myself can thus not be divorced from my care for others.

Part of this care is an awareness of the distance that separates me from the other. This distance is itself a matter of concern, as a distance to be overcome in the project of love or perhaps as a distance to be transformed into a relation of servitude. "But this distantiality that belongs to Being-with, is such that Dasein as everyday Being-with-one-another, stands in subjection (*Botmässigkeit*) to Others. It itself is not; its being has been taken away by the others. Dasein's everyday possibilities of Being are for the others to dispose of as they please" (SZ 126). Heidegger adds that the others here are first of all not particular persons, rather the anonymous "they" or "one." We do what one does, speak as one speaks. "In these modes one's way of Being is that of inauthenticity and failure to stand by one's self. To be in this way signifies no lessening of Dasein's facticity, just as the ‘they,’ as the ‘nobody,' is by no means nothing at all. On the contrary, in this kind of Being, Dasein is an *ens reealissimum*, if by 'Reality' we understand a Being that has the character of Dasein" (SZ 128).

It may seem odd to speak in this context of distance. Isn't it just the distance that separates us from others that has been negated when we live as one lives? We have become just another, another citizen, another soldier, another customer. In this “just another" the distance that characterizes a more isolated, self-centered existence is lacking. But distance has not been eliminated; it has been preserved within the self, which now has become distant from itself. We have lost ourselves to our contemporaries; they now

help us define what we are.

To accept such definition is also to accept a way of speaking; it is to join the language-games that are being played by the community or communities of which we are part. The more unquestioning this participation, the more complete the sway of idle talk. From Heidegger's perspective, Wittgenstein's move to ordinary language appears as a reduction of language to idle talk.

By now it should have become clear that what Heidegger means by "idle talk must be distinguished from what Wittgenstein means by the idling of language. Consider again the blind man who tries to learn the meaning of "blue by listening to how others use it. In a sense he, too, could learn that violets are blue, that the sky is blue. Yet were we to place some object before him and without providing further hints were to ask him what color it is, he would be at a loss as to how to answer. Here language has lost touch with the world. As Wittgenstein puts it, it idles, it has lost its function.

What Heidegger has in mind when he speaks of "idle talk" is something quite different. Think of how clichés are used, expressions that in constant use have become mute. We all have learned to expect and use certain phrases in certain situations without giving the matter much thought —do we know, e.g., what expressions like "I'm sorry", "I love you" or "you are welcome" mean? Or “law” and “order” and “peace now"? We do know in what contexts it would be appropriate to use them. We can, although we may not choose to do so, play the proper language-games and in that sense we do know what they mean. But must something very much like what I just said about clichés not also be said of words like “cow” and “tree”? Have we not also learned in what contexts it would be appropriate to use them? Just where is the difference? When Wittgenstein likens language to an engine idling (I 132) he thinks of language that no longer functions as part of a language-game, where language-game is understood as “the whole, consisting of language and the acts into which it is woven" (I 7). When Heidegger speaks of "idle talk" he thinks first of all of language which does function as part of a language-game that in its entirety is taken for granted. It follows from Heidegger's view that only to the extent that it is inauthentic can a form of life be discovered by examining the grammar of the language-games governing it.

But if language as it is spoken usually and most of the time is inauthentic

discourse, what is authentic discourse? It is difficult to find an answer in *Being and Time*. Heidegger does insist that the silent call of conscience is to be understood as a mode of discourse (SZ 271). It would thus seem to offer us the only example of authentic discourse to be found in the book. But here the self calls itself in silence. **Should we then say that authentic discourse takes place in silence and is essentially monological, as is the call of conscience?** But given that Dasein is essentially with others, this is an unsatisfactory answer. But where should we look?

We are given a few hints. Thus Heidegger tells us "when Dasein is resolute, it can become 'the 'conscience' of Others" (SZ 298). But how can we become the conscience of others? Perhaps by our actions? By not saying anything, when we are expected to say something? Or by saying the "wrong" thing? Heidegger does not tell us. In the same place he goes on to insist "Only by authentically Being-them-selves in resoluteness can people authentically be with one another." As already suggested, Heidegger does think that there can be an authentic being with others. But does this not imply that there must also be authentic conversation? Such conversation would have to have its foundation in a resolute response to the call of conscience. I have to have freed myself from the dominion of others to be free to rally listen and to respond to them and to be open to whatever situation I find myself in. But what language would such conversation use other than that everyday language that has been judged to be inauthentic? **Perhaps idle talk, operating against a background of silence, so that it would continuously suffer shipwreck and exhibit its own inadequacy**? Think of the conversation of two people who love each other: I suspect that their words are likely to silly and superficial. Yet this is perhaps itself a superficial view, that mistakes the verbal surface for the whole. What really matters remains unsaid.

That man can be authentic only in communion with others is implied by Heidegger's discussion of history. "Only in communicating and struggling does the power of destiny become free. Dasein's fateful destiny in and with its generation goes to make up the full authentic historizing of Dasein" (SZ 384-385). Authentic being with others is tied here to the possession of a common history, and that must include a shared language. Only history provides us with our place. This place must not be thought of as assigned by history. History itself has to be interpreted and such interpretation requires

conversation and struggle with those who are part of the same community, which only in this way is really established. This, too, would seem to depend on authentic conversation. But how is it possible, given the way Heidegger ties of authenticity to being-unto-death? **The tension between community and death, language and authenticity is never resolved in *Being and Time.***

17. Language and Authenticity

1

Let me begin by returning just very briefly to the *Tractatus.* A presupposition of what Wittgenstein has to say there is that **to be meaningful a proposition has to be either true or false**. What truth is, is taken for granted and finds expression in Wittgenstein's picture theory of meaning. A true proposition pictures what it describes as it is. Presupposed then is an understanding of **truth as correspondence**. And such an understanding of truth does indeed seem to agree with the way we ordinarily understand truth, without giving the matter much thought. It brings to mind a passage in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (A58/B83), where Kant calls the question, What is truth? "the old and famous question" with which one sought to get logicians into trouble and he dismisses it, when he writes that "the nominal explanation of truth, that is to say, that it is the agreement of knowledge with its object is here "taken for granted and presupposed, "*geschenkt und vorausgesetzt*."

This is indeed the way we tend to think of truth. It corresponds to the way truth is defined in a text that has not lost its authority: Thomas Aquinas' *De Veritate*. Consider Thomas' definition of truth as "the adequation of the thing and the understanding": *Veritas est adaequatio rei et intellectus*.[159] Quite in keeping with our everyday understanding, the definition claims that there can be no truth where there is no understanding. But can there be understanding without human beings? Does truth then depend on human beings? Aquinas, of course rejects such a suggestion: the truth of our thoughts or propositions has its measure in the truth of things, and that truth must be understood as the **adequacy of the thing to the divine intellect**. Aquinas thus has a theocentric understanding of truth that gives human discourse its measure in God's creative word, in the divine logos, which is nothing other than the thing in itself understood as a *noumenon*, a term that relates it to the divine *nous*. *Omne ens est verum*. "Every being is true." Given such an understanding of "the pure truth," truth is indeed denied to us finite knowers, as Kant, too, knew. Thomas Aquinas' understanding of God

---

[159] Thomas Aquinas, *Questiones disputatae de veritate*, qu. 1, art. 1. See Martin Heidegger, *Einführung in die phänomenologische Forschung*, (WS 1923/24) G17, 162-194.

left no room for thoughts of a cosmos from which understanding would be absent. His, as I said, was a theocentric understanding of truth, where we should note that the definition *veritas est adaequatio rei et intellectus* invites two readings: *veritas est adaequatio intellectus ad rem*, "truth is the adequation of the understanding to the thing" and *veritas est adaequatio rei ad intellectum*, "truth is the adequation of the thing to the understanding." And is the second not presupposed by the first? Is there not a sense in which the truth of our assertions presupposes the truth of things or ont**ological truth**? If we are to measure the truth of an assertion by the thing asserted, that thing must disclose itself as it really is, as it is in truth. But what could "truth" now mean? Certainly not an adequation of the thing to our finite, perspective-bound understanding: that would substitute appearances for the things themselves.

Theology once had a ready answer: every created thing necessarily corresponds to the idea preconceived in the mind of God and in this sense cannot but be true. The truth of things, understood as *adaequatio rei (creandae) ad intellectum (divinum)*, "the adequacy of the (to be created) thing to the (divine) intellect," secures truth understood as *adaequatio intellectus (humani) ad rem (creatam),* "the adequacy of the (human) intellect to the (created) thing." [160] And such talk of the truth of things does accord with the way we sometimes use the words "truth" and "true": e.g., when we call something we have drawn "a true circle," we declare it to be in accord with our understanding of what a circle is. What we have put down on paper accords with an idea in our intellect. Here the truth of things is understood as *adaequatio rei (creandae) ad intellectum (humanum),* "the adequacy of the (to be created) thing to the (human) intellect."

But what right do we have to think that we can bridge the abyss that separates God's infinite creative knowledge from our finite human understanding? The Heidegger of *Being and Time*, like Nietzsche before him, insists that there is no such bridge.

And, Kant, too, despite his willingness to take the traditional understanding of truth as correspondence for granted, would have agreed with this claim: if we understand truth as the correspondence of our judgments and things in themselves, understood as noumena, another term that names the truth of things, then there is no truth available to us

---

[160] See Martin Heidegger, "Vom Wesen der Wahrheit," *Wegmarken*, *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 9 (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1976), pp. 178-182.

for Kant either. But Kant does not conclude that therefore we cannot give a justification of the human pursuit of truth. To be sure, theory cannot penetrate beyond phenomena; things as they are in themselves are beyond the reach of what we can objectively know. But this does not mean that the truth pursued by science is itself no more than a subjective illusion. **The truth of phenomena** provides sufficient ground for science and its pursuit of truth. Key to our understanding of that truth is this by now familiar thought: to understand that what we experience is only an appearance, bound by a particular perspective, is to be already on the road towards a more adequate, and that means here first of all less perspective-bound and in this sense freer understanding. The pursuit of truth demands a movement of self-transcendence that, by leading us to understand subjective appearance for what it is, opens a path towards an ever more adequate, more objective understanding. **The pursuit of truth demands objectivity** as a regulative ideal. Copernicus already relied on this familiar pattern of thought to make his readers more receptive to his break with Aristotle and Ptolemy.

But in *Being and Time* Heidegger explicitly rejects such an understanding. Absolute truth and the absolute subject are declared to be rests of Christian theology that philosophy ought to leave behind:

> The idea of a 'pure "I"' and of a 'consciousness in general' are so far from including the *a priori* character of actual subjectivity that the ontological characters of Dasein's facticity and its state of Being are either passed over or not seen at all. Rejection of a 'consciousness in general' does not signify that the *a priori* is negated, any more than the positing of an idealized subject guarantees that Dasein has an *a priori* character grounded upon fact.
>
> Both the contention that there are 'eternal truths' and the jumbling together of Dasein's phenomenally grounded 'ideality' with an idealized absolute subject, belong to those residues of Christian theology within philosophical problematics which have not as yet been radically extruded. (SZ 229)

As I have already suggested, I would question Heidegger on this point: The transcendental subject is not dismissed quite that easily. As thinkers we are capable of

transcending our time- and space-bound situation and arrive at the idea of a 'pure I' and of a 'consciousness in general'. This is what Kant does, but, as pointed out, he would grant that a knowledge of things in themselves is denied to us.

But back to Heidegger: what can he substitute for the truth of things, for Thomas' *ens verum*? Without breaking with the understanding of truth as *adaequatio rei et intellectus* Heidegger puts in the place of God the human knower, or Dasein, as the only intellect of which we have knowledge. **The truth of things now comes to mean the way they disclose themselves to authentic Dasein**. One thinks of Berkeley's *esse est percipi*.

2

In *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology* Heidegger takes up the problem of truth in a way that remains close to the parallel and somewhat earlier discussion in *Being and Time*, but that is in some ways more accessible. "The problem concentrates itself in the question: how does the existence of truth relate to Being and the way and manner in which Being is?" (GA 24, 318) There is no truth, Heidegger insists, without Dasein (GA 24, 316). And so he asks: "Is there Being only, when truth exists, i.e. when Dasein exists? Does whether there is Being or not depend on the existence of Dasein?" (GA 24, 317) Heidegger's fundamental ontology would seem to demand that we answer this question affirmatively. Inquiring into Being we inquire after all into the way beings disclose themselves to Dasein. But does this mean that there was no Being before human beings came into existence? Heidegger's answer invites questioning: "The kind and manner, in which Being is and alone can be, prejudges nothing concerning whether and how beings can be as beings." (GA 24, 317) Earlier he had explained: "Before their discovery Newton's laws were neither true nor false. That cannot mean that the beings that are uncovered with the revealed laws before that were not so, as they showed themselves after their uncovering, and, as are showing themselves now to be. The discovering, i.e. the truth reveals beings precisely as what they already were, without regard to their being discovered or not." (GA 24, 314) To be what it is, Heidegger rightly insists, nature does not need to disclose itself to human beings, i.e, does not need truth.

But do we not want to say then that nature transcends Dasein and thus truth, which Heidegger's fundamental ontology ties inseparably to Dasein? And if we have to think nature in this way, do we not also think of Being as transcending the Dasein-dependent Being to which *Being and Time* sought to lead us?

The discussion of truth in *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, and more especially the cited Newton passage, tracks and expands on the parallel discussion in paragraphs 43 and 44 of *Being and Time.* There already Heidegger faces the need to take a step beyond an understanding of Being that makes it dependent on Dasein and thus beyond his own existential analysis. To be sure, no more than in the *Basic Problems,* does Heidegger recognize at this point a deep challenge to his project:

> But the fact that Reality is ontologically grounded in the Being of Dasein does not signify that only when Dasein exists and as long as Dasein exists, can the Real be as that which in itself it is.
>
> Of course only as long as Dasein is (that is only as long as an understanding of Being is ontically possible), 'is there' Being. When Dasein does not exist, 'independence' 'is' not either, nor 'is' the 'in-itself'. In such a case this sort of thing can be neither understood nor not understood. In such a case even entities within-the world can neither be discovered nor lie hidden. In such a case it cannot be said that entities are, nor can it be said that they are not. But now, as long as there is an understanding of Being and therefore an understanding of presence-at-hand, it can indeed be said that in this case entities will still continue to be. (SZ 212)

Like the Newton passage cited above, this would seem to force us to think "beings" as transcending "Being." But to think them in that way, must we not attribute to them some sort of transcendent Being? But if so, Heidegger warns us, such Being cannot be understood, just as the Kantian thing-in-itself resists understanding. The attempt to grasp the essence of Being here suffers shipwreck. Key to that shipwreck is what I want to call the **antinomy of Being,** which forces us, on one hand, to think Being relative to Dasein,

on the other, as transcending Dasein.[161] Heidegger had to confront this antinomy in *Being and Time*, in his attempt to think the ontological difference, the difference between beings and Being. When we approach that difference from the perspective of transcendental phenomenology we will want to say: Being is constitutive of and in this sense transcends beings. Beings can present themselves only to a being that is such as we are, a being that, embodied and dwelling in language, is open to a world in which beings have to take their place and present themselves if they are "to be" at all. And so Heidegger came to call language the house of Being. The way beings present themselves is always mediated by the body, by language, by history and founded in the being of Dasein as care. In the "Letter on Humanism" Heidegger will repeat thus the sentence: "Only as long as Dasein is, is there [gibt es] Being" (GA9, 336/216).

But Heidegger qualifies this when he speaks in par. 43 of *Being and Time* of the dependence of Being, but not of beings, of reality, but not of the real, on care, i. e., on the always understanding and caring being of human beings (SZ 211-212). In "The Letter on Humanism" this qualification becomes: "But the fact that the Da, the lighting as the truth of Being itself, comes to pass is the dispensation of Being itself…" (GA9, 336). There is therefore a sense in which beings and the real can be said to transcend that Being (Sein) which is said to be relative to Dasein. To be sure, these beings could not "be" in the first sense without human beings. Only human consciousness provides the open space, the clearing that allows things to be perceived, understood, and cared for. That space is a presupposition of the accessibility of things, of their Being. But this is not to say that we in any sense create these beings. They are given to us. Our experience of the reality of the real is thus an experience of beings as transcending Being so understood. This invites a distinction between two senses of Being, the first transcendental sense relative to Dasein and in this sense inescapably historical, the second transcendent sense, gesturing towards the ground or origin of Dasein's historical being and thus also of Being understood transcendentally. Transcendent Being dispenses "the Da, the lighting as the

---

[161] Cf. Karsten Harries, "The Antinomy of Being: Heidegger's Critique of Humanism," *The Cambridge Companion to Existentialism,* ed. Steven Crowell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 178-198. For a more developed disucssion see Karsten Harries, *Wahrheit: Die Architektur der Welt* (Paderborn: Wilhelm Fink, 2012)

truth of Being." But any attempt to lay hold of that originating ground threatens to transform it into a being, such as God, and must inevitably fail. Here our thinking bumps against the limits of language. Being refuses to be imprisoned in the house of language. And yet this ground is somehow present to us, calls us, if in silence, opening a window to transcendence in our world, a world shaped for us by the progress of philosophy, i.e. of metaphysics. The evolution of Heidegger's thought since *Being and Time* can thus be described as supplementing the silent call of conscience with the call of transcendent Being (gestured towards by his understanding of "earth"[162]), where there is a suggestion that only as a response to the latter can there be authentic speech, speech that would seem to be inseparable from authentic dwelling. To speak here of a *Kehre*, a turning, as Heidegger himself does for the first time in print in the "Letter on Humanism" (GA9, 328) is misleading in that it suggests a reversal. But, as Heidegger points out, "there has been no change of standpoint." The question of Being remains central. The so-called *Kehre* is thus better understood, as Heidegger himself here describes it, not as a philosophical advance, but as a more thoughtful attempt to attend to the matter to be thought (GA9, 343): Being. What makes it necessary is the antinomial essence of Being, which denies the thinker a foundation. The antinomy of Being shows us why we cannot dispense with something like the Kantian understanding of the essentially unknowable thing in itself as the ground of phenomena.

3

In *Being and Time*, as we saw, Heidegger insists that an adequate understanding of truth requires us to attend to "the *a priori* character of actual subjectivity. But constitutive of Dasein, as we saw last time is *Rede* (*logos*); and that *Rede*, given the facticity, including especially the historical situatedness of Dasein, is said to be essentially *Sprache*, language. So it is our language, Heidegger insists, that mediates the way things disclose themselves to us. Language thus replaces logic as opening up the realm in which things have to take their place to be experienced by us at all. Much of the thinking of the late Heidegger thus circles around language.

---

[162] See Karsten Harries, *Art Matters: A Critical Commentary on Heidegger's The Origin of the Work of Art* (New York: Springer, 2009), pp. 109-123 n.8, 7]

In *Unterwegs zur Sprache, On the Way to Language*, Heidegger tells us that he lectured on language for the first time twenty years after his *Habilitationsschrift*.

> It was at the same time that I dared discuss in a class the question of language. It was at that time that I, in class, made public my first interpretations of Hölderlin's hymns. In the summer semester of 1934, I offered a lecture series under the title 'Logic.' In fact, however, it was a reflection on the *logos,* in which I was trying to find the nature of language. Yet it took nearly another ten years before I was able to say what I was thinking — the fitting word is still lacking even today. ' (US 93/OWA 8)

This statement is both instructive and somewhat misleading. Instructive is first of all the way Heidegger links what he here terms his first lecture course dedicated to language to his first public interpretation of Hölderlin's hymns. The lecture course was later published as vol. 38 of the *Gesamtausgabe*, where it has the title *Logik als die Frage nach dem Wesen der Sprache*. *Logic as the Question in Search of the Essence of Language.* The last of the 31 paragraphs that make up this volume has the title: *Die Dichtung als die ursprüngliche Sprache*, "Poetry as Original Language." We shall have to return to that formulation.

The lecture cycle as a whole moves from an initial discussion of logic understood in the traditional sense, i.e. in the way the young Heidegger, too, like Wittgenstein and Frege, had understood it as the discipline that investigates the form and the laws of thought, to an understanding of thought as inseparably bound up with language and of language as rooted in the being of human beings, i.e. to an existential understanding of logic as the discipline that investigates the essence of language, where one important difference between the lecture of 1934 and *Being and Time* is that Heidegger now emphasizes not the solitary, authentic self that calls itself back to itself in the silent call of conscience, but emphasizes the way the "I" is always bound into a "we," where in keeping with the National Socialist jargon of the time, he identifies the "we" as the *Volk*, to whom authentic Dasein decides to belong. Belonging to such a "we" we leave behind that teleological suspension of the ethical that seems implied by Heidegger's understanding of authenticity. As Kierkegaard's Abraham returned from Mount Moriah

to rejoin his family, so Heidegger's authentic person has to return to the community.

But how is community to be understood here? Surely not as a community subject to the idle chatter of "the they." That returns us to the question: how are we to understand authentic *Rede* or discourse as opposed to inauthentic *Gerede* or idle talk? Heidegger's answer: **authentic discourse is origjnal poetry**. It is a remarkable answer that will occupy us in the remaining sessions.

And that is why he mentions in the quotation above the lecture series *Logic* together with his first public interpretation of one of Hölderlin's hymns. The reference is to the lecture course of the winter semester 1934/35, *Hölderlins Hymnen "Germanien" und "Der Rhein"*, "Hölderlin's Hymns, 'Germania' and 'The Rhine'" (GA 39). As we shall see, more and more Heidegger's thinking about language and his interpretations of the late hymns of Hölderlin were to become almost inseparable. Let me here read a remarkable statement from the much discussed *Spiegel* interview:

> HEIDEGGER: It is not for me to decide how far I will get with my attempt at thinking and in which way it will be received and productively transformed in the future. In 1957 I gave a lecture entitled "The Principle of Identity" for the anniversary of the University of Freiburg. In it I last risked showing, in a few steps of thought, the extent to which a thinking experience of what is most characteristic of modern technology can go. I attempted to show that it may go so far as opening up the possibility that human beings of the technological age experience the relationship to a demand that they can not only hear but to which they also belong. My thinking has an essential connection to Hölderlin's poetry. But I do not think Hölderlin is just any poet, whose work is a subject, among many others, for literary historians. I think Hölderlin is the poet who points toward the future, who expects the god, and who therefore cannot remain simply a subject for Hölderlin research in the literary historical imagination.[163]

Heidegger here insists that his thinking stands in a relationship to Hölderlin's poetry that

---

[163] *Martin Heidegger and National Socialism: Questions and Answers*, ed. Gunther Neske and Emil Kettering (New York: Paragon Press, 1990), p. 62.

is not to be gotten around: a remarkable statement for a philosopher to make! It reminds one of what a medieval philosopher might have said about his relationship to the Bible — and Heidegger was quite aware of that relationship. But can a philosopher claim this sort of thing without surrendering all claims to be considered a philosopher? Think of Plato's critique of the poets, especially Homer, in the *Republic*. How can Heidegger attribute to the hymns of the by then half-mad Hölderlin a significance comparable to that of Scripture?

The claim made in the *Spiegel* interview is not a claim that Heidegger could always have made. The young theologian could not have made it: his thinking then also stood in an essential relationship to a text, a text believed to be the word of God. The young logician could not have made it: he placed his work in the service of a timeless logos. The Heidegger of *Being and Time* could not have made it: the claim would seem to be incompatible with authenticity, as there analyzed. Nor could the Heidegger of 1933 have made it. The turn to Hölderlin is bound up with his turn away from National Socialism. It belongs to the year 1934.

To be sure, Heidegger had encountered Hölderlin much earlier. As he reports in "On the Way to Language"

> In 1910, Norbert von Helllingrath, who was killed in action before Verdun in 1916, first published Hölderlin's Pindar translations from the manuscripts. In 1914, there followed the first publication of Hölderlin's late hymns. These two books hit us students like an earthquake. Stefan George, who had first directed Hellingrath's attention to Hölderlin, now in turn received decisive inspiration from those first editions, as did Rilke. (OWL 78)

Heidegger, as I pointed out earlier, at that time was engaged in logical studies in a way that invites comparison with the work of Wittgenstein or Frege, where it would be interesting to compare the language of these early logical writings to that of his poems of the time, such as *Abendgang auf der Reichenau*. The language of the dissertation is by its very nature translatable. Poetry is finally untranslatable.

To understand what lets Heidegger claim that his thinking stands in an absolutely essential relationship to the poetry of Hölderlin we have to gain not only a deeper

understanding of Hölderlin's poetry, but also have to keep in mind the progress of Heidegger's thinking, more especially the evolution of his thinking of *logos* (*Rede*). We have to take seriously Heidegger's self-description in a letter to Löwith (August 19, 1921) as a "Christian theo-logian."[164] It points to what Heidegger, from the very beginning sought in "logic": a world-orientation. As Theodore Kisiel points out, "One could" indeed "easily write a whole book characterizing Heidegger's entire career as that of a 'logician.'" [165] Such a book should consider carefully what Kisiel has to say about the submissive dedication that according to the young Heidegger is demanded of the phenomenologist: "a nonreflective categorial immersion or absorption (*Hingabe*) rather than an inspection (*Hinsicht*)." Kisiel points to Emil Lask who used *Hingabe* "to describe our immediate experience of forms of life (like values), in which we are already 'given over' (*hingegeben*) to them."[166] But without denying Heidegger's profound indebtedness to Lask, the term *Hingabe* is quite ordinary German and such submissive self-surrender is demanded by Heidegger already in his first publications, not yet of the phenomenologist, to be sure, but of the logician. Such a book on Heidegger as logician would also have trace the necessities of thought that led Heidegger to his progressive temporalization of the logos, first in language and finally in a privileged sense in the work of some poetic or prophetic genius, where, as *Hingabe* suggests, what is at issue is freedom and what might bind its excessive projection of possibilities: from beginning to end, problems of logic for Heidegger, as for Wittgenstein, are also problems of ethics.

4

The truth of discourse, according to Heidegger is its power to reveal (cf. SZ 218). Idle talk has lost this revelatory power, constituting itself in a *Nach- und Weiterreden*, in "gossiping and passing along" (SZ 168). But as such it must derive from a more fundamental speaking. Usually, to understand something means something like placing it into a context of ordinary language, i.e of idle talk. When this happens, "Entities have not been completely hidden; they are precisely the sort of thing that has been uncovered,

---

[164] Theodore Kisiel, *The Genesis of Heidegger's Being and Time* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995), pp. 7, 78, 287.
[165] Ibid., p.398.
[166] Ibid., p.499.

but at the same time they have been disguised.“ (SZ 222) In idle talk the revealed is at the same time veiled. I understand things as "one" does, as this or that. Proximally and most of the time the existential-hermeneutic "as" is part of the structure of *Gerede*. Belonging to *Gerede*, it shares in its ambiguity. To understand things as one does is to overlook what is distinctive about my particular situation.

This ambiguity is indeed inescapable. It is due to the fact that human being, while on one hand the individual’s own, is also a being with others. The former leads to the demand that, if understanding is to be authentic, my understanding has to be my own; but if man is essentially with others, I must be able to share what I understand with others. The ambiguity of language is a function of the tension between authenticity and community pointed out above. To communicate with others, we must speak as one speaks even if to do so we have to do violence to what makes our experience our own. I pointed this out earlier when discussing assertion: all my attempts to provide a fully adequate description of the tree I see outside my window must fail. But this inadequacy is only a special case of the inadequacy that marks language as it is proximally and most of the time. Consider again the expression "I love you.” A cliché no doubt, incapable of doing justice to what is to be expressed. And yet it can communicate love, just as it can be no more than a hollow, polite phrase. What distinguishes the two? In the latter case we might say: “he does not really mean it." But what sense can we make of saying some thing and really meaning it? Can we tell just by looking at the phrase? Do we not need its setting, the way it functions in a given situation? In such a situation it may well lose its ambiguity. Language becomes ambiguous when what is said loses touch with the situation in which it is said. Just as a proposition like "there is a red book in this room" was seen to be in danger of losing its meaning when taken out of context, so all discourse turns ambiguous to the extent that it loses its roots in a particular situation. And yet, there must be some of this if language is to communicate at all. For this reason language will always tend to place itself like a veil over the world in which we find ourselves. This would be harmless if the being of man were not so tied to language, that the rootlessness of language tends to be coupled with a rootless way of life.

Heidegger makes the emancipation of language from its setting the foundation of the traditional understanding of the truth and falsity of judgments. Only with this

emancipation does the problem of the relation of language to something else, to something that gives it its point, or makes it true, appear. "The assertion which is expressed is about something, and in what it is about it contains the uncoveredness of these entities. This uncoveredness is preserved in what is expressed. What is expressed becomes, as it were, something ready-to-hand within-the-world which can be taken up and spoken again" (SZ 224). This makes it possible to speak of things without really encountering what is spoken of. "In a large measure uncoveredness gets appropriated not by one's own uncovering, but rather by hearsay of something that has been said. Absorption in something that has been said belongs to the kind of Being which the 'they' possesses" (SZ 224). Only in this sense can most of us know that Vaduz is the capital of Liechtenstein or that Alexander won the Battle of Issus in 333 B.C. or that there is starvation in Nigeria. In all these cases doubt concerning the truth of such statements is possible. Do these propositions really represent what is as it is? And only now does truth come into play, understood as a correspondence between language and reality.

"Die Entdecktheit des Seienden rückt mit der Ausgesprochenheit der Aussage in die Seinsart des innerweltlich Zuhandenen. Sofern sich aber in ihr als Entdecktheit von … ein Bezug zu Vorhandenem durchhält, wird die Entdecktheit (Wahrheit) ihrerseits zu einer vorhandenen Beziehung zwischen Vorhandenen (intellectus und res)." "When assertion has been expressed, the uncoveredness of the entity moves into the kind of Being of that which is ready-to-hand within-the-world. But now to the extent that in this uncoveredness, as an uncoverednes of something, a relationship to something present-at-hand persists, the uncoveredness (truth) becomes for its part, a relationship between things which are present-at-hand (*intellectus* and *res*)" (SZ 225).

What Heidegger has to say about the truth of assertions can be extended to all idle talk. We become uncertain about the true meaning of such phrases as "what a beautiful hat you are wearing" or "I am terribly tired tonight" or "I love you" only when language loses its moorings in concrete situations and as a result begins to drift and becomes ambiguous.

Is such ambiguity avoidable? It is easy to imagine a jealous lover who insists on professions of love and yet fails to be convinced. There are no expressions that can allay his doubts. The other remains concealed. Not only what

she says, but her entire way of life have become ambiguous to him. In spite of all our attempts, we cannot make sure of the other. Here, too, revelation and concealment go together.

18. Poetry

1

Poetry, Heidegger maintains, is not a late luxury that presupposes other language; on the contrary, language is said have its foundation in poetry. To approach this thesis it is perhaps best, at least initially, not to think of poetry in the usual sense, but to take seriously Heidegger's definition of poetry as "the inaugural naming of being and the essence of all things, not just any speech, but that particular kind which for the first time brings into the open all that which we then discuss and deal with in everyday language." (E 40)[167] From this it follows that "poetry never takes language as a raw material ready to hand, rather it is poetry that first makes language possible." (E 40)

But is this definition more than an arbitrary construction? To give a first answer to this question it is not necessary to decide whether Heidegger has done justice to what we usually call poetry. At issue is only the thesis that language has its foundation in a speaking that is, as Heidegger calls it, "an inaugural naming of being and the essence of all things." It seems difficult not to go at least some distance with Heidegger. If everyday language is language that has come to be taken for granted, must it not have its foundation in language that is not yet taken for granted?[168] Consider Wittgenstein's' language-games. They present themselves to us as something that has already been established. But how are language-games established? Unfortunately Wittgenstein has little to say on this issue. Those few remarks in the *Investigations* that touch on it point in Heidegger's direction: "To invent a language could mean to invent an instrument for a particular purpose on the basis of the laws of nature (or consistently with them); but it also has the other sense, analogous to that in which we speak of the invention of a game." (PI 492) To liken the invention of a language to the invention of an instrument is to presuppose that the inventor already knows what he wants to do; this knowledge enables him to measure the success of his invention. Language here has its measure outside itself. But Wittgenstein denies that we can evaluate the success of ordinary language in

---

[167] Martin Heidegger, "Hölderlin und das Wesen der Dichtung," (Hölderlin and the Essence of Poetry), Erläuterungen zu Hölderlins Dichtung (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1971), abbreviated as E in the text, reprinted as GA 4, 1981.
[168] Cf. Johann Gottfried Herder, *Abhandlung über den Ursprung der Sprache*, 1772.

this way. It follows that its establishment cannot be likened to the invention of an instrument. As the term "language-game" suggests, it is more like the invention of a game. It is, as Heidegger calls poetry, "free establishment" (E 38). Only where there is such free establishment can there be real novelty, for as long as we remain caught up in established language-games, whatever can happen has already been sort of taken care of by our language. To, meet with something really new is to meet with something we have not yet taken care of. We have no place for it in our linguistic space. To understand it we must refuse to take already established language for granted and become poets in Heidegger' s' sense. Perhaps this is what Wittgenstein hints at when he writes: "What is new (spontaneous, 'specific') is always a language-game." (PI, xi)

This argument, that established language must have its foundation in an act of establishment, although not found in *Being nd Time*, is demanded by what is said there. When Heidegger writes that idle talk constitutes itself in a "Nach- und Weiterreden," a "gossiping and passing along" (SZ 168), such a formulation forces one almost to think of a more original way of speaking, even if this thought may be difficult to reconcile with two of Heidegger's theses: 1. das Gerede ist "die Seinsart des Miteinanderseins selbst," "Idle talk is the kind of Being that belongs to Being-with-one –another itself" (SZ 177), and 2. "Sofern Dasein überhaupt ist, hat es die Seinsart des Miteinanderseins" "So far as Dasein is at all, it has Being-with-one-another as its kind of Being." (SZ 125)

2

But suppose we grant that everyday language is idle talk, and that idle talk must have its foundation in a more fundamental speaking; still, why should we seek this foundation in poetry? Such an undertaking would be arbitrary were it not suggested by language itself.

To think the essence of language, Heidegger remarks, we have to consider language. True but trivial, we are inclined to say, for isn't the question precisely" what is language? Heidegger 's answer is puzzling: "Language itself is— language and nothing besides. Language itself is language" (US 12, tr. PLT, 190). A meaningless tautology? If so, a tautology that has its precedents: I am reminded of Cusanus' discussions of the *non aliud,* the not-other: why is the earth earth? he asked: Because it is nothing other than the

earth. Cusanus used such seemingly empty formulations to point out that we fail to do full justice to the things we encounter as long as we apply the only rough measures provided by language, or, to use the formulation of the preceding session, as long as we insist on placing them into a pre-established and taken for granted context. By leading us away from the phenomenon to be interpreted to a place on some conceptual map, such interpretation threatens to distort and hide what was to be revealed. This forbids itself especially in the case of what is supposed to be fundamental speech. To guard against this, Heidegger insists on the obvious: Language is language. This proposition does not lead us to some other thing in which language is founded. It also says nothing about whether language is itself a ground for other things. (US 13, tr. PLT 191)

Language is: language. "*Language* speaks." (US 13, tr. PLT 190)

Heidegger himself raises an obvious objection: Language speaks? Isn't it rather man who speaks using language? Implicit in these questions is the contrast between a view that makes man the master of language, which he uses as his instrument, and another, more fundamental understanding, that makes language the master of man.[169] The problem of a realistic versus a transcendental interpretation of language reappears here. From all that has been said in the preceding sessions, it should be clear that Heidegger does want to assert that man's being in the world is constituted by language. Language grants man the space where he can dwell. Elsewhere Heidegger calls language the house of Being. (US 107, tr. OWL 22) Walking through this house, we encounter the things of the world. For Heidegger, too, the limits of my language are the limits of my world. But since we are usually concerned with what is, rather than with the linguistic space in which whatever is must find its place, language is easily passed over. (HW 60-61, tr. PLT 73-74)

Where should we look for the essence of language? Again Heidegger gives a seemingly trivial answer: most likely in what has been said. (US 16, tr. PLT 194) But is this not to be found everywhere? Why turn to poetry? Why not to the shouts of the policeman at the street corner, or to a student's question, or to this morning's breakfast conversation? — "Did you read about those Canadian students who got themselves killed sleeping on some railroad track? Curious place to spend the night. You would think they

---

[169] Çf. VA, pp. 146, 190; Also Hum, p. 52)

would have noticed the shiny rails. There are really quite a few trains on that line. Could I have another piece of toast, please" —

Does language reveal itself as, language in such conversations? Certainly not to those conversing! Thus in this remembered fragment of a conversation there was talk of some Canadian students, death, and toast. Language was taken for granted.

But what about now? Now that I point out that in a particular situation language was being taken for granted, I am no longer taking it for granted. Reflection creates a distance that helps us recognize language for what it is, in this particular case quite obviously idle talk. This recognition presupposes at least same awareness of what would be a more genuine speaking. It should be possible to depend on this awareness in our search for a better example.

But perhaps the fault lies not so much with the particular example chosen as with the general stance that has been adopted. We are looking at language as something that has occurred and thus from the outside. What is only past can have no more than ontic status. If 1anguage comes into view as past and done with, it will necessarily be understood as part of the world, not as that which lets man dwell in the world. Also: what is only past, no longer speaks to us. To speak to us the past must enter the present.

Different though it is, this point is not altogether unrelated to the preceding example. Idle talk, we said, is discourse that presupposes language as already established. This establishment has happened and is no longer happening. Idle talk thus has its foundation in the past and fails to do full justice to present and future. If we are to find language that reveals the essence of language, such language must be an establishing, not something already established. This suggests that we should try to grasp language as it is now occurring. But when we try to do so, do we not succeed only when the speaking has passed and given way to the spoken? How is this to be avoided?

> If, for this reason, we have to search for the speaking of language in the spoken, we will do well, instead of arbitrarily picking something spoken, to find something purely spoken (*rein Gesprochenes*). The purely spoken is that, in which the completion (*Vollendung*) of speaking, which belongs to the spoken, is, as it is concerned, beginning (*eine anfangende*). (US 16, tr. PLT 194)

Rein Gesprochenes belongs, like all *Gesprochenes,* to the past. As life completes itself in death, so speaking completes itself in the spoken. The speech is complete only when speaking is no longer. But to reveal the essence of language, we must escape from the domination of the past. Heidegger thus adds this modification: in the case of the purely spoken, the spoken presents itself not only as completed, but also as beginning.

What are we to make of this? How can what has already been spoken be itself a first speaking? Only if we cannot relegate it to the past, if what this speaking establishes resists being assigned its place in what has already been established. This is to say, t he purely spoken cannot be said without loss in another way. What is expressed is "expressed only by these 'words in these positions." (PI 531) The purely spoken is thus irreplaceable. But this is not enough. If the purely spoken is to be ever beginning, we can never be done with it. Each time we read or hear what has been said, the task of listening and interpreting begins again. This is possible only if in this case the spoken has not become autonomous of the speaking. It presents itself not only as completed, but also as just beginning and still ahead of us. In the spoken the speaking is preserved. The past is recovered as future.

Without speaking of poetry, our discussion has moved in the direction of traditional determinations of its essence. To see more clearly why Heidegger seeks the essence of language in poetry, let us approach this identity again, this time not from the side of language, but from that of poetry.

3

. Heidegger's description of the place of the poet is twofold:

1. The poet is said to be taking leave from the many and from their ways of speaking.

2. The poet's speaking is said to determine man's place.

Although Heidegger's first interpretation of the essence of poetry in "Hölderlin und das Wesen der Dichtung" emphasizes the latter, I shall begin with the former as in a sense more basic, for all establishment of new language-games, presupposes that we have taken leave from the old.

Heidegger's essay "Die Sprache im Gedicht" "Language in the Poem" provides first of all an interpretation of Georg Trakl's poetry, beyond this a determination of the essence of modern poetry, and, perhaps least obviously, a general insight into the essence of poetry. As we shall see, this insight is only partial. This again is no accident, but reflects Trakl' s historic place: in this age of need, — as Heidegger calls it, following Hölderlin — poetry cannot realize its full essence.[170]

Heidegger interprets the place of Trakl's poetry as die *Abgeschiedenhei*t, which Peter D. Hertz translates as "apartness." "All saying of the poems of Georg Trakl remains centered on the wandering stranger. He is and is called *der Abgeschiedene*. Through and around him the poetic saying is tuned to a single song. Because the poems of this poet are gathered into the song of the *Abgeschiedene,* we call the place of his poetry die *Abgeschiedenheit*." (US 52, tr. OWL 172)

Who is *der Abgeschiedene*? What is this *Abgeschiedenheit* of which Heidegger speaks? A first answer to both, is provided by fragments taken from Trakl's poetry. Interpreting them, Heidegger understands the *Abgeschiedene* as one who has taken leave from others: the *Abgeschiedene* is no longer with us. He stands alone and separate.

Still interpreting Trakl, Heidegger calls what the *Abgeschiedene* has left behind, *der bisherige Mensch*, man as he has been up to now. "Man as he has been falls apart *(verfällt*), in so far as he loses his essence (*Wesen*), i.e. decays (verwest)." (US 46, tr. OWL 167)

Verfällt recalls Heidegger' s thesis in *Being and Time* that being with others man is essentially falling (*verfallend*), a falling that also marks his language. This, as we have seen, is to be expected: to become the property of several, language must "make itself common" (E 34-35), must become idle talk. Losing himself in the common, man loses his essence i.e. decays. Here and elsewhere it becomes clear that words that have no normative function as long as fundamental ontology remains divorced from the thinker's own project, acquire such a function when related to that project, so already in the second part of *Being and Time* and in subsequent works. Authenticity becomes a task. We are asked to follow the call of conscience that calls man from beyond the world of the many.

---

[170] Cf. Karsten Harries, 'Das befreite Nichts," *Durchblicke. Martin Heidegger zum 80. Geburtstag* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1970), pp. 39 - 62.

The *Abgeschiedene,* too, follows this call. Obedient to it, he loses touch with common sense, as it is stored in the prevailing language-games. Measured by this sense, what he thinks is nonsense. Thus he may look to us like a madman. Der *Abgeschiedene* is therefore also *der Wahnsinnige*. "The madman thinks (*sinnt*), and he even thinks with an intensity shared by no one else. But he remains without the sense (*Sinn*) of the others. He is of another mind (*Sinn*). '*Sinnan*' means originally to travel, to strive for … to take a certain direction; the indogermanic root *sent* and *set* means way. He who has taken leave is also the madman, because he is on his way to quite another place." (US 53, tr. OWL, 173)

Where is the *Abgeschiedene* going? His going is said to be a going under, a going unto death. (US 46, tr. OWL 167): yet this going under is not disintegration or destruction. "Losing himself, he disappears in (*in der),* but in no way into the (*in die*) destruction wrought by November. He glides through it, away into the spiritual twilight of the blue, to 'vesper' i.e. towards evening." (US 51, tr. OWL 171)

Again many of the words Heidegger uses are borrowed from Trakl. As so often when reading the late Heidegger, the reader may well wish for a more precise statement or a translation. But although this interpretation will attempt to provide such a translation, a warning is in order: what does it mean to offer a translation? To do so we have to use words that have their place in some already established language-game, i.e. words whose meaning is already constituted by their use. Thus there is always the danger that instead of leading us closer to what is to be thought, translation will cause us to take it for granted. By using a "vaguer," more poetic vocabulary, Heidegger guards against this; he forces us to struggle with the words we are given. And only as long as this struggle is preserved, is reading also genuine thinking.

The *Abgeschiedene* is said to disappear "*zwar in der*," but not "in die *Novemberzerstörung*." What does *Novemberzerstörung* mean here? November is that time of year, when what has been established by the preceding seasons is torn away. It is the time of the approaching end. It is thus related to death and dread, which in *Being and Time* are said to involve a fading away of the familiar world: "The 'world' can offer nothing more, and neither can the Dasein-with of Others" (SZ 187). Anxiety thus appears to destroy all that gives our life meaning, at least as long as we seek this meaning

in the world. By his readiness to take leave from the world, the *Abgeschiedene* escapes destruction. He moves through it, towards evening. "Evening" recalls November, but it suggests something more gentle; it also suggests more strongly the thought of repetition — an evening is one of many. Night, which follows evening, is not only the end of day, but also a period of rest that prepares for a new beginning. Night here means that which is prior and posterior to all establishment. Out of it all establishment arises only to sink back into it.

Confronting us with the fact that things cannot go on as they have, evening lets us see things differently. Again like dread, evening creates a distance from established ways of life and speech that reveals them to have their ground in the night, although perhaps we should not speak here of "ground" in that it withdraws whenever an attempt is made to grasp it. This ground is unlike what traditional philosophizing sought when it asked for a ground, a firmly established foundation for further construction. If ground is understood in this way, the night is not *Grund*, but *Abgrund*, abyss.

The journey of the *Abgeschiedene* has led him beyond the established and taken for granted back to what preceded its establishment. Since for man to be is to be with others, having his place in some established order, the *Abgeschiedene* cannot be. He is no longer or not yet. Thus he is called both dead and unborn.

It should have become clear that when speaking of the *Abgeschiedene* Heidegger and Trakl are not speaking of an individual who could ever exist. Perhaps we come closer to what they have in mind if we take the *Abgeschiedene* to be the impossible ideal of an existence fully obedient to the call of conscience in *Being and Time*. Certainly the *Abgeschiedene* is not the poet. The poet only follows his call. "The poet becomes poet only in so far as he follows that 'madman' who died away into the time of the beginning (*die Frühe*) and from that place for which he has left (*Abgeschiedenheit*) calls with melodious steps the brother following him." (US 73, tr. OWL 191) Using the language of *Being and Time* we can perhaps say, the poet has chosen the *Abgeschiedene* for his hero (cf. SZ 385). This choice is a choice to journey away from the established community into the night. Poetry communicates this choice. The language of poetry thus has its

place in between idle talk and silence.[171] It is the recovery of silence in the midst of idle talk. As this recovery, poetry presupposes familiar language. Thus we seem to know what the words of the poet mean, yet those familiar words no longer function as they usually do — we know and don't know what is being said. In poetry language reveals its essential ambiguity. The poem places what it names before a background of silence, yet not to hide that background, as would idle talk, but to return us to it. Thus its life resides in the tension of the named and the unnamed.

The poem is like the vesper bell that breaks the silence of everything and yet in breaking it lets us hear it; or again like the steps of one disappearing into the night.

---

[171] Cf. Ungaretti's suggestion that the poem should be like a brief tearing of silence. Mallarmé similarly argued that ideally a poem should be silent, white.

19. The Ontological Difference and the Holy

1

In *Being and Time* Heidegger understands authentic Dasein as being resolutely until death. This must have made him receptive for the poet Georg Trakl's description of the *Abgeschiedene,* the one whe has departed and is underway, journeying towards death, into the night. The poet is said to follow the example of the *Abgeschiedene*.

Following Trakl, Heidegger calls the *geistliche Nacht* holy. (US 44; tr. OWL 165) The poet's walk into the night can thus be interpreted as a recovery of the holy. This formulation permits us to tie the discussion in *Unterwegs zur Sprache to* the earlier determination of poetry that is found in *Erläuerungen zu Hölderlin Dichtung*, where the poet, and following him Heidegger, similarly invokes the holy.

In "Heimkunft/An die Verwandten" poetry is said to be a home-coming (E 24)."Homecoming is the return to the proximity of the origin " (E 23). What does "**origin**" mean here? Heidegger calls Dasein the clearing of Being. Human being is said to have its origin in a clearing. This origin is now equated with the holy.[172] Poetry, Heidegger suggests, leads us into the clearing that heals us (*heilt)* i.e. makes us entire or whole *(heil*). As such this clearing is said to be the holy (*das Heilige*). To call poetry a first homecoming is to suggest that it is a journey towards the holy.

All this may seem darkly suggestive, but no more. Why is the clearing that which heals? And why does Heidegger call it the holy, using a term with obvious religious connotations? The answer to the first question has already been given: the human being, we said, is essentially spirit. As such he transcends his usual place in the world, opens himself to the past and to the future, and that is to say also unto death, and that is to say also to the night, which envelops him and circumscribes his being. What lets man become whole is this openness to his mortality, i.e. to the night, which is part of man's

---

[172] "Wir nennen nach einem älteren Wort unserer Muttersprache das reine Lichtende, das jedem 'Raum' und jedem 'Zeitraum' erst das Offene' einräumt' und d.h. hier gewährt, 'die Heitere '. Sie ist in einem zumal die Klarheit (*claritas*), in deren Helle alles Klare ruht, und die Hoheit (*serenitas*), in deren Strenge alles Hohe steht, und die Frohheit (*hilarita*s), in deren Spiel alles Freigelöste schwingt. Die Heitere behält und hat alles 1m Unverstörten und Heilen. Die Heitere heilt *ursprünglich*. Sie ist das Heilige." (E 18)

essence as the clearing of Being. Is Heidegger's talk about the holy then simply a translation of something already familiar from *Being and Time* into the language of Hölderlin?

In another place Heidegger calls the holy the essence of nature[173] (E 58). This essence is said to find expression in the Greek word *phusis*. *Phusis* Heidegger interprets to mean "the rising (*Aufgehen*) into the open, the clearing of that clearing in which alone anything can appear, place itself into its contour, show itself in its 'appearance' (*eidos, idea*), and thus be present as this or that" (E 55). Things can present themselves as being this or that only where there is something like an open space. Heidegger attempts to point towards what is presupposed with the word clearing. *Aufgehen* suggests seeds sprouting, plants rising out of the ground emergence into the light, disclosure of the hidden. Disclosure, according to Heidegger, is the essence of truth. Thus nature is said to be "das Wahre des Seienden," "the 'truth of beings"[174] (E 127).

This again is identified with *das Seyn*, where the archaic spelling is used to refer, not simply to Being, understood as the presencing of things, but to point also to the ground of such presencing, to an event of epiphany or disclosure. The later Heidegger speaks of the *Ereignis*. In the *Humanismusbrief* Heidegger thus insists that "only from the truth of Being can the essence of the holy be thought" (W 181). "Nature," "The truth of being" and "the holy" would thus appear to point towards the same. We sense the holy when we are struck by the always unique presence of things.[175] Heidegger tends to link the holy to both, the clearing, which is the origin of Dasein, of human being-there, and the truth of Being, which is the essence of nature. The two are indeed inseparable. If truth is disclosure, the truth of Being is the disclosure of beings, their presencing. Disclosure requires openness or a clearing. This clearing is provided by the ecstatic being of man. The essence of truth can thus not be divorced from the essence of man understood as spirit.

Disclosure is never simply a disclosure of presence, but always disclosure of the

---

173 Martin Heidegger, "Wie wenn am Feiertage…"
174 Martin Heideger, "Andenken"
175 Cf. Wittgenstein's understanding of the mystical.

presence of particular things. Being reveals itself in beings. Heidegger calls the gap that separates beings from Being, understood as the mode of their presencing, the **ontological difference** (*ontologische Differenz*). This gap is constitutive of the truth of Being. Thus, if poetry is a recovery of the holy, it must also be a recovery of the ontological difference. Perhaps this is just another way of saying that poetry places what it names (and thus fixes) before a background of silence. But before we can decide whether this is indeed the case, we have to consider in more detail the meaning of the ontological difference.

In the development of Heidegger's thought this difference has its origin in the distinction between the ontic and the logical that preoccupied the young Heidegger. Consider the difference between the seen blue of the sky and the meaning "blue," that is the difference between what we see and the meaning of the seen, or, more generally, the difference between individual beings and what is constitutive of these beings, their being. In the *Habilitationsschrift* an attempt was made to exhibit the most general structures constitutive of beings in the transcendentals of medieval philosophy: *unum*, *verum*, *bonum*. They are thought to be constitutive of every *ens* or being. Gathering *unum*, *verum*, and *bonum* together. The being of these beings can thus be considered the most fundamental of the transcendentals (Hab. 158, GA 1, 216). Even in the *Habilitationsschrift* we have thus something like the ontological difference, separating Being from beings.

In these early works the difference presents itself to us first of all as the difference between the ontic and the logical, that is to say, between facts or other objects and what is constitutive of them or what was called formal transcendence. There is, however, that other difference Wittgenstein points to when he opposes to how or *wha*t something is *that* it is. The difference here is one between the essence of some fact and its existence. If we were to take this hint, Being should be interpreted as material transcendence.

But what the later Heidegger means by "Being" cannot be understood adequately either in terms of the *ens* of the *Habilitationsschrift*, nor in terms of the mystical of the *Tractatus*. Not only must we keep in mind that Heidegger has tried to think beyond the reduction to presence-at-hand which underlies his own earlier logical investigations — as well as Wittgenstein's understanding of the mystical; more important in this context is that Heidegger's Being combines features of material and formal transcendence, if in

altered form. Thus it helps to close the gap between form and matter, as was demanded in the *Habilitationsschrift*.

What has been said so far about the ontological difference provides little more than a few hints. The meaning of what Heidegger has in mind when he speaks of Being remains obscure. And this, as he does not tire to remind us, is no accident. What normally occupies us is only one side of the ontological difference. Our concern with beings lets us pass over Being, i.e. the mode of their presencing. Just this makes its recovery a task. Things present themselves and thus speak to us in almost infinite ways: of the uses to which they may be put, of the care we owe them, and of other people. A toy left in the garden, a worn tire, a half-written letter — we understand these things because we find ourselves in contexts of care which permit us to take their meaning for granted. But there are moments when the meaning of things long taken for granted suddenly evaporates. We become detached; things lose their claim on us. And as things become mute, what they are becomes a matter of indifference. Their opaque, gratuitous presence turns more insistent as their ordinary meaning collapses in dread or anxiety. ("Anxiety" is how Macquarrie and Robinson translate the German *Angst*. While closer to the German, I find "dread" less stilted and shall use it. Lowrie thus used 'dread" when he translated Kierkegaard's *Begrebet Angest, The Concept of Dread*.)

What is it that man dreads? If dread lets us lose touch with all the things of our world, it cannot have its origin somewhere within this world. Unlike fear, dread has no definite object. Man is in dread of a nothingness that seems to invade his world. But can we really speak of an invasion? Does this nothingness come from beyond, or has the invader been with us all the all the time and is only now noticed? This is indeed so. As we have seen, if there is to be experience, if beings are to present themselves, there must be that clearing which is the essence of man. Using the language of traditional philosophy, keeping in mind the reductions involved, we can restate the point in the following way: consciousness is essentially of something — in becoming conscious of an object I place it before me. This is what *Vor-stellung*. means. But in placing an object before me I do not create it. I let it appear. The objects I encounter are appearances.[176]

---

[176] Cf. Hugo von Hofmannsthal's profound description of the disintegration of our language and its meanings in the Lord Chandos Letter.

What appears must be at a distance, must be other. A condition of the possibility of the appearance of objects is that there is a distance that separates us from what is to appear to us. Distance requires something like a space or an openness, a clearing. This clearing can be considered a transcendental condition of the possibility of appearances.

How are we to characterize it further? We know at least this much, it cannot be an entity, for all entities presuppose it as a condition of their presencing, i.e. of what Heidegger calls their being. It is then not anything and in this sense nothing. Beings appear against the horizon of nothingness, as just happening to be. It is this nothingness that calls itself to our attention" in dread. Dread thus reveals something like the ontological difference.

But why should this nothingness, which functions as a transcendental condition of the possibility of experience, also be the source of dread? Perhaps a comparison can shed more light on what ties the two together. Dread, I want to suggest, is related to what was earlier called a vision of the world *sub specie possibilitatis*. To see something *sub specie possibilitatis* is to see it as happening to occupy a certain place in logical space, thus as groundless and arbitrary. This vision, too, requires something like an awareness of difference between facts and logical space, essentially the same difference that emerges in Heidegger's *Habilitationsschrift*. But if this comparison is to be more than superficial there must be an essential tie between what was just called "the horizon of nothingness" and what Wittgenstein calls logical space, or, more obviously perhaps, the analogous conception of a logical realm that Heidegger discusses in his *Habilitationsschrift*.

It is easy enough to point to similarities: the logical realm, too, furnishes a transcendental condition for the possibility of experience: if anything is to become present, it must present itself in logical space. Also: the metaphor "space" suggests an open expanse, a clearing. But the dissimilarities are just as striking: the logical realm possesses a very definite structure; it is a space of interrelated meanings.

The connection that ties the conception of a logical realm to what Heidegger later calls "the clearing" becomes more obvious when we ask: what, on the earlier view, is the being of these meanings that determine the structure of the logical realm? Meanings, we said, are essentially constitutive of known reality; or, as the young Heidegger put it, a meaning is the sort of thing that can be true of some fact. Thus meaning stands in an

essential relationship to truth. To say of meanings that they can be true of facts, is to say also that they transcend facts. Constitutive of meanings is this transcendence, which is itself not just another meaning, because the realm of meanings has its foundation it it. "To transcend" is to go beyond; to go beyond is to establish a distance, an openness. We are thus returned to Heidegger' s conception of *Daein* as the clearing of Being. This clearing, we can now say, is the foundation of logical space. To grant this point we do not have to decide whether there is only one such space, or whether it is perhaps one of many possible spaces established by different languages. What we have shown is only that without the clearing of Being there could be no language. Language lets us transcend reality towards meaning and to this extent lets us fall out of the world. It is this falling out of the world that dread reveals.

Beings, it was argued, appear against a horizon of nothingness. An awareness of this horizon invites what Heidegger calls the fundamental question: why is there anything at all? Why not rather: nothing? The answer to this question cannot be found by appealing to other things, e.g. a first cause, such as the God of traditional ontology. Such a cause would be another entity and as such within the world. Heidegger' s fundamental question, however, questions the dimension of beings in its entirety, thus calling our attention to the mystery of presence, to what Wittgenstein called they mystical. An answer, if there is to be an answer at all, can be furnished only by pointing beyond beings to Being.

But is being not just the presencing of beings? The answer to Heidegger's fundamental question seems to reduce to the empty: beings are because they are. Thus it only serves to reinforce the question. But what is the ground of their presencing? We need to distinguish between being (*Sein*) understood as the mode of the presencing of beings and Being (*Seyn*) as the ground of such presencing.

Whatever this Being may be, it cannot be understood as another being. In this sense, it, too, it is not anything, and thus nothing. Again nothing appears as the foundation of entities. But the "nothing" that provides the openness necessary if there is to be disclosure and the "nothing" to which one is led in the attempt to answer the fundamental question cannot have the same significance. While both call in silence, the former is empty, the latter full; the former is closer to formal transcendence, the latter

closer to material transcendence. Following Hölderlin, Heidegger calls one light, the other earth.

Earlier we interpreted the object of knowledge as the product of an imposition of form on an otherwise opaque matter. The presence of objects has its foundation in that imposition. In his later works Heidegger uses a similar image, only that now, instead of opposing the subject imposing form to matter, light is opposed to earth. But since light is the essence of spirit, the formulations are closer than the difference in vocabulary might suggest. Beings are established in the contest of earth and light, which is the essence of Being. Were it not for this contest there could be no consciousness, since consciousness is essentially a clearing, an island of negativity in an otherwise opaque material. Nothingness is part of the essence of Being. It is constitutive of being as presence and makes it possible for Being to be present in beings. This ambivalence of Being is the foundation of the ontological difference.

As these comments imply, we would misunderstand Heidegger were we to make Being (*Seyn*) into what has been called material transcendence. It is perhaps more accurate to say the opposite, the meaning of Being is presence; as such it is closer to immanence than to transcendence. Yet this formulation is also misleading. For as Heidegger insists, Epiphany and concealment go together. Being essentially eludes our grasp. Thus it has a transcendent aspect.

Immanence and transcendence name two sides of Being, one side turned towards us, the other away from us. As we argued earlier, to account for the givenness of entities, and beyond that, for the facticity of our own being, we have to recognize the transcendence of Being. Heidegger evokes this aspect when he speaks of *Seyn*. To account for the truth or disclosure of beings, we have to place Being in an essential relationship to Dasein, recalling Berkeley's e*sse est percipi*. Heidegger evokes this aspect when he speaks of *Sein.* So understood Being presupposes the clearing. But this is a one-sided understanding. More adequately understood, Being is transcendence within immanence. It is like a mountain ridge, separating and linking what we can see and what remains hidden, or like a forest clearing, where forest and light mingle, or again like evening, joining night and day. As such it is grasped and yet always eludes our grasp.

I asked "what is it that man dreads?" and in answer pointed to a nothingness that

seems to invade the world. Equally well I could have said, man is in dread of himself. To understand man as spirit is to understand him as transcending the particular claims, with which the world presents him, beyond meaning and value, is to understand him as essentially **free.** As free spirit man is subject to dread. Were he to become only spirit, he would be no more than a stranger in an alien and indifferent world. No reason would be left to do this rather than that and this weightlessness of things would issue in the paralyzing question: why do anything at all? Faced with such a radical freedom, man may well choose the flight into self-deception and inauthenticity, in dread of his own ghostlike essence.

And yet, dread does not destroy all meaning. The very fact that man is in dread of dread reveals that he continues to be concerned for himself. Otherwise the lack of meaning would be a matter of indifference to him, rather than cause for despair. Dread reveals **care**. It is this recognition that the meaninglessness of the world does not seem to entail the meaninglessness of human existence, that permits someone like Sartre to claim that man possesses the strength to posit values in a meaningless world. But can the world and man be divorced in this way, especially if, with Heidegger we take man to be essentially in the world? If everything in the world is worthless, must man not judge himself worthless, too? To point out that as spirit man transcends the world does not help matters; for far from establishing the human being as his own foundation spirit reveals to him that has not chosen himself, that he has been cast into a strange world, apparently without higher reason. Is this being not an accident, a matter of indifference? And yet man cares for himself, without justification and without requiring it. His meaning is given to him, if obscurely, in this care. But given to him by what?

Not by the world, for in his freedom man transcends the world and its meanings in dread. Not by man himself, in so far as he is spirit and belongs to the light: freedom alone cannot establish meanings. But man belongs not only to the light; he also belongs to the earth. Meaning must be founded in the call of the earth.

Man could not be called at all were he not spirit. Man thus is called only because he belongs to both, light and earth. Heidegger calls the interplay or contest of light and earth Being. We can thus say, the meaning of man's existence is founded in the call of Being. Calling man, Being is said to be the holy. Recovering the holy, the poet

reestablishes the meaning of life.

Heidegger calls the holy both terrifying (*entsetzlich*) and granting salvation (*heilgewährend*) (E 61, 62). The call of Being is terrifying because, like dread, it tears us away from our usual place; it takes the ground on which we stand away from us, displaces us, and makes us homeless in the world. It bears salvation in that by preventing us from scattering ourselves, from losing ourselves to the world, it returns us to our own being and lets us become whole. This recalls the discussion of the call of conscience in *Being and Time*. Conscience, too, is fundamentally ambivalent.

How then are we to relate the call of Being and the call of conscience? Are the two perhaps identical? Not quite. Speaking of the call of conscience Heidegger emphasizes just one aspect of the call of Being: the call of the clearing, of the 'light that is the horizon of all our being in the world. This is indeed part of the call of Being; thus all that was said of the call of conscience can also be said of it. But the call of Being is also the call of the earth and as such a call to a particular way of being in the world. If we keep in mind that there can be no clearing without the forest, that nothingness and being, formal and material transcendence in the end cannot be divorced, the call of conscience and the call of the earth merge into the call of Being.

The ambivalence of the holy noted by Heidegger recalls a similar ambivalence stressed by Rudolf Otto in his discussion of the Holy. As they taught together at Marburg, this similarity may well be more than an accident. Otto begins his *Idea of the Ho!y*[177] by pointing out that religion possesses two aspects, one rational, the other irrational and belonging to the realm of feeling. As all discussion uses concepts, it tends to stress the rational aspect, which it can grasp without difficulty, while when dealing with the irrational it is somewhat at a loss. Here it has to rely, like Platonic recollection, on the ability of the individual to "recollect" what it tries to suggest. Otto attempts to bring this view into sharper relief by introducing the conception of the holy, which he takes to be the core of all religious experience. Like religion, the holy possesses a rational and an irrational side. 0tto uses the terra "numinous" to refer to the holy without its rational and ethical clothing. It is the subject to which all religious schematization

---

[177] Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, tr. J. Harvey, 2d ed.)London and NevT York, 1957).

gives only predicates. Thus something like Heidegger's ontological difference marks the essence of the holy. As the numinous refers to religious feeling, not to a religious concept, it is said to lie outside the categories of human thought. Hence it is ungraspable, indefinable, a mystery that forces us to choose symbolic or negative language. What is encountered is the completely other, that which does not fall into the circle of our language and thoughts, which is beyond whatever is. But we should not forget that the Holy posses two sides, one irrational, the other rational. The numinous must be schematized to provide orientation.

All this can also be said of Heidegger's holy. Like the numinous, it is *mysterium.* By its very nature this *mysterium* is both *tremendum* and *fascinans,* because it calls the individual, fragmented and estranged from the whole, back to his origin, *tremendum* because this call conflicts with man's attachment to the security offered by the place he has found for himself in the world, because it calls on him to step into the silence of evening.

But if the holy requires the numinous if it is to be more than an empty shell, the numinous is destructive if it calls man too immediately. Calling man out of the world to that silence in which earth and 1ight speak to him, the numinous calls on man to surrender his own being which is essentially a being in the world. Otto, as I pointed out, recognizes this danger and insists on the importance of the rational side of the holy. He emphasizes the need for schematization: the indefinite must be made definite, if man is to assume a meaningful stance towards it. The numinous must show itself in a particular shape, in a particular entity. Such appearance the later Heidegger came to name the *Ereignis*. The *Ereignis* is an experience of the holy. Here we touch on the origin of myths and theogonies, of a poetry that calls man not only to the ambivalent silence of the numinous, but summons him to take his place in the world. Only such poetry can do full justice to the essence of the holy which bridges the ontological-difference.

20. Poetry and Truth

1

In my last lecture I spoke of Rudolf Otto's *Idea of the Holy*. Otto introduces the "category" of the Holy to bring his view of religion into sharper focus. It is said to form the innermost core of all religious experience. Like religion, this category possesses two aspects: one rational, the other irrational. Otto takes the irrational to be the more basic element, calling the rational or the conceptual a predicate of the irrational. Otto uses the term "numinous" for the Holy without its rational or ethical elements. It is the subject to which all religious schematization gives only predicates.

Heidegger, too, recognizes that need for schematization or mediation and especially in his Hölderlin interpretations he attempts to provide it. The holy is said to require gods or angels to carry its message to man; the poet receives this message and transmits it to others. But how are we to understand this account of mediation? What are Heidegger's or Höderlin's gods or angels to us? Heidegger's Christian roots are all too apparent. But can *we* make any sense of such talk? Heidegger's poetic thinking threatens to become so hermetic that it leaves us uncertain about its significance. Again the proximity of poetry threatens philosophy.

The problem of mediation appears, although unacknowledged, already in *Being and Time*. Perhaps we can best approach it by turning to a key concept, which returns in later works: resolve (*Entschlossenheit*). In *Being and Time* resolve is understood as the authentic response to the call of conscience. That response must express itself in the world, in resolute action. Authentic speaking, too, if there is such speech, must be resolute. But how are we to think such resolute speech?

Resolve is understood in *Being and Time* as the authentic response to the call of conscience. How then are we to understand the call of conscience? Calling Dasein to acknowledge its guilt, conscience calls in dread, most inescapably in the dread of death. As dread is itself dreadful, the usual response to the call of conscience is an attempt to run away to the safety of the familiar world and way of life and speaking. With Wittgenstein we might say, we content ourselves with established language games. We accept ordinary language as a ground. But by so doing, Heidegger suggests, we run away

from ourselves, conceal our essential being, to which conscience calls us. To be resolved is to accept oneself in one's entirety, and that means also the groundless facticity of our existence, also our being unto death (SZ 306).

In *Being and Time* resolve is understood as man's openness to his situation and affirmation of the mortal he is. If we recall that the later Heidegger calls the holy that which heals man by letting him be as a whole, it becomes evident that the holy and what in *Being and Time* is called resolve belong together: man can affirm himself in his entirety only by opening himself to the holy.

Given that man can exist only as an individual occupying a particular place in the world, self-affirmation implies the ability to make particular decisions. But if Heidegger's analysis forces us to accept this rather obvious fact, it does not tell us how such decisions are to be made. It does, however, suggest why it is difficult to make up one's mind instead of having it more or less made up for one. For one aspect of man's facticity is his inability to secure his actions and decisions by relating them to a higher reality in which he could be said to have his measure. *Being and 'Time* denies that there is such a measure. A measure appears only with resolve; it is not antecedently given to guide resolve. Resolved man knows his place in the world. Knowing his place, man knows what to do. But where there are no criteria to evaluate what is resolved and resolve is blind, it is difficult, if not impossible, to distinguish responsible action from arbitrariness. Furthermore, by calling authentic Dasein resolved, Heidegger invites a resolve to be resolved, a readiness to be committed, even where there is no cause deserving of our commitment. The readiness to be resolved is thus at the same time a readiness to be seized. Resolved to be resolved, man is in a vulnerable position, open to attack and seizure, although such seizure is nothing other than what the individual has himself chosen. But how now are we to distinguish seizure by God from seizure by the devil? Good from evil?

Heidegger suggests this in those late works where *Entschlossenheit* is said to be *Ent-schlossenheit* (EM[178]16, HW[179] 55, 321, G[180] 112). The hyphen is to suggest that

---

[178] EM: *Einführung in die Metaphysik*, GA 40, page references to the 1953 edition, published by Klostermann. Tr. *Introduction to Metaphysics,* 2nd edition. Translated by Gregory Fried and Richard Polt, New Haven, Conn., Yale University Press, 2014.

man has unlocked himself and is ready to listen and respond to the call of Being. In the *Rektoratsrede* Heidegger calls spirit a "fundamental, knowing resolve towards the essence of Being (SU[181] 13). This view returns in other works: in *Einführung in die Metaphysik* he writes that "the essence of resolve lies in the opening, the coming out-of-cover (*Entborgenheit*) of human being-there into the clearing of being," (EM 16) and in *Gelassenheit* Heidegger speaks of resolve as "*Dasein* opening itself for the Open" (G 61). In these later works resolve is thus not simply said to be an affirmation of Dasein in its entirety, but the very foundation of such affirmation is sought in an openness to Being and its call, that is to say, to the holy, to what Heidegger came to call the *Ereignis,* the event of Being. Still, the notion of Being remains so indefinite that this formulation, like that of *Being and Time*, points in no definite direction. Being is itself questionable. To be open to it is to be ready to question, instead of taking for granted a certain way of life and taking refuge in it. Open towards and questioning Being man is insecure. But if man can affirm himself only as this individual, in this particular situation, he must discover or establish a place where to stand. And as there is no transcendent measure of man, it is up to him to found the order which will yield such a place. The precariousness of such foundation is evident. Resolved man knows that there can be no real security and that whatever place that he has chosen for himself is questionable. "Every decision, ... however, bases itself on something not mastered, something concealed, confusing (*Beirrendes*); otherwise it could never be a decision" (HW 43-44). The resolve that lets us occupy this rather than that place is subject to doubt. But where there is authenticity, this doubt does not lead to paralysis, rather to a readiness to hold one's place, in spite of the uncertainty pervading the human situation. Thus in his *Rektoratsrede* Heidegger called for a defiant self-affirmation that lets us act in spite of

---

[179] HW: *Holzwege*, GA 5, page references to the 1-5th edition published by Klostermann. Tr. *Off The Beaten Track* (GA 5). Edited and Translated by Julian Young and Kenneth Haynes, Cambridge University Press, 2002.
[180] G: *Gelassenheit* (Pfullingen, Neske, 1959), also in GA 16 and GA 77. Tr. *Country Path Conversations*. Translated by Bret W. Davis, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2010.
[181] SU: "Die Selbstbehauptung der deutschen Universität" (Breslau: Korn, 1933), also in GA 16. Tr. "The Self-Assertion of the German University,"*Martin Heidegger and National Socialism: Questions and Answers* (New York: Paragon Press, 1990),

our knowledge that error cannot be neatly separated from truth. As everything becomes questionable, questioning becomes itself the highest form of knowledge. (SU 12)

All these remarks remain disturbingly empty. They do not answer the question: how are we to decide where to stand? If man is not assigned his place by God or nature, is it possible for man himself to establish this place? *Being and Time* seems to suggest this —resolve is just such establishment. If man is to affirm himself in his entirety he must also affirm himself as occupying a specific place. In other words, resolve in the ontological sense entails the ability to resolve in an ontic sense; openness to Being and its call entails an openness to specific calls. Authenticity demands that we bridge the ontological difference. But if this mediation is demanded by what is said in *Being and Time*, it is not discussed there and how it is to be thought remains obscure. Such an account is hinted at only in Heidegger's later works, especially in his talk of the *Ereignis*.

As has already been argued, it would be a mistake to take the establishment of man's place to be arbitrary free creation; to do so would be to overlook our dependence on the world. Man is caught up in this world. Caught up in it, he finds himself surrounded by claims that demand to be acknowledged. Man's openness to Being must be at the same time a willingness to listen to these claims in which Being is revealed. Only because Being calls us always in particular beings, can man gain a definite place and measure. Only in the presence of such calls can there be resolve. Authentic discourse, too, must be understood as a response to such a call or calls.

To become definite Being requires the work of man. "Unconcealment occurs only when it is achieved by work: the work of the word in poetry, the work of stone in temple and statue, the work of the word in thought, the work of the polis as the historical place in which all this is grounded and preserved" (EM 146). Although poetry is named first, this passage seems to give a certain priority to the polis, the work of the statesman, as being more basic than that of the poet. Given Heidegger's view that language is constitutive of man, we should expect poetry to be given that place. Does Heidegger mean to say here that poetry depends on an already established community? But how is the establishment of such a community to be thought? Does the work of the statesman not presuppose an already established language? And does such establishment not have its origin in the work of the poet?

We shall have to return to these questions. Here I only wanted to show that Heidegger's conception of resolve demands that the call of Being manifest itself in the call of different beings, that is to say, that there be mediations of the holy. Poetry achieves such mediation. With this we have gone beyond the determination of the poet found in Heidegger's Trakl essay, "Die Sprache im Gedicht." The poet no longer appears merely as someone who, in order to serve the holy, has freed himself from idle talk; such service is now seen to involve the creation of a work establishing man's place. This leads us to the second part of Heidegger's description of the place of the poet: "Poetry is the establishing of Being by means of the word." (E[182] 38)

2

Heidegger has spelled out the revelatory nature of work and poetry at some length, most completely perhaps in "Der Ursprung des Kunstwerks," "The Origin of the Work of Art."[183] In this essay Heidegger is speaking first of all of the visual arts, but, as he himself points out, all art is taken by him to be poetry in a wider sense, i.e., work establishing Being; furthermore, all other work depends on poetry in the narrower sense, i.e. on the work of language. The latter should be evident if we accept Heidegger's view that language is constitutive of our being-in-the-world. " ... language brings what *is* as something that is into the Open for the first time. Where there is no language, as in the being of stone, plant, and animal, there is also no openness of what is and consequently no openness also of that which is not and of the empty" (HW 60; tr. PLT 73). As language names "being*s* for the first time," such "naming nominates beings *to* their being *from out of* their being" (HW 60-61; tr. PLT 73).

If only language lets us dwell in the midst· of beings, there can be no more fundamental work than this establishment of the world in language. I shall call such establishment **original poetry**. Art and architecture, for example, presuppose poetry in that sense, and the same is true of what is usually called poetry. Such poetry can perhaps

---

[182] *Erläuterungen zu Hölderlins Dichtung*, Klostermann 1951, also in GA 4 "Elucidations of Hölderlin's Poetry." Translated and introduction by Keith Hoeller, Amherst, New York, Humanity Books, 2000.

[183] See Karsten Harries, *Art Matters: A Critical Commentary on Heidegger's The Origin of the Work of Art* (New York: Springer, 2009).

be understood as an attempt to recover the original poetic essence of language. This proposed definition should be compared with our earlier description of poetry as the recovery of silence in the midst of idle talk. According to both interpretations poetry is a recovery of the origin, but the origin is understood differently in each case, in the one case historically, as original poetry, i.e., as the first establishment of the linguistic space that defines and founds the poet's world, in the other case more fundamentally, as the recovery of the silence that follows and precedes such establishment. But since the latter is constitutive of all creation, poetry that seeks to recover the establishing of original poetry, thus making it present, must also at the same time preserve that silence if it is not to degenerate into idle talk.

In its wider sense, poetry is the establishment of Being in a work. To make more concrete how such establishment occurs, Heidegger uses the example of a Greek temple.

> A building, a Greek temple, portrays nothing. It simply stands there in the middle of the rock-cleft valley. The building encloses the figure of the god and, in this concealment, it lets it stand out into the holy precinct through the open portico. By means of the temple, the god is present in the temple. This presence of the god is in itself the extension and delimitation of the precinct as a holy precinct. The temple and its precinct, however, do not fade away into the indefinite. It is the temple-work that first fits together and at the same time gathers around itself the unity of those paths and relations in which birth and death, disaster and blessing, victory and disgrace, endurance and decline acquire the shape of destiny take for human being. The all-governing expanse of this open relational context is the world of this historical people. Only from and in this expanse does the nation first returns to itself for the fulfillment of its vocation." (HW 30-31, tr. PLT 41-42)

The passage points out a key characteristic of genuine work: such work establishes a world. "World" cannot mean here the totality of facts. We come closer to what Heidegger has in mind if we think of a horizon of intelligibility. Consider the thesis of *Being and Time* that entities are encountered first of all and most of the time as to hand. To understand such entities is to understand also what they are good for. Such

understanding places them in some larger context, e.g. some activity. With respect to this activity I can ask again: what is its meaning, 'what is it good for?' And such questioning can be repeated until I come to a final horizon that cannot be surpassed. All meaning finally has its foundation in the way the individual exists in the 'world', in a way of life — using Wittgenstein's language we can say, in the most comprehensive language-game. (Cf . SZ 84)

Just as the meaning of some tool presupposes the context in which it is of use, so it presupposes what Heidegger calls a region (*Gegend*). The hammer for example, belongs in the workshop; here it has its proper place. To know what it is, is to know this place. Heidegger defines region as "das Wohin der möglichen Zugehörigkeit des zuhandenen Zeugzusammenhanges," as "the 'whither' to which an equipment-context ready-to-hand might possibly belong." (SZ 110) A part of space is thus constituted as a region by a particular activity. In this sense kitchen, house, town, a particular landscape are regions. With respect to each such region one can ask again, where does this region belong? And such questioning can continue until we finally arrive at the region that encloses all regions. **This region of all regions is the world.** Understood in this way, the world assigns to each thing its proper place. "World is the ever-nonobjective to which we are subject as long as the paths of birth and death, blessing and curse keep us transported into Being. Wherever those decisions of our history that relate to our very being are made, are taken up and abandoned by us, go unrecognized and are rediscovered by new inquiry, there the world worlds" (HW 33, tr. PLT44-45). To know one's place in the world is to know what to do. "He who truly knows what is, knows what he wills to do in the midst of what is" (HW 55; tr. PLT 67). To be resolved is to possess such knowledge.

It is in this sense that poetry is said to establish a world. Heidegger suggests this when he calls poetry an *Aufräumen*, the work of the poet das *Aufgeräumte* (E 15-16). Usually *aufräumen* means "to clean up." Think of cleaning up a workshop, putting the tools in their proper places. *Aufräumen* here means to establish or re-establish a region. Heidegger's use of the word preserves much of its usual meaning. What has been cleaned up has been cleared, brought into order, an order that now makes it possible to assign to each thing its proper place (E 16). Similarly the poet establishes the world as the region

of all regions, a space that assigns to all things their proper place.

As Heidegger emphasizes, we have grasped only one side of the essence of work when we understand it as the establishment of a world. In establishing a world, the work presents the earth. As already pointed out, earth corresponds to what I have called material transcendence. "The earth is the essentially self-secluding (*das wesenhaft sich Verschliessende*). To set forth the earth means to bring it into the Open as the self-secluding" (HW 36, PLT 47). Just as the essence of truth demands revelation and concealment, immanence and transcendence, so Heidegger now seeks· the essence of poetic work in an establishment of a contest between earth and world. Heidegger speaks of a contest rather than a resting together, because earth and world are inescapably in tension. In so far as the establishment of a world is a making overt, it tends to conceal what is covert.

Such concealment can lead to a total forgetting of the earth, as it does, for instance, when a science, misunderstanding its own being, tries to grasp what is without loss. As I have tried to show, such an attempt can only lead to a loss of reality.

> Earth thus shatters every attempt to penetrate into it. It causes every merely calculating importunity upon it to turn into a destruction. This destruction may herald itself under the appearance of mastery and of progress in the form of technical-scientific objectivation of nature, but this mastery nevertheless remains an impotence of will. 'The earth appears openly cleared as itself only when it is perceived and preserved as that which is by nature undisclosable, that which shrinks from every disclosure and constantly keeps itself closed up." (HW 36, PLT 47)

The danger that the work poses to the earth is the same danger that lets Heidegger speak of language as a danger. Commenting on Hölderlin's "Darum ist der Güter Gefährlichstes, die Sprache dem Menschen gegeben" “This is why the most dangerous of goods, language has been given to man,” Heidegger remarks that danger here is the threat posed by beings to Being (E 34). Such a danger is implicit in all making overt, and all the more so, if we remember that, in order to be understood, language must make itself common. Having become a common possession, the struggle with the earth that must be preserved in all genuine speaking tends to be obscured.

Should we then equate Being and earth? What has already been said rules this out. Earth refers to the materially transcendent and hidden aspect of Being. Being itself is the contest of earth and light. This contest founds the poet's contest with the earth, which issues in the emergence of world.

The tension at which "contest" hints, also marks the nature of truth. "The clearing (*Lichtung*) in which beings stand is in itself at the same time concealment" (HW 42, PLT 53). Heidegger goes on to point out that such concealment takes place in two different ways: there is the already familiar tendency of beings to hide other beings. "One being places itself in front of another being, the one helps to hide the other, the former obscures the latter, a few obstruct many, one denies all .... This concealment is dissembling. If one being did not simulate another, we could not make mistakes or act mistakenly in regard to beings: we could not go astray and transgress and especially could never overreach ourselves" (HW 42, PLT 54).

But there is also a more fundamental concealment that is part of the essence of earth. Precisely when, as in dread, the ordinary meanings of things collapse, this hiddenness is revealed to us in the awareness that some thing is, and that all attempts to grasp what it is must finally fail. "Beings refuse themselves to us down to that one and seemingly least feature which we most touch upon most readily when we can say no more of beings than that they are. Concealment as refusal is not simply and only the limit of knowledge in any given circumstance, but the beginning of the clearing (*Lichtung*) of what is lighted (des *Gelichteten*)" (HW 42, PLT 53-54). Together, hiding, *Verbergen,* and refusal, *Versagen,* constitute the essence of truth as twofold unity of revelation and concealment. "Truth, in its nature, is un-truth" (HW 43, PLT 54). The establishment of this essential truth is poetry.

Truth, poetry and art belong together. "Art, as the setting-into-work of truth, is poetry." (HW 62, PLT 74)

21. "Is There a Measure on Earth?"

1

Today I want to turn to Heidegger's essay "Poetically Man Dwells …," "….dichterisch wohnet der Mensch …." In that essay Heidegger calls poetry a **measuring**. This formulation, too, derives from Hölderlin. Once again Heidegger's thinking about poetry presents itself to us as an attempt to recover the meaning of Hölderlin's poetic determination of the essence of poetry, this time by means of an interpretation of a few lines from a late fragment.

Dart, wenn lauter Mühe das Leben, ein Mensch
Aufschauen und sagen: so
Will ich auch seyn? Ja. So lange die Freundlichkeit noch
Am Herzen, die Reine, dauert, misset
Nicht unglücklieh der Menseh sich
Mit der Gottheit. Ist unbekannt Gott?
Ist er offenbar wie der Himmel? Dieses
Glaub' ich eher. Des Menschen Mass ist's.
Voll Verdienst, doch dichterisch, wohnet
Der Mensch auf dieser Erde. Doch reiner
Ist nieht der Sehatten der Nacht mit den Sternen,
Wenn ich so sagen könnte, als
Der Mensch, der heisset ein Bild der Gottheit.

Giebt es auf Erden ein Maass. Es giebt
Keines.

May; if life is sheer toil, a man
Lift his eyes and say: so
I too wish to be? Yes. As long as kindness,
The Pure, still stays with his heart, man

Not unhappily measures himself
Against the godhead. Is God unknown?
Is he manifest like the sky? I'd sooner
Believe the latter. It's the measure of man.
Full of merit, yet poetically, man
Dwells on this earth. But no purer
Is the shade of the starry night
If I might put it so, than
Man, who is called the image of the godhead.

Is there a measure on earth? There is
None. (VA[184] 188-189, tr. PLT 218-219)

Even less than in the *Erläuterungen* does Heidegger offer us here a translation of the poet's hermetic speech into another, more familiar idiom. His concern is rather to lead us back to the meaning of key words used by the poet. Translation can stand in the way of this by substituting for the harder to think language of the poet an easier, more readily taken for granted speaking. Understandable as this fear of substituting a philosophical version of idle talk for authentic speech is, it makes it difficult to determine just what Heidegger is saying, difficult also to relate it to what is said in B*eing and Time*. To be sure, there is also the opposite danger that by getting entangled in a Hölderlin-derived Heideggerian jargon we lose ourselves in just another form of idle talk, no better for basing itself on Hölderlin's hymns rather than on more familiar philosophic speech. We need to be aware of both dangers.

Just two lines furnish Heidegger with a poetic description of the essence of man:

... dichterisch, wohnet
Der Mensch auf dieser Erde.

Man dwells on the earth; this dwelling is said to be poetic. "Hence it is necessary to pay heed a twofold demand: for one thing we are to think what is called man's existence (*Existenz*) by way of the nature of dwelling, for another, we are to think of the nature of poetry as a letting-dwell, as a —perhaps even *the* —distinctive kind of building" (VA

[184] VA: *Vorträge und Aufsätze* (Pfullingen: Neske, i954), GA 7.

189; PLT 221). The first statement leads hardly beyond *Being and Time*: Resolved man was said to know his place in the world; knowing his place, he can be said to be at home in it. His being in the world can thus be called a dwelling (*wohnen*). *Wohnen* would thus appear to mean: to be in the world authentically (Cf. VA 162, PLT 160).

The second statement calls attention to a problem that is posed by the analysis in *Being and Time*. If resolve is tied to knowing one's place, does it not depend on the establishment of that place? *Wohnen* suggests this dependence, by recalling the usual connection between building and dwelling. To erect a building is to establish a place for man to dwell. In the later works, the world is understood as such a building and he who builds it is said to be the poet. If we accept what leads Heidegger to make language constitutive of being in the world and to seek the essence of language in poetry, understood as original discourse, we should have no difficulty with Heidegger's reading of "dichterisch wohnet der Mensch ... "

So far we have not gone beyond what has already been said. But Hölderlin and Heidegger tie the poetic dwelling of man to a measuring. This raises two questions: all measuring presupposes a measure and something measured. What is it that the poet measures? And where does he find his measure? But perhaps measuring is not to be understood here in its usual sense. While measuring usually presupposes that there is an already established measure, poetry is said to provide this measure itself, but not in the sense of freely inventing it. "Hence it is necessary to pay heed to the basic act of measuring. That consists in man's first of all taking the measure which then is applied in every measuring act" (VA 190; 221). Poetry is *Mass-Nahme*, the taking of a measure. "Hölderlin sees the nature of the 'poetic' in the taking of the measure by which the measure-taking of human being is accomplished" (VA 190, PLT 222).

What is measured is the essence of man. But where does the poet find this measure? Following Hölderlin, Heidegger gives us what appears to be a traditional answer: the most fundamental measure of man is the Godhead. Taking this together with the earlier definition of poetry as establishment of man's place, we can say: **To exist authentically man must affirm the Godhead as the measure of man.**

Is Heidegger then, following Hölderlin, simply returning to the traditional conception of man as *imago Dei*? To answer this question we have to know just what is

meant here by Godhead. We must, however, keep in mind that the traditional view of man as created in God's image is difficult to reconcile with Heidegger's fundamental ontology. According to *Being and Time* man is in the hands of nothingness and as such unable to base his decisions on an already established transcendent reality in which he could be said to have his measure. Just this is asserted by the traditional view.

But before turning to the sense in which the Godhead serves as the measure of man, we should consider again what is to be measured: the essence of man. Remaining with Hölderlin's language, Heidegger now seeks this essence in an *Auf-schauen*, a looking up. "The upward glance spans (*durchmisst*) the between of sky and earth. This between is measured out (*zugemessen*) for the dwelling of man" (VA 189; PLT 220). Man's looking up is said to be a measuring. What is measured is the in between of heaven and earth.

Again the words are stranger than the thought. The sky or heaven (*Himmel*) is what lights the earth. The in between of heaven and earth is the domain of the interplay of openness and concealment which we have already seen to be the dwelling place of man. Man is the tenant of the clearing of Being. To be, for man, is to be in the clearing. To seek the essence of man in a measuring of the in between of heaven and earth is to describe him not simply as the tenant, but as the surveyor of the clearing of Being. Man's being is such that his dwelling-place has to be established by him. Such establishment is said to involve a measuring. Man takes the measure with which he measures his own being by the Godhead.

2

What is the meaning of Godhead? More often than of God or the Godhead Heidegger speaks in his Hölderlin interpretations of gods. "But when the gods are named originally and the essence of things receives a name, so that things for the first time shine out, human existence is brought into a firm relation and given a basis" (E 39). Here, too, poetry's establishment of man's place is tied to taking a divine measure, but this measure is said to be provided by gods rather than God.

Perhaps we can approach the meaning of both gods and God by turning to a hint we are given in the *Humanismusbrief*: "Only from the truth of Being is it possible to

think the essence of the holy. Only from the essence of the holy is it possible to think the essence of godhead (*Wesen der Gottheit*). Only in the light of the essence of godhead can that be thought which the word God [and, we can add, gods] is supposed to name" (Hum[185] 36, WM 181-182). Here we should note that the word *Gottheit* is analogous of the word *Kindhe*it, childhood, so that I should perhaps have translated it as "godhood," since we tend to think of "godhead" as a name for God, that is of a being. A being is not what Heidegger has in mind.

We interpreted the essence of the holy to be an epiphany of Being. We experience something numinous that resist being put into words. But Being never reveals itself, except in beings. These beings can be said to be holy when their presencing preserves and reveals rather than obscures the presencing of Being. Such revelation takes place in poetry: the poet's words reveal beings in their being, instead of letting us pass over this being, taking it for granted, as we do in our daily encounter with things. "The art-work opens up in its own way the Being of beings. This opening-up, i.e., this deconcealing, i.e., the truth of beings, happens in the work" (HW 28; tr. 39). In his own poetic sketches Heidegger attempts to do just this by raising images suggestive of the Black Forest: a heavy sky over mountain meadows, some blooming daffodils, the evening sun falling golden into the forest. These poetic attempts are not altogether successful: too obviously they are constructed according to a schema that marks them unmistakably as attempts to capture the ontological difference. Each poem is an incomplete sentence, introduced by the word *wenn*:

> Wenn das frühe Morgenlicht still über den Bergen wächst ....
> When the light or' early morning grows silently above the mountains .... (ED 6)
>
> Wenn das Abendlicht, irgendwo im Wald einfallend, die Stämme umgoldet ....
> When the evening light, falling somewhere into the forest,

---

[185] *Brief über den Humanismus*, Klostermann, 1949. Also in *Wegmarken*, Klostermann 1967 and GA 9. "Letter on Humanism," *Pathmarks*, tr. Frank A Capuzzi, and J Glenn Gray.

paints the tree trunks gold... (ED 24)

The *wenn* introduces a clause that sets the stage. We are led to expect an advent that never occurs. Nothing happens. The stage remains empty and this is of course the point. "The poet calls in the sights of the sky, that which in its very self-disclosure causes the appearance of that which conceals itself, and indeed as that which conceals itself. In the familiar appearances, the poet calls the alien as that to which the invisible imparts itself, in order to remain what it is — unknown" (VA 194, tr. 225). Poetry lets Being manifest itself in particular beings. This is not to say that any particular being will do as well as any other. That Heidegger picks scenes from a particular landscape is hardly an accident: it is in nature, and especially in the forests, mountains and fields of the Black Forest, that Heidegger senses the holy more readily than in some other-landscape. We shall return to this fact that nature today is more likely to offer to many if us epiphanies of the holy than gods or God. Here, however, I want to make another point: That the epiphany of the holy happens just here and at this particular time rather than somewhere else or everywhere, presupposes that what the poet responds to is not simply the holy, but a, particular manifestation of it, which carries its message to him. Just this is the essence of divinity. Heidegger takes Hölderlin's gods to be messengers of the holy. To be such messengers, i.e. angels, they must bridge the ontological difference. They should therefore be sought neither with beings nor with Being alone. They belong with the between.

Each god so understood presides over a locality.[186] He is essentially *genius loci*. On this view poetry is essentially a naming of the *genius loci* and as such the establishment of a manifold of entities as one region. This region way be only a mountain meadow, disclosed as such in a fleeting experience, finding expression in a few lines of poetry. It may be a workshop or a house, a bridge or a river, a country or the world. Constitutive of each region is a particular kind of unity. Extending the tie between world and poetry to region and poetry, we should expect the unity of a region to be founded in the unity of a work of art. Following rationalist aesthetics, we can call the principle of such unity, what gathers an art-work into a whole, its theme.[187] Heidegger's **gods, I**

---

[186] In VA Heidegger speaks no longer of *Gegend*, but of *Ort*. Cf. pp. 154 ff.

[187] Cf. Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten, *Reflections on Poetry* tr. and intro. K.

want to suggest, are the themes of regions. God is the theme of the world. Or again, to shift to a still different vocabulary, what Heidegger and Hölderlin mean by "gods" invites comparison with what Kant means when he speaks of "aesthetic ideas."[188]

But how does this relate to the way region is used in *Being and Time*? Does not Heidegger there tie the unity of each region to a particular activity? We can tie this understanding of region to what is said here: presiding over a region, each god assigns human beings a place, thus establishing what is to be done. But isn't this too farfetched? Consider the farmer and his farm. Does it really make sense to look for something like an aesthetic unity in this region and the associated activities? Do they not receive their unity simply from the work to be done? When I have looked at the region in this way and I have tried to account for it, is there anything left unaccounted for? Not necessarily: Perhaps the farmer does look at what he is doing as serving only as means to an end. If so, the activity is dependent for its meaning on something outside it. Taken for itself it is meaningless. But is this really the case?

What led certain activities to be associated with gods and later with saints?

The essence of divinity, I have suggested, can be understood as providing human beings with a measure. The need for such a measure follows from Heidegger's conception of Dasein as fundamentally guilty. Subject to guilt we are called upon to be resolute and make decisions. But decisions can only be made where man is provided a measure. This is to say no more than that freedom requires criteria. A freedom that knows no criteria is indistinguishable from spontaneity, that is, is no freedom at all. Suppose a friend suddenly bangs his hand on the table and you ask him: why did you do that? and he answers: I had no reason, I just felt like it! Does this assert that the action

---

Aschenbrenner and B. Holther (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1954), par. 68. 'l'he poet is like a maker or creator. So the poem ought to be like a world. Hence by analogy whatever is evident to the philosophers concerning the real world, the same ought to be thought of a poem." Just as the poem is unified by a theme — "By *theme* I mean that whose representation contains the sufficient reason of other representations supplied in the discourse, but which does not have its own sufficient reason in them" (par. 66) -- so the universe has its sufficient reason in God.

[188] Cf. Kritik der Urteilskraft, par. 49, which points back to Baumgarten's conception of the theme and ahead to Schelling's sugeestion that just as the philosopher is concerned with ideas, so the artist is concerned with gods.

was done without criteria? What does "reason" mean here? Does it mean that he could not give an explanation of why he did ‘what he did? Could he not go on to say something like: you were all sitting there so solemnly, I just couldn’t stand it any more. “I had no reason" would mean in that case something like: I wasn’t willing to play the games we usually play, but for that unwillingness he could have had his reasons. For instance, he might have responded to what Heidegger calls the call of conscience. But suppose he answered: I really had no reason; I did not even feel like it; it just happened. Would we still call it a free act and say that he decided to do it?

Freedom requires, if not a moral sense, at least a sense that some things matter, and that not all things matter equally. Furthermore, that they matter is not something that I have freely chosen, for it this were so, we could ask why that particular choice was made. To say that things matter is to say that man exists in such a way that he is always already claimed in countless ways that assign him his place. But perhaps we should say, that we are assigned many, very different and often incompatible places. Thus Aphrodite assigns us a different place than Hera. The world is not one homogeneous region, but a complex of intersecting and competing regions, thus threatening to scatter us. This enables us to see why, **given Heidegger’s demand for self-integration**, the measure of authentic Dasein cannot finally be provided by the gods. A long as human beings hear only the voices of the gods while God is dead or man deaf to his call, there is no escape from dispersal and from fragmentation. Without God there can be no measure of the entire man. Purity of heart, for Heidegger, too, is to will one thing.[189] This the gods deny. To will one thing is possible only in response to the call of one God. Only he can become the theme of an all-embracing region in which everything finds its proper place.

As opposed to the gods who preside over regions, God presides over the world as the region of all regions. In spite of this terminology, we should not overlook how much separates this view from the tradition. On the traditional view God created man in his image. This makes the being of man dependent on that of God while the reverse is not the case. **On the view just outlined, man’s being is such that he cannot exist**

---

[189] But are we not presupposing here once again the Platonic emphasis on unity? If, following Nietzsche, one were to question this Platonic idealization of unity, would one not also have to question the priority of God over the gods?

authentically except by having what we can perhaps call an ideal image of himself. To establish such an image is the task of the poet.

To restate this point, using the language of Heidegger and Hölderlin: The looking up of man is not simply a looking up to heaven, but to the gods and in the end to God. The former alone would make nothing the measure of man, as is the case when only conscience calls. Such a measure cannot establish the world as the dwelling-place of man. Rather it lets man lose his home. In *Being and Time* Heidegger thus speak of the essential homelessness of Dasein. To experience the world as his home man must experience the divine and, if he is to affirm himself in his entirely, he must affirm God.

But if the poet is to name God and this naming is to be more than an arbitrary construction, must he not know God? But how can he know God, if man is given a measure only though human work? Is it not only the poet's work that establishes God as God? Again the problem of a realistic versus a transcendental interpretation of language makes an appearance. To function as the measure of man, God may not simply be something posited by man. That would be to substitute for God some golden calf. What the poet names God or some god must have a claim on man and man cannot be the author of that claim. Only transcendence can function as the measure of man. On the other hand, language was said to be constitutive of human understanding and being in the world. Heidegger tries to do justice to both considerations by suggesting that the poet knows God as the unknown. "For Hölderlin God, as the one who he is, is unknown and it is just as this *Unknown One* that he is the measure for the poet" (VA 191, PLT 222). But what sense are we to make of this? How can the unknown function as measure? Are we, not back with the emptiness of the call of conscience? Heidegger answers rather cryptically: "The measure consists in the way in which the god, who remains unknown, is revealed *as* such by the sky" (VA 191, PLT 223). God appears, but in this appearance remains hidden. He appears in the endless variety of things that surround us, familiar and easily taken for granted. “What remains alien to the god, the sight of the sky — this is what is familiar to man. And what is that? Everything that shimmers and blooms in the sky and thus under the sky and thus on earth, everything that sounds and is fragrant, rises and comes — but also goes and stumbles, moans and falls silent, pales and darkens. Into this, which is intimate to man but alien to the god, the unknown imparts himself, in order

to remain guarded within it as the unknown" (VA 194, PLT 225). While in *Being and Time* all meanings are founded in care, now Heidegger founds care in the manifold call of the world that is yet one call. Heidegger's definitions of poetry as establishment of the world and as establishing God as the measure of man are thus not really different. God is the unknown center of the world. Without this center we have worlds, but no world.

3

But are we still using poetry here in the sense of an original speaking from which everyday language derives? If so, it should be possible to establish poetry by something like a transcendental argument as the condition of the possibility of our language. But could such an argument lead us to gods and God? In this connection it is important to keep in mind the emphasis Heidegger places on both the unity of Dasein and on primordiality. If, for man, to exist authentically is to be entire, where in *Being and Time* the foundation of his entirety is provided by death, then the different language-games in which we find ourselves caught up cannot be more than parts of one more encompassing language-game, although Heidegger would admit that first of all and most of the time the unity of this language-game remains hidden from us, making it far easier to speak of language-games in the plural. Still, if man is to be truly himself, he must recover that unity. The idea of one language furnishes us thus with a measure which we can use to measure ordinary language.

This much is suggested even in *Being and Time*. But in *Being and Time* the idea of a measure remains empty. 'The authentic life is marked by its form rather than by its content. The authentic life is a life unto death. Yet man can be only as this particular being, here and not there, now and not at some other time, having to live just one of a great many possible lives. This requires that the ideal become concrete. Yet this ideal cannot have its sole foundation in human freedom, just as it cannot be laid down for the authentic individual by some external authority; be it God, be it society, be it nature. It is man himself who must establish the ideal, yet not *ex nihilo*, but responding to whatever calls him in his situation. In this sense God is projected by man in his own image. This projection reveals to him the meaning of the earth: "Genuinely poetic projection is the opening up or disclosure of that into which Dasein as historical has

already been thrown. This is the earth and for a historical people, its earth, the self-closing ground on which it rests together with everything that, though concealed as yet from itself, it already is" (HW 62, PLT 75).

But suppose we grant that God, understood in this sense, is a necessary condition for the possibility of authentic existence, does this make poetry primordial discourse? Primordial means original. But how is "original" to be understood? In a temporal sense? There are passages that suggest this: thus when Heidegger calls poetry the primitive language of a historical people he seems to be saying that everyday language stems from poetry. Against this one could cite Heidegger's claim that first of all and most of the time language is idle talk. It would be odd if this were so only today. "Primordial" could however, be understood in the sense of "constitutive of." Such transcendental priority need not be coupled with a genetic priority. Is it in this sense that Heidegger's assertion that poetry is the essence of language should be understood?

22. Hölderlin's *Patmos*

1

In Heidegger's later essays philosophy seems to approach a limit that it cannot cross without becoming either poetry or silence. At times Heidegger seems to have taken this step: his words retain their suggestiveness, but it is difficult to say just what it is they suggest.[190] This has led to charges of obscurity, and these charges are made not only by unsympathetic critics such as Carnap or Ayer; even one of his own students, Karl Löwith, has accused Heidegger of reducing philosophy to verbal play.[191] There is indeed something playful about Heidegger's use of language. Heidegger plays with language and in this play it is transformed until at times we hardly recognize it. But it would be a mistake to think that his transformation of language stems from a failure to pay sufficient attention to its nature. Rather, it is demanded by Heidegger's understanding of the essence of language. As, we have seen, on his view this essence is threatened above all by idle talk, and not least by the idle talk of philosophers. If language is to become once again equal to the task Heidegger has set it, it must emerge out of a destruction of idle talk, a destruction that finds only one expression in the critical examination and final rejection of the language of traditional metaphysics.

To the extent that philosophical thinking is directed against idle talk, it will tend to move towards poetry. In Heidegger's own work this finds twofold expression: his writing style, which in *Being and Time* is still rather close to traditional philosophy, changes in later works, as it is subjected more and more to the measure provided by poetry; at the same time much of his thinking becomes an extended dialogue with a small number of poets, who take their equal place beside the thinkers of the past. Of these poets Hölderlin is by far the most important. As Heidegger will say in the *Spiegel* Interview: "My thinking has an essential relationship to Hölderlin's poetry. But I do not

---

[190] Cf. Rudolf Carnap, "Überwindung der Metapbysik durch logische Analyse der Sprache, *Erkenntnis,* vol. 2 (Leipzig, 1931), A. J. Ayer, Language, Truth, and Logic, (New York, 1952), p. 42, and Ingeborg Bachmann, "Zu einem Kapitel der jüngsten Philosophiegeschichte," Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Schriften*, *Beiheft* (Frankfurt, 1960), pp. 7 - 15.

[191] Karl Löwith, *Denker in dürftiger Zeit,* p. 15.

think Hölderlin is just any poet, whose work is a subject, among many others, for literary historians. I think Hölderlin is the poet who points toward the future, who expects the god, and who therefore cannot remain simply a subject for Hölderlin research in the literary historical imagination." [192] Heidegger claims not to turn to Hölderlin to illustrate an already established thesis; nor does he claim to give us a well-balanced, objective interpretation, where the interpreter remains in some way outside what he is interpreting. While Heidegger s interpretations reveal new dimensions in Hölderlin's poetry, Heidegger himself does not remain unaffected. Philosophy and poetry enter into an alliance where one becomes inseparable from the other. In this alliance poetry, Heidegger claims, has the leading part. In Hölderlin's poetry Heidegger finds a key to the essence of language.

But why Hölderlin? Are there not other poets who would serve Heidegger's purpose equally well? Why not write about Goethe or Shakespeare? As a matter of fact, Heidegger has given us interpretations of Trakl and Rilke, George and Hebel, and yet Hölderlin remains more important to him than these others. "Hölderlin has not been chosen because his work, one among many, realizes the universal essence of poetry, but solely because Hölderlin's poetry was born by the poetic vocation to write expressly of the essence of poetry. For us Hölderlin is in a pre-eminent sense *the poet of the poet*. That is why he compels a decision" (E 32). The hymns in which Hölderlin celebrates the mission of the poet present Heidegger with an understanding of what it means to be a poet; at the same time they provide examples of what poetic language can and should be. In the light of this twofold determination of poetry, Heidegger rethinks his own views on language.

If this suggestion of a dialogue between Heidegger and Hölderlin is not to remain abstract, itself little more than idle talk, we have to make an attempt to listen to the poet himself. Although interpretations, such as Heidegger's, can help us to do so, they can also stand in our way, placing themselves before the poet and obscuring what he has to say. In this session I would therefore like to turn away from Heidegger and by means of

---

[192] "Nur noch ein Gott kann uns retten," *Der Spiegel*, 31 May 1976, pp. 209. GA 16, p. 678. Trans. Lisa Harries, "Der Spiegel Interview with Martin Heidegger," *Martin Heidegger and National Socialism: Questions and Answers*, ed. Günther Neske and Emil Kettering (New York: Paragon, 1990), p. 62.

an interpretation of Hölderlin's hymn *Patmos* try to show what Hölderlin in that poem takes to be the task of the poet in this age. Heidegger has not given us an interpretation of *Patmos*. In many ways it fits less well the place Heidegger has assigned to poetry than such other hymns as *Heimkunft/An die Verwandten* or *Wie Wenn am Feiertage* or the great river humns, *Der Rhein* and *Der Ister* For us this is an advantage, since it makes it easier to read Hölderlin, without reading into him Heidegger's interpretations.

2

Perhaps the best way to approach *Patmos*[193] is to take a careful look at the first stanza, which is both, a request that is answered by the poem, and a statement anticipating much of what is to follow, but expressing it in so concentrated a fashion as to demand a further, explanatory movement. The stanza is made up of four sentences, each successive sentence longer than the one that preceded it. The first very simply, almost enigmatically, states God's relationship to man:

Nah ist
Und schwer zu fassen der Gott. (I, 1-2)

Near is
And difficult to grasp, the God.

The second sentence, related to the first in sound and rhythm, speaks of danger, but at the same time asserts a relation between danger and salvation:

Wo aber Gefahr ist, wächst
Das Rettende auch.

But where danger threatens
That which saves also grows.

Man is in danger because, although living in the proximity of God, it is difficult for him to grasp Him.

Later drafts show that Hölderlin was not quite satisfied with this first sentence.

---

[193] Unless otherwise indicated, the translations of Hölderlin's poems are by Michael Hamburger.

The later versions have:

Voll Güt ist. Keiner aber fasset
Allein Gott.

Most kind is; but no one by himself
Can grasp God'.

God is not simply said to be near, but good; and instead of saying that it is difficult to grasp God, Hölderlin now asserts that it is impossible for the solitary individual. Man's knowledge of God must be communal.

We can sense here a change that took place in Hölderlin's thinking. To mark this change one could compare *Patmos* to an earlier poem such as *Da ich ein Knabe war*. In this poem Hölderlin speaks of having been raised in the arms of the gods who are said to have been far closer to the poet than his fellow men:

Doch kannt ich Euch besser,
Als ich je die Menschen gekannt,
Ich verstand die Stille des Ethers
Der Menschen Worte verstand ich nie.

Yet I knew you better
Than ever I have known men,
I understood the silence of Ether,
The words of men I never understood.

In the earlier poem Hölderlin speaks of gods rather than of God. The poet learns about the gods, listening to the voices of nature, to the whispering trees, to sun and moon, to the quiet of the ether. He knows that man's usual chattering, *das Geschrei der Menschen*, drowns out these voices that often speak to us in silence. Man cannot serve both, the community and the gods. The poet is described here as someone who senses the presence of the holy in particular shapes; this gives him the strength to name the gods and thus to exhibit epiphanies of the holy. But Hölderlin came to learn that this privilege is bought at a price. Later he was to accuse himself of having sinned against his fellow men: since as a poet he neither loved nor served them in human fashion, they did not show themselves

to him as human. Hölderlin touches here on something that puts his, and Heidegger's, conception of the poet into question: the tension between poetry and community.

The very first lines of *Patmos*, at least in their revised form, reject this opposition between poetry and community: we shall grasp God only as members of a community. But what does this mean? Does it mean that we must resist poetry, as Hölderlin conceived of it, as a temptation? Or must poetry be determined in a new way that it stands no longer in opposition to the already established language of the community?

The next four lines speak of beings who, like Heidegger's authentic individual, live securely in the presence of danger:

1m Finstern wohnen
Die Adler und furchtlos gehn
Die Söhne der Alpen über den Abgrund weg
Auf leichtgebaueten Brücken.

In gloomy places dwell
The eagles, and fearless over
The chasm walk the sons of the Alps
On bridges lightly built.

The stanza closes with a request, based on a further description of our situation. This situation is characterized in two ways:

Drum, da gehäuft sind rings
Die Gipfel der Zeit,
Und die Liebsten
Nah wohnen, ermattend auf
Getrenntesten Bergen,

Therefore, since round about
Are heaped the summits of Time
And the most loved live near, growing faint
On mountains most separate,

Time is seen as a mountain range. Its peaks, as the following stanza suggests, are the

great ages of mankind, such as that of the Greeks or that of Christ. Yet their proximity is coupled with a loss of reality. Intervening time separates the poet not only from the Greeks and their gods, but also from those whom he once knew and who now have died. *Die Liebsten* may thus refer to Christ and the Greek gods; it may also refer to Susette Gontard, Hölderlin's Diotima, whose death led to Hölderlin's increasing doubts concerning the ability of the poet to name the gods and to restore them to new life.

We can now be more specific about what community Hölderlin has in mind: it is a community that stretches across and is thus not negated by time. And yet, what were once living gods, epiphanies of the holy, are now only pale images, very close perhaps, and yet powerless to help us. We and the gods linger on most distant mountains, the gods too weak to claim us, and we, too weak to return them to life. This twofold lack leads to the request with which the stanza closes:

> So gib unschuldig Wasser,
> o Fittiche gib uns, treuesten Sinns
> Hinüberzugehn und wiederzukehren.
>
> So give us innocent water,
> o pinions give us, with minds most faithful
> To cross over and to return.

The request is addressed to either God or innocent water — which given Hölderlin's punctuation, could be either vocative or accusative.[194] This request may seem somewhat surprising after the first two lines. One might have expected a request that God show himself in such a way that we can grasp him; instead the request is a request for a bridge across the abyss of time, a request to have the past as present. Yet the two are tied together. To ask that god reveal himself to man is to ask for His epiphany; but this epiphany has happened, and not only once, but repeatedly, for the last time and most completely in Christ. This epiphany, too, belongs to the past, and like the others, its power, too, is waning. We no longer believe in the presence of the living God. The poet's request becomes thus a request to rejoin those who lived in his presence.

Important is the line

> Hinüberzugehn und wiederzukehren.

---

[194] Heribert Kühnapfel, *Studien zu Hölderlins später Dichtung* (diss. Breslau, 1931), p. 86,

Especially for Hölderlin, who found it too easy to seek refuge in a golden past and had yet difficulty finding his place in the present, the request again to return is a request to have the community that the poet desires include the present, and not be bought at the price of its sacrifice. As Hölderlin senses insanity approaching, the problem of the return to the present age becomes increasingly important to him as he questions his own tendency to ascribe a task to the poet that would force him out of the community of men in order to name the gods.

The next two stanzas pose few problems. Far less dense than the first stanza, they are made up of just two sentences. The first suggests that the request has been granted (II, 1-5). The next twenty-six lines form one extended sentence, describing a movement away from the landscape of home, across Greece, to Asia Minor. The first part of the journey parallels the poet's own development as it is described, for instance, in *Als ich ein Knabe war*. The journey, which in the end carries the poet to Patmos, begins with the forests and brooks of home (II, 5-9).

Again later versions suggest that Hölderlin felt that too much had been left unsaid. They read:

Es kleideten sich
Im Zwielicht, Menschen ähnlich, da ich ging
Der schattige Wald
Und die sehnsüchtigen Bäche
Der Heimat;

There clothed themselves
Like men, in the twilight, as I went
The shadowy wood
And the yearning streams of
My homeland;

Nature takes on human form; when we hear its voices as if they were human, we dwell near the Creek gods.

But this time the journey carries us past Greece to Patmos. The fifth stanza ties this journey to calamities:

Und wenn vom Schiffbruch oder klagend
Um die Heimat oder

Den abgeschiedenen Freund
Ihr nahet einer
Der Fremden, hört sie es gern,

And when, after shipwreck or lamenting for
His homeland or else for
The friend departed before him,
A stranger draws near
To her, she is glad to hear it,

One is tempted to refer shipwreck and loss of home and friend back to the poet himself. One thinks of the death of his beloved Diotima and of Hölderlin's Greek world, which had died with her.

The sixth stanza brings a change. The poem becomes denser and the rhythmic structures more complicated. Especially towards the end sentences become very brief. More than to any other part of the poem, Hölderlin kept returning to this stanza — in a later version the first four lines become three stanzas.

Striking are the parallels between the poet and Christ's disciple. The latter, too, had lost his home and the one he loved. St. John appears here as the poet who saw the face of his god. Christ, although the highest epiphany of God, is, according to Hö1derlin, brother to the Greek gods. John wrote as someone who had been loved and called by his god. And yet, this god had died on the cross, and since this death no new gods have appeared to take his place. The problem that faces Hölderlin is this: what is the place of the poet after the death of god?

Later versions dwell on this point:

Begreifen müssen
Dies wir zuvor. Wie Morgenluft sind nämlich die Namen
Seit Christus. Werden Träume. Fallen, wie Irrtum
Auf das Herz und tötend, wenn nicht einer
Erwäget, was sie sind und begreift.

This first we
Must understand. For like morning air are the names
Since Christ, become dreams. Fall on the heart

Like error, and killing, if one does not
Consider what they are and understand.

Given the death 'of God', the poet is in danger of becoming a false priest, as Hölderlin describes himself in the last fragmentary stanza of *Wie wenn am Feiertage.* The poet, who, without being called, usurps the place of a prophet can only mislead. Yet even the words of former prophets become hollow, even or perhaps especially where they are still being preserved in constant repetition. The danger they pose is that even when they have lost their power to reveal and no longer name the divine, they may imprison man in now groundless, but established ways of speaking. To guard against this we need careful interpretation.

In this stanza Christ is called *der Gewittertragende*, the one who bears thunderstorms. This phrase suggests the opening *of Wie wenn am Feiertage*..., a poem that is central to Heidegger's Hölderlin interpretation and to his view of the poet.

Doch uns gebührt es, unter Gottes Gewittern
Ihr Dichter! mit entblösstem Haupte zu stellen,
Des Vaters Strahl, ihn selbst, mit eigner Hand
Zu fassen und dem Volk ins Lied
Gehülllt die himmlische Gabe zu reichen.

Yet, fellow poets, us it behooves to stand
Bare-headed beneath God's thunderstorms,
To grasp the Father's ray, no less, with our own two hands
And, wrapping in song the heavenly gift,
To offer it to the people.

The poet appears here as mediator between God and the people. The divine, as so often with Hölderlin, expresses itself as terrifying and potentially destructive. The poet must expose himself to God's lightning. A nd yet, there is hubris in the idea that the poet should grasp

Des Vaters Strahl, ihn selbst, mit eigner Hand
To grasp the Father's ray, no less, with our own two hands

The disciple was free from this hubris. He lived at a time when God last showed himself in definite shape, so that he could be grasped without danger. But the divine becomes a destructive power whenever man reaches for it without waiting for a divine mediator.

Hölderlin's approaching insanity appeared to the poet to have its foundation in this inhuman attempt to grasp the divine transcendence. As he writes in the last version of *Patmos*:

> Zu viel aber
> Der Liebe, wo Anbetung ist,
> ist gefahrreich, triffet am meisten.
>
> But too much
> Of love, where there is adoration
> Is full of danger, strikes most.[195]

Why can love, coupled with adoration, be a danger? Because, born of man's inability to accept himself and his place in the world, which seems devoid of meaning, love leads beyond this place? But without mediation the divine is too indefinite to assign man a place. The poet loses his place to the indefinite and becomes God's victim.

The journey that carries the poet to Patmos fails to carry him into the presence of God. It only lets him see the disciple who saw his god die. Thus it carries him to the edge of that night in which we still dwell. Like John we have to learn to accept the death of God. Yet like the disciples, we do not want to let go of the light of day:

> aber sie liebten unter der Sonne
> Das Leben und lassen wollten sie nicht
> Vom Angesichte des Herrn
> Und der Heimat. Eingetrieben war,
> Wie Feuer im Eisen, das, und Ihnen ging
> Zur Seite der Schatten des Lieben. (VII, 5-9)
>
> but under the sun they loved
> This life and were loath to part from
> The visible face of the Lord
> And their homeland. Driven in
> Like fire into iron, was this, and beside them
> The loved one's shadow walked.

---

[195] My translation.

Later versions add, *wie eine Seuche*, like a plague. And in this age it is indeed a disease to demand to live in the presence of the gods, a disease that easily leads the poet to lose his home and place in the world. We must accept our place in the night and wait for the God who is to come. As Heidegger was to do later, Hölderlin sees the withdraval of the divine from the world as a process over which we have no control:

Denn sie nicht walten, es waltet aber
Unsterblicher Schicksal und es wandelt ihr Werk
Von selbst, (XII, 10-12)

For they do not govern, the fate
It is of immortals that governs, and their work
Proceeds by its own force

It is not up to us to make the divine reappear. To put it differently, it is not up to us to name the gods, i.e. to be poets. God must give birth to gods and the gods themselves must claim us. Otherwise the attempt to reveal transcendence will fail in one of two ways: either the words of the poet will become empty, hollow, — as Hugo von Hofmannsthal puts it in the Lord Chandos Letter, like moldy mushrooms crumbling in our mouth[196] — or the transcendence which is to be expressed will break the shell of words. In this night, poetry, in its attempt to name the transcendent, will again and again approach silence.

To say that the gods have fled is not to say that there is no mediation at all:

Und es grünen
Tief an den Bergen auch lebendige Bilder, (VIII, 14-15)
And low down at
The foot of mountains, too, will living images thrive,

and again:

Der Vater aber liebt,
Der über allen waltet,
Am meisten, dass gepfleget werde
Der feste Buchstab, und Bestehendes gut
Gedeutet. (XV, 10-15)

---

[196] Hugo von Hofroannstha1, *Ausgewählte Werke*, vol. 2, *Erzählungen und Aufsätze* (Frankfurt, 1961), p. 342.

But what the Father
Who reigns over all loves most
Is that the solid letter
Be given scrupulous care, and the existing
Be well interpreted.

Nature and history, the latter established for us in the words of those who lived in a brighter age, are the mediations left to us. As Hölderlin says in a later version of *Der Einzige*:

Mit Stimmen erscheint Gott als
Natur von aussen, Mittelbar
In heiligen Schriften.

With voices God appears as
Nature from without. Mediately
In holy scrlptures. [197]

And yet, what we read of in Scripture is becoming more and more dreamlike — tales of God walking on earth — fairy tales — and nature does not speak to us clearly enough to found on what it has to tell us a common way of life. With the death of God, the community of men is threatened. For that community presupposes the establishment of a common language that assigns to the individual a place in a larger order. With the death of God our common language has lost founder and foundation. Individuals, and especially those committed to authenticity, unwilling to continue by simply accepting the inherited, but unable to discover old or new gods, find themselves alone.

Doch furchtbar ist, wie da und dort
Unendlich hin zerstreut das Lebende Gott. (IX, 1-2)

Yet dreadful it is how here and there
Unendingly God disperses whatever lives.

The ninth stanza is grammatically the most confusing of the poem. Much remains unsaid which is yet necessary to even grammatically complete what appears. These confusions, communicating uncertainty and loss, lead to the desperate question that is the tenth stanza: *was ist dies*? What is the meaning of this process in which we find ourselves caught up? Three times the word *wenn* introduces descriptions pointing to what

[197] My translation.

makes this process so questionable.

Wenn aber stirbt alsdenn
An dem am meisten
Die Schönheit hing, dass an der Gestalt
Ein Wunder war und die Himmlischen gedeutet
Auf ihn, (X, 1-5)

But when thereupon he dies
To whom beauty most adhered, so that
A miracle was wrought in his person and
The Heavenly had pointed at him,

Hölderlin speaks of the beauty of the incarnated God. With the withdrawal of the divine from the world, it threatens to become pale and questionable.

Und wenn, ein Rätsel ewig füreinander
Sie sich nicht fassen können
Einander, die zusammenlebten
Im Gedächtnis, und nicht den Sand nur oder
Die Weiden es hinwegnimmt und die Tempel
Ergreift (X, 5-10)

And when, an enigma to one another
For ever, they cannot understand
One another who lived together
Conjoined by remembrance, and not only
The sand or the willows it takes away,
And seizes the temples,

Time is presented here as a force that takes away not only sand and willows, but also the temples in which yet the gods were once present. Time also forces us to acknowledge that ultimately we are alone; that even those whom we loved, those with whom we lived together and who were closest to us, even they are taken away from us and become distant and pale, strange and alien, a riddle, too difficult for us to solve.

Wenn die Ehre
Des Halbgotts und der Seinen

Verweht und selber sein Angesicht
Der Höchste wendet
Darob, dass nirgend ein
Unsterbliches mehr am Himmel zu sehn ist oder
Auf grüner Erde, (X, 10-15)

When even
The demigod's honour and that of his friends
Is blown away by the wind, and the Highest
Himself averts his face
Because nowhere now
An immortal is to be seen in the skies or
On our green earth,

Christ himself is forgotten and God has turned away from a world that cannot save itself from the rule of time.

The questioning *was ist dies?* "What is this?" with which the stanza closes marks off what preceded from what is to follow.

Very gently, parable-like, the eleventh-stanza attempts an answer. God is like the sower, who separates "wheat from chaff, and is rich enough not to care if some kernels lost. (XI, 1-7)

Und nicht ein Übel ists, wenn einiges
Verloren gehet und von der Rede
Verhallet der lebendige Laut,
Denn göttliches Werk auch gleichet dem unsern,
Nicht alles will der Höchste zumal. (XI, 6-10)

And there's no harm if some of it
Is lost, and of the speech
The living sound dies away,
For the work of gods, too, is like our own,
Not all things at once does the highest intend.

But is it an answer? Or is it rather an invitation to accept the place where we have been cast? And yet, as Hölderlin says of the disciples, it is difficult to live in the night and

tempting to try to light our own lamps where the divine light is lacking. In the second part of the stanza, beginning with

Zwar Eisen träget der Schacht, (XI, 11)

The pit bears iron, though,

the language accelerates; this breathlessness continues into the next stanza. Instead of being finished, the sentence breaks off and, separated from it by a hyphen, the warning words:

Im Zorne sichtbar sah ich einmal
Des Himmels Herrn, nicht, dass ich sein sollt' etwas, sondern
Zu lernen. (XIII, 5-8)

In anger visible once I saw
The Lord of Heaven, not that I should be something, but
To learn.

The preceding stanza had begun by suggesting that the poet might be rich enough to form an image of Christ; now the suggestion is rejected. If listening to his own or to another's need he were to shape such an image, he would be an impostor; the work would be false:

Gütig sind sie, ihr Verhasstestes aber ist,
So lange sie herrschen das Falsche, und es gilt
Dann Menschliches unter Menschen nicht mehr. (XII, 7-9)

Benign they are, but what they most abhor,
While their reign lasts, is falsehood, and then
What's human no longer counts among humankind.

Hölderlin thus rejects the poet's pretensions to make God visible. We must wait to be called. Where, impatient, man tries to name God without being called, he becomes inhuman.

The rest of this stanza and the following express eschatological hope. The present night will come to an end, although man lacks the strength to bring this about. Once more there will be men strong in their ability to see and name the son of the highest.

Denn sie nicht walten, es waltet aber
Unsterblicher Schicksal und es wandelt ihr Werk

Von selbst, und eilend geht es zu Ende.
Wenn nämlich höher gehet himmlischer
Triumphgang, wird genennet, der Sonne gleich
Von Starken der frohlockende Sohn des Höchsten, (XII, 10-15)

For they do not govern, the fate
It is of immortals that governs, and their work
Proceeds by its own force and hurrying seeks its end.
For when heavenly triumph goes higher
The jubilant son of the Highest
Is called like the sun by the strong.

This relates to what was earlier said:

Denn wiederkommen sollt es
Zu rechter Zeit. (VIII, 7-8)

For it was to come back when
The time was due.

Yet this hoped for day belongs to an indefinite future. Until it comes we have to wait:

Es warten aber
Der scheuen Augen viele,
Zu schauen das Licht (XIII, 5-7)

But many timid eyes
Are waiting to see the light.

By being willing to wait, they save themselves from destructive lightning:

Nicht wollen
Am scharfen Strahle sie blühen, (XIII, 7-8)

They are reluctant to flower
Beneath the searing beam,

Content with what has been established, they entrust themselves to the mediation of Holy Scripture. (XIII, 13; XIV, 11)

The fourteenth stanza addressess the Landgrave of Homburg to whom the poem is

dedicated, as to one who is loved by those in heaven, more ready to submit to the divine will than the poet himself. Again Hölderlin asserts the presence of the divine, indeed of Christ, even in this age.

Denn noch lebt Christus.
Es sind aber die Helden, seine Söhne
Gekommen all und heilige Schriften
Von ihm und den Blitz erklären
Dle Taten der Erde bis izt, (XIV, 9-13)

For Christ lives yet.
But all the heroes, his sons,
Have come, and holy scriptures
About him, and lightning is explained by
The deeds of the world until now.

But we lack mediators and have to be content with past mediation. We still stand under the lightning torn sky, more exposed to the divine, because more distant from and thus less protected by the gods.

The last stanza gives us a final determination of the task of the poet in this needy age; at the same time it states in what sense God can be grasped today. The first two lines characterize this age as an age of need:

Zu lang, zu lang schon ist
Die Ehre der Himmlischen unsichtbar. (XV, 1-2; cf. X, 10-11)

Too long, too long now
The honor of the Heavenly has been invisible.

The divine has become the transcendent that does not appear in the world. Without the mediating god, it becomes a destructive force that seizes us:

und schmählich
Entreisst das Herz uns eine Gewalt (XV, 5-6)

and shamefully
A power is wresting our hearts from us.

The next three lines suggest that man must serve the divine. The poet deems his own

service, first to the earth, to nature, then to the light of the sun, to the Greek gods, especially to Apollo, insufficient.

Wir haben gedienet der Mutter Erd'
Wir haben jüngst dem Sonnenlichte gedient,
Unwissend, (XV, 9-11)

We have served mother earth
And lately have served the sunlight
Unwittingly,

The service that is demanded of us in the present age is service to what has already been established. It is not new establishment, but interpretation, serving the appropriation of the already established.

der Vater aber liebt,
Der über allen waltet,
Am meisten, dass gepfleget werde
Der feste Buchstab, und Bestehendes gut
Gedeutet. Dem folgt deutscher Gesang. (XV, 11-15)

but what the Father
Who reigns over all loves most
Is that the solid letter
Be given scrupulous care, and the existing
Be well interpreted. This German song observes.

In this age of need poetry cannot be what it is in the light of day. Poetry must serve what has been established. It does the greatest justice to this age by being about past poetry. To refuse this modest position — as Hölderlin himself refused it — is to run the risk of destroying what has been established without being able to put anything new in its place, exposing man to God's lightning.

23. Heidegger and Hölderlin

1

Heidegger understands Hölderlin as the poet who poetically describes the vocation of the poet. What then is that vocation? *Patmos* gives a threefold answer. First of all the poet appears as one who, having experienced the presence of a god, has the strength to provide human beings with something like a world orientation. Such a poet was the Evangelist John. His poetry is Holy Scripture. Presupposed by such poetry is an epiphany of the divine, an experience of some being in whom the divine was felt to be present. But can we make any sense of such experiences? What are Christ or, for that matter, the Greek gods to us? Where do we encounter the holy? The divine, *Patmos* suggests, has withdrawn from our world.

If we accept that the inherited value system and the established and long taken for granted ways of speaking in which it is enshrined, have lost their foundation, have become powerless and pale, the task emerges of saving language from becoming hollow repetition — idle talk that can only conceal the loss of meaning. The temptation is now to try to create or seek refuge in a new myth, a myth for the modern world. The paradigm of such creation is Aaron's fashioning of a golden calf in the absence of Moses. Not only Schoenberg experienced the rise of National Socialism in the image of that story. Alfred Rosenberg's *Mythos des 20. Jahrhunderts* is a version of the golden calf. For a few years Heidegger would seem to have sought refuge in just such a myth. But we ask too much of poetry when we expect it to furnish us with a new myth. In *Patmos* Hölderlin warns the poet explicitly against succumbing to that temptation. His is the more modest task of interpreting what has been established in a way that prevents it from degenerating into idle talk.

To be sure, Hölderlin, too, once took it to be the task of the poet to again name the gods and thus to establish a language-game that once again would assign human beings their place. This would make the poet a new prophet, the founder of a new way of dwelling in the world. Against this *Patmos* holds out a warning: does God still call men to prophecy in this age? And in the absence of such a call, must the self-appointed prophet not turn into a false prophet? To claim such a role, exposes the poet to lightning

and danger of destruction. In *Patmos* Hö1derlin gives the poet the more modest task of interpreting what has already been established in order to reawaken others to its threatened meaning. Only in this way can the poet still belong to the historic community and serve God in the only way still possible today. Hölderlin himself found it impossible to serve in this fashion. In the absence of God, this had to lead him in the direction indicated by Heidegger in his Trakl essay: away from the language of the community towards silence. Following the call of the *Abgeschiedene,* Hölderlin becomes himself one who has taken leave.

Two lines quoted by Heidegger in *Hölderlin und das Wesen der Dichtung* are revealing in the context.

1. King Oedipus has one eye too many perhaps. (E 44)
2. I can truly say that I have been struck by Apollo. (E 41)

King Oedipus, Hölderlin suggests, blinds himself because he has one eye too many. Similarly, Heidegger hints, Hölderlin himself may have had one eye too many and therefore had to blind himself. And we can ask, must something similar not also be said of Heidegger himself, who, after his disastrous engagement with National Socialism, chose Hölderlin for his hero? To be sure, Heidegger, did not blind himself, even as he interpreted both Hölderlin's and Nietzsche's descent into madness as such a blinding.

Hölderlin, Heidegger suggests, has an eye that the majority lacks. Hölderlin himself points to what separates him from others when he describes himself as one who grew up in the presence of the gods. If we accept Heidegger's interpretation of the meaning of "gods" as "the messengers of the holy" this is to say: from childhood on, Hölderlin found himself outside the community and its world, being called instead and more immediately by epiphanies of the holy. The extra eye that Hölderlin has lets him experience the special aura of things of nature that makes them unique and resists reproduction, an aura that is lost to the extent that everything is increasingly experienced as reproducible. The eye too many that Hölderlin possesses is the ontological eye that lets him experience beings as epiphanies of the numinous or, as Heidegger might put it, that lets him experience in beings their ground in Being. Wittgenstein's references to the mystical come to mind, which, however, according to him resists being put into words. Any attempt to say it will lead our speaking towards heremetic unintelligibiity and finally

towards silence. We can think of Angelus Silesius and the rose that blooms without a why. It is this ontological sight that most of us, preoccupied with the things and concerns of our ordinary lives, have lost. What concerns us is not Being but beings.

Hölderlin speaks of king Oedipus as having had one eye too many, perhaps. These words suggest that it would perhaps be better if man were without this double sense of sight. His place between the ontic and the ontological, between beings and Being, creates a tension in the life of the poet that needs to be resolved. The ontological difference is too much to bear.

But if the poet has one eye too many, which eye is superfluous? Which eye ought to be put out? Clearly, from the point of view of the ontic, the ontological eye is a disruptive influence. It calls into question what is normally accepted; thus it puts us at a distance from the many, calling us, out of their world towards silence. The ontological eye is disruptive as the call of conscience is. The two belong together. By carrying us out of established language-games, they take things out of the contexts in which they usually appear. As the normal meanings of things collapse, efficient action in the world becomes impossible. Just as Heidegger, in his search for a more genuinely ontological language tends to stress the importance of key words at the expense of the context or grammar to which they belong, so the poet, true to his commitment to the ontological dimension, tends to lose the grammar of life. The tension into which the poet is placed expresses itself in dissatisfaction with the established and generally accepted world. If it were not for this tension, the poet, too, could lose himself in this world and thus losing himself, forget his homelessness. He might be in despair over the finite, as Kierkegaard might say, but he would not recognize his despair.

If the ontological eye is one too many from the ontic point of view, the reverse is true from the ontological point of view. The closer Hölderlin moves to the ontological dimension, the more difficult he finds it to accept a normal way of life. For the poet who has been "struck by Apollo," who experiences this god as present and knows himself to be his chosen servant, such a compromise is impossible.

It is significant that Hölderlin identifies the force that seizes him with Apollo. Apollo is associated with light and clarity, but also with insanity. Light and clarity-are tied to what Heidegger calls the clearing. To be struck by Apollo is to be expelled from

all familiar regions, to be cast into the open. The call of Apollo is the call of the clearing, of the light beyond Plato's cave that bids us reject what ties us to darkness. It is a call to journey into the light, not to the establishment of another world, not to world-establishing poetry in that sense, but to that poetry that must end in silence. As the tension between that call and the demands of the everyday increases Hölderlin becomes aware of the impending danger. Thus a few years before his mental collapse he writes that while he used to be able to rejoice over every new truth, over a better view of what lies beyond us, he now dreads the fate of Tantalus, to whom the gods gave more than he could digest. Is our lot not to dwell within the cave and not in the light?

The concealment of the ontological dimension is not the danger that threatens Hölderlin. The danger is rather that the grammar of life will be lost. Life loses the structure that binds it together and breaks into fragments. The poet's commitment to the ontologica1 dimension makes it difficult for him to accept that minimum of structure without which human life is impossible. Hölderlin's fate is the loss of the world, of the order in which things find their proper places.

2

The last hymns that accompany this process of disintegration stand alone in world literature. It is increasingly difficult to establish what these poems mean. Continuity and structure threaten to disappear. Individual phrases assume a significance that resists analysis. Karl Jaspers ties Hölderlin' s uniqueness of the late hymns to the fact that Hölderlin was the only great poet who was also a schizophrenic. In this coming together of apparently unrelated factors this uniqueness is said to have its foundation. It is a plausible interpretation, but it leaves the question: why should so many have found these hymns, written on the edge of madness so significant?

Here it is of some interest that while today Hölderlin' s place among the world's great poets is assured, for a hundred years he remained pretty much unknown. There were, to be sure, exceptions, such as Gustav Schwab, Clemens von Brentano, Bettina and Achim von Arnim, but when the 15 year old Nietzsche proclaimed Hölderlin his *Lieblingsdichter,* his favorite poet, he also remarked that the majority of his compatriots

had not heard of him.[198] And if Hölderlin was of only marginal significance for the development of nineteenth century poetry, no one in the 19th century would have thought of him as having made a significant contribution to philosophy, certainly not his former roommate Hegel, who could be said to have outgrown Hölderlin shortly after 1800. Soon Hegel was to "criticize the art of his day as 'dreaming' and Hölderlin's drama *Empedocles*, a kind of self-portrait, as a 'beautiful soul,' fleeing life."[199] Hegel's description of the beautiful soul in *The Phenomenology of the Spirit,*[200] as a consciousness concerned to save its purity of heart, condemned to unhappiness by its refusal to realize itself in the world, may be read as also a description of Hölderlin. As the spirit's progress in the *Phenomenology* has to leave the beautiful soul behind, has to leave art behind, so Hegel's progress leaves Hölderlin behind. The mature Hegel buried Hölderlin in silence.

Heidegger on the other hand insists that Hölderlin is not only Germany's greatest poet, but also "one of our greatest, that is most futural *thinkers*,"[201] a thinker whose work is said to present all of us, but especially the German people, with a profound challenge, where part of that challenge, as Heidegger understands it, is the continuing challenge presented by Greek thought. Heidegger's high estimation of Hölderlin was of course not original with him. Crucial, as he acknowledges, was Norbert von Hellingrath's Hölderlin edition, especially its fourth volume, which, appearing in 1914, for the first time made these hymns available. For his Hölderlin understanding, Heidegger, like so many of his contemporaries, for example Rilke, is thus indebted to the circle around Stefan George, to which von Hellingrath belonged. Heidegger himself has been quite explicit about this debt.

When Heidegger celebrates Hölderlin, not just as a great poet, but also as a great thinker, he places his own thinking in self-conscious opposition to the metaphysical thinking of the mature Hegel, who, in the spirit of considerations presented already in Plato's *Republic,* was unable to take poetry seriously as a rival claimant to truth. This is

---

[198] See *Dichter über Hölderlin* , ed. Jochen Schmidt (Frankfurt: Insel, 1969), p. 109.
[199] Shikaya, p. 264. See Herma Nohl, ed., *Hegels theologische Jugendschriften* (Tübingen, Mohr, 1907), p. 285 f.
[200] Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, ed. Johannes Hofmeister (Hamburg: Meiner, 1952), p. 463.
[201] *Hölderlins Hymnen "Germanien" und "Der Rhein*," p. 6.

not to call into question the importance of the countless discussions in which Hölderlin and Hegel engaged, first in Tübingen (Hölderlin and Hegel became friends in 1790; the following year Schelling joined the circle), later, from January 1797 to 1800 in Frankfurt, and it was to Hölderlin to whom Hegel dedicated his best known poem, "Eleusis," written in August 1796, a poem that looks forward to rejoining the friend, whom Hegel here calls Geliebter, "beloved."[202] But soon their thoughts and paths began to diverge and we can say: Hegel, and something similar can be said of Schelling, had to leave Hölderlin behind, for German idealism develop as it did.

Heidegger, of course, insists that the confrontation with Hölderlin still awaits us and, as mentioned, claims that to understand his own thought, one has to understand it as serving and therefore as standing in an essential relationship to Hölderlin's poetry. Socrates' teaching in the *Republic* is here reversed: the primacy of the poet over the philosopher is explicitly acknowledged. Heidegger's turn to Hölderlin is bound up with his call for a step beyond the entire tradition of metaphysics, a tradition that is said to culminate in the work of Hegel, where that step is also understood as a step beyond modernity. If Heidegger is right, that tradition had to end in nihilism and just because of this we need to confront Hölderlin. In Hölderlin descent into madness he finds a deeper significance.

But to return to the late hymns: What are we to make of the late hymns? Is Hölderlin's final insanity accidental? What is the relationship between poetry and insanity? In one of his poems Schiller poses the question: Why must he who attempts to lift the veil of Isis perish? To lift the veil of Isis, Schiller tells us, is to see the truth, not one truth among many other truths, but the truth, an indivisible truth. This truth must then be something very different from what we normally would call truths. Such truths pertain to particulars, while the truth of which Schiller speaks lifts man beyond all particulars. Following Heidegger, we can take truth here to mean the revelation of Being, of the contest of earth and light. In such revelation what matters is not so much what something is, but that it is.

The more solitary the work, fixed in the figure, stands on its own and the

---

[202] Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Werke* I, *Theorie Werkausgabe*, *Frühe Schriften* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1971), p. 230.

> more cleanly it seems to cut all ties to human beings, the more simply does the thrust come into the Open that such a work *is*, and the more essentially is the extraordinary thrust to the surface and the long-familiar thrust down. But this multiple thrusting is nothing violent, for the more purely the work is itself transported into the openness of beings — an openness opened by itself — the more simply does it transport us into this openness and thus at the same time transport us out of the realm of the ordinary. To submit to this displacement means to transform our accustomed ties to world and to earth and henceforth to restrain all usual doing and prizing, knowing and looking, in order to stay within the truth that is happening in the work. (HW 54; PLT 66)

The poet's commitment to his work is a commitment not to lose himself in the established. Such a commitment must bring with it the destruction of the familiar world. Hölderlin's uniqueness and what leads Heidegger to choose him for his hero (SZ 351) lies in his commitment to this poetic ideal. But by opening himself to the ontological dimension, Hölderlin opens himself to a force that shatters his life into fragments. When Heidegger calls the *Abgeschiedene "*the madman," this latter term should not be taken lightly. If we take the *first moment* of poetry sketched before, its leave-taking from the everyday and its common sense, too seriously and let our commitment to it lead us altogether beyond idle talk, we must become insane.

Hölderlin himself stressed this danger and to combat it emphasized the importance of the community. He came to suspect the hubris that lies in the conception of the poet standing as mediator between men and the numinous, and at times his approaching insanity seemed to him a punishment for this hubris. To this warning voice of Hölderlin Heidegger does not do justice. Thus in his interpretation of *Wie wenn am Feiertage* … Heidegger stresses Hölderlin's conception of the poet as mediator, but passes over the fact that the poem is a fragment.[203] In the fragmentary last stanza

---

[203] Heidegger's omission of the fragmentary eighth stanza is difficult to justify. His explanation — "Der hier zugrunde gelegte Text beruht, nach den urschriftlichen Entwürfen erneut geprüft, auf dem folgenden Versuch einer Auslegung (E. 50) — gives too ready ammunition to those who accuse Heidegger of doing violence to his texts. Cf. Walter Muschg, *Die Zerstörung der deutschen*

Hölderlin puts his belief in the messianic role of the poet in question. Even if the poet says, Hölderlin warns us here, that he has experienced the gods, it is the gods themselves who threw the false priest into the dark to sing his warning song to those who want to hear:

Doch weh mir! wenn von
Weh mir

Und sag ich gleich
Ich sei genaht, die Himmlischen zu schauen,
Sie selbst, sie warfen mich tief unter die Lebenden
Den falschen Priester, ins Dunkel, dass ich
Das warnende Lied, den Gelehrigen singe.
Dort

But, woe unto me! when of
Woe unto me!

And though I may say,
I had approached to see the Heavenly,
They themselves cast me deep below the living
The false priest into the dark
That I might sing the warning song to those able to learn.
There

The tragedy of this last stanza Heidegger does not see or does not want to see.

Heidegger's attempt to seek the essence of language in poetry and the essence of poetry in Hölderlin's late hymns leaves us with a problem. Is it possible to escape insanity and at the same time follow the call of the Abgeschiedene? Does Heidegger offer us a solution? His favorite poet, Hölderlin, and his favorite painter, Van Gogh,

---

Literatur (München, no d.), p. 175.

were both schizophrenics. **If we take Heidegger's view of authenticity seriously**, perhaps more seriously than he himself was willing to take it, is it possible to avoid insanity? We are thrown back to a problem posed by Kierkegaard: how can Abraham receive Isaac again, once he has willed to sacrifice him? How can the poet return to the world and to the community once he has chosen to forsake it? Hölderlin was unable to make that return. And this inability cannot be divorced from the adopted poetic ideal.

24. Poetry and Community

1

Can we follow Heidegger in his attempt to seek the essence of language in poetry without doing violence to the social character of language? Or is it perhaps we who have done violence to Heidegger's thought, first by exaggerating the individuating power of death, later by giving only passing attention to what Heidegger has to say about the ties between community and language? Does Heidegger not insist that man is essentially with others? To be with others human beings must be able to hear from one another: community requires a common language. "The being of men is founded in language. But this only becomes actual in *conversation*. Nevertheless the latter is not merely a manner in which language is put into effect, rather it is only as conversation that language is essential." (E 36)[204] **The essence of language,** Heidegger seems to be saying here, **must be sought in conversation or dialogue**. Conversation presupposes that men have been fashioned into a community by being given a common measure. "We are a conversation, that always means at the same time: we are a *single* conversation. But the unity of a conversation consists in the fact that in the essential word there is always manifest that one and the same thing on which we agree, and on the basis of which we are united and so are essentially ourselves. Conversation and its unity support our Dasein" (E 36). **To be authentic, human existence must have its foundation in an established and shared language.**

Whatever is established presupposes a first establishment; thus, Heidegger suggests, established language presupposes poetry. As the originator of communal language, the poet cannot be part of the community that he has helped found; as the one who establishes the order in which others can find their place and each other, he is beyond that order. He belongs to those creators who "pre-eminent in their historical

---

[204] Martin Heidegger, "Hölderlin und das Wesen der Dichtung," *Erläuterungen zu Hölderlins Dichtung*. (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1951), (GA 4). [abbreviated as E]. For English translations of the essay see Keith Hoeller's translation in *Elucidations of Hölderlin's Poetry* (Amherst, New York, Humanity Books, 2000) and the older translation by Douglas Scott in *Existence and Being*, ed. Werner Brock (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1965).

place, become at the same, time *apolis*, without city and place, lonely, strange, md alien ... without statute and limit, without structure and order, because they themselves as creators must first of all create all this" (EM 117).[205]

It would seem that, if to be human is to be with others, the poet is necessarily inhuman. But while it is difficult to reconcile Heidegger's attempt to seek the essence of language in its establishment by a solitary individual with his understanding of man as essentially with others, it does agree with his interpretation of the phenomenon of death. Facing death man recognizes that he is fundamentally alone and that all his attempts to establish a secure place for himself are attempts to discover a bottom in what is bottomless. To act authentically man must recognize that his action is without final justification and that he alone is responsible for it; he may not shift responsibility by arguing that what he is doing is only what one does. Discourse, too, is action. If poetry is authentic discourse, it, too, must be the work of an individual and without foundation in what one says.

But have we not gone too far? Emphasizing poetry's dependence on the poet, we have neglected its dependence on the community. Heidegger himself speaks in "The Origin of the Work if Art" of this twofold dependence. "Just as a work cannot be without being created but is essentially in need of creators, so what is created cannot itself come into being without those who preserve it" (HW 54; PLT 66). On this view, the tension between individual and community is part of the essence of poetry.

To guard against an overly individualistic interpretation of poetry, we must insist that the community that preserves the work of the poet is constitutive of it. The poet casts his work towards that community.

What does preserve mean here? "Preserving the work means: standing within the openness of beings that happens in the work" (HW 55; PLT 67). To preserve the work of the poet is to hear it and to keep the place we are assigned by it. Heidegger calls this dwelling-place of man his *ethos*. Thinking about this place is fundamental ethics (Hum

---

[205] EM: *Einführung in die Metaphysik*, GA 40, page references to the 1953 edition, published by Klostermann. Tr. *Introduction to Metaphysics,* 2nd edition. Translated by Gregory Fried and Richard Polt, New Haven, Conn., Yale University Press, 2014).

39,41).[206] Fundamental ethics does not tell human beings what to do, but it does tell them what is necessary if they are to know what is to be done: only that person can be resolved and face definite tasks, who is assigned his place by subordinating himself to a work. Such subordination is preservation. "This "standing-within" of preservation, however, is a knowing. Yet knowing does not consist in mere information and notions about something. He who truly knows what is, knows what he wills to do in the midst of what *is"* (HW 55).

By making poetry dependent on those who would preserve it, Heidegger appears to go some distance towards closing the gap between poetry and community. But in spite of this effort, poetry and community remain too far apart. Heidegger does not argue that there must actually be a community that preserves the work of the poet. The work "always remains tied to preservers, even and particularly when it is still merely waiting for preservers and only pleads and waits for them to enter into its truth" (HW 55). The work thus stands here in an essential relation to a possible, not to an actual community. Furthermore, as only the work of true creators establishes the order in which others find their place, establishing that order they cannot themselves be part of it. They furnish measure and law, but are themselves beyond them. Thus the work of the poet cannot meaningfully be challenged, for the criteria that would have to be presupposed to make such challenge possible are themselves only established through his work.

Heidegger thus argues, at least implicitly, for

1. The separation of poet and community.
2. The freedom of the poet from all law.
3. The priority of the poetic over the ethical.

One may want to question these theses, even on Heideggerian grounds, by arguing that there is nothing that prevents each individual from being himself the author of the work from which he derives his measure. One could even insist that this is demanded by Heidegger's own understanding of authenticity. This would deny the distinction between the poet as leader and the community of the led. Heidegger nowhere

---

[206] *Brief über den Humanismus* (Frankfurt am Man: Klostermann, 1949). Also in *Wegmarken* (Frankfurt am Man: Klostermann, 1967) and GA 9. "Letter on Humanism," *Pathmarks*, tr. Frank A Capuzzi, and J Glenn Gray.

suggests that such a move is possible: according to him few are called to genuine work and this is especially true in this age of need, where our forgetfulness of Being has made such establishment all but impossible. Furthermore, and more importantly, according to Heidegger the nature of community presupposes that there be just one work establishing it — only one work can provide a multitude of human beings with a common measure, a common history, a common future. On this view the poet stands above rather than within the community he helps to found. His relationship to other members of this community is thus asymmetrical and this asymmetry rules out his participation in genuine conversation.

I find it difficult to make sense of this: How, on Heidegger' view, is it possible for the people to hear the poet? Only if the poet is already a member of the community can he lead it; only if he speaks the language of those who are to preserve his work, will he be understood. Poetry must have its foundation in a common language. It is necessary to provide the poet with the material he needs for his work. In the "Origin of the Work if Art" Heidegger thus calls language the poet's work-material (HW 34; PLT 45). Language is the poet's earth. Yet against this we have to weigh Heidegger's argument that what has been established presupposes an act of establishment; as something already established, language presupposes poetry. We are moving in a circle: poetry presupposes a common language that in turn presupposes poetry. This circle suggests that we may be trying to separate what belongs together. Living language never has that neat closure Heidegger suggests when he speaks of the unity of the conversation that envelops us. Language is not established once and for all, it continues to be established, giving expression to an evolving common sense. It is not given to us as something complete and finished, but is to be appropriated and transformed by us. To some extent we are all potential poets, and every poet participates and subordinates himself to an ongoing conversation. *The essence of language* is not so much poetry as *dialogue*; genuine dialogue, however, is necessarily poetic.

2

The circle into which we are led when we try to think through Heidegger's view of poetry, also can be uncovered in his discussion of art. This should be expected, if, as Heidegger argues, all art is fundamentally poetry. From this determination of art it

follows that the artist cannot derive his measure from what has already been established.

Again we must ask whether this understanding of the work of art does not isolate the artist too much from all established contexts. Consider a Gothic cathedral or a Greek temple. Perhaps the Greek temple establishes, as Heidegger says, a world. But such assertions are disturbingly vague. What does "Greek temple" refer to? Heidegger describes it in terms that raise the general idea of a Greek temple, yet every work of art is concrete and individual. Every temple occupies and defines a particular place, serves a particular divinity. Delos is not Olympia, Apollo not Zeus. Are we to say then, that every such temple establishes the Greek world anew? Were this so, the Greek world would scatter into fragments. **We can make sense of the thesis that the work of art establishes a world only if the world established is also the already established world, which is interpreted and made more visible by the work of art, perhaps we can say, if the already established world is the poet's earth,** "earth" to be understood as Heidegger understands it in this essay. We don't do justice to the essence of art, as long as we emphasize the establishment of a world and forget that the work of art is always a comment on the already established world, which it re-establishes and thus preserves. Such interpretation cannot be derived from what has been established, yet it remains bound to it, remains bound to a pre-given order, established in other and earlier creative work. The artist is essentially a member of an ongoing community of creators.

Although Heidegger tends to emphasize the groundlessness of artistic creation, he does recognize the need for binding the work of art into history. "Poetic projection comes from the Nothing in this respect, that it never takes its gift from the ordinary and traditional. But it never comes from the Nothing in that what is projected by it is only the withheld vocation of the historical being of man itself." (HW 63; PLT 76) To say this is to go beyond the thesis that the work of art requires those who preserve it. The place assigned to the preservers is now said to be a place to which they were destined by their history. To make sense of this we have to acknowledge that this destiny has already established itself in preceding works. **The artist never establishes the world upon the earth immediately**. Rather the poet's earth is itself always already mediated by other works. Only in this way can we understand how works of art can lose their world, so that later they are understood only with difficulty, or differently, or not at all (cf. HW 30; PLT

42). Thus we don't really understand the Greek temple quite in the way Heidegger's description suggests. It does not place *us* into its world, although in some sense it still presents that world to us. Similarly the churches of the Middle Ages are no longer the houses of God, but have turned into museums, so that their preservation today is as likely to take the form of guided tours as of religious services. Even when an art historian presents us with an interpretation that convincingly leads us back to the world that was once established in that work, still, this world is not ours. The structure of our world, of that world that provides us with our final horizon, prevents us from being assigned our place by works of art belonging to past ages.

Just as the poet's establishment of language presupposes an already established language, so the world established in a work of art presupposes an already established world. **The work of the poet or the artist is creative re-establishment of what has been established.** If this formulation is accepted, we cannot separate as sharply as Heidegger the poet who establishes a world in his work from the community that preserves that work. The poet, too, is preserver as much as creator.

Against this one could once again appeal to the fact that the established world must itself have its foundation in linguistic creation, this is to say, in poetry. And if an infinite regress is to be avoided, we must posit poetry that is more than creative interpretation, which is creation in a fuller sense. But how is such creation to be understood except in terms of the already established?

Again we are moving in a circle that ties all establishment to an establishing, i.e, to creation and creation to what has already been established. Earlier it was suggested that Heidegger understands the poet as one who is taking leave from the community. To what extent can this be reconciled with what has here been maintained? Are we not saying that *the p***oet must serve and be part of an ongoing conversation**?

How does this agree with what Heidegger has to say for instance in the Trakl essay? It is important in this context to remember that Trakl's poetry leads us, according to Heidegger, not so much to the essence of poetry, as to the essence of *modern* poetry. Perhaps there is something about the situation of the modern poet, and beyond that of the modern artist, that makes it impossible for him to serve the established world and difficult to participate in a conversation that is more than a community of the silent.

Modern art, too, is based on a pre-given world and perhaps that world is such that it demands a more radical leave-taking than traditional art. Heidegger's poetic thinking could be cited as an illustration.

3

Every established world stands to some extent in the way of the poet. This has its foundation in the tendency of every work to cover up what Heidegger calls the earth. Precisely because the world is more easily grasped while the earth remains hidden, there is a tendency to forget the earth. This is why, following Hölderlin, Heidegger can call language the danger of dangers: by establishing a world, it tends to cover up Being. But if it is part of the essence of language and world to cover up the earth and thus Being, it must be a particular feature of our world, that accounts for the leave-taking characteristic of modern art and poetry. And again, if every world has its foundation in work, it must be a particular feature of the work determining our modern world that accounts for our inability to create works of art in what Heidegger takes to be its highest sense.
Heidegger interprets this work as the work of metaphysics.

What is metaphysics? The essence of metaphysics has its foundation in the question: what is the being of beings? Metaphysics seeks to determines this being and thus to rescue it from the hidden. But is this not characteristic of all work? Every genuine work make some something overt and thus, we can say, rescues it from the hidden.

Against this we must weigh something said earlier about the work of art: the work of art, Heidegger writes, presents the earth, thus it preserves the hidden. Art and poetry do not aim at a victory over the hidden, but on the contrary, seek to reveal the hidden as hidden. The will to master the earth is, however, part of the essence of metaphysics.

Metaphysics is born of the will to power that seeks to place all that is totally within man's grasp. I tried to show that we must fail in this by means of an analysis of Cartesian method. Only if it were possible to preserve the earth in the world without loss could this attempt to grasp being succeed. Just this is ruled out by the earth's essence. The power of the earth can be pushed back, can be forgotten, but it cannot be secured and negated.

The forgetting of the earth, I suggested, is necessarily also a forgetting of Being as Heidegger understands it. This is not to say that earth and Being as Heidegger understands these terms mean the same thing. As already pointed out, the essence of Being must be sought in the interplay of earth and light, of concealment and openness. The world and the work that establishes it have their foundation in that play. By interpreting Being, having only the world in view, metaphysics overlooks the hidden and thus the essence of Being. From its perspective, focused as it is on things, the hidden aspect of Being appears to be nothing at all (HW 104; AWP[207]154). It is part of the essence of metaphysics that it tends to forget and cover up its own foundation. This would be of small significance were it not for the fact that our world has its origin in this forgetful interpretation of Being. On Heidegger's view, it is in our own world that metaphysics celebrates its greatest triumph.

Metaphysics has its origin in a revolt against Being in its entirety that now, for the first time in Greek philosophy, is questioned and grasped as that being which it is. To grasp in concepts is already to determine, to fix and secure. The attempt not only to determine, but to hold on to the being of beings, leads to an interpretation of that being as not simply presence, but as continuous presence or everlasting presence. To assure this, nature has to be grounded in another harder, more crystalline reality. A supersensible, unchanging reality is opposed to the fleeting world with which our senses present us. True being is opposed to appearance; what we initially encounter is thought to be dependent on a higher reality. It is thought as having its ground in some other reality. As Leibniz was to formulate the central thought of metaphysics: *nihil est sine ratione*, nothing is without a reason or ground. The Christian philosophy of the Middle Ages interprets this dependence as a dependence on God. "All entities other than God need to be 'produced' in the widest sense and also to be sustained. 'Being' is to be understood within a horizon that ranges from the production of what is to be present-at-hand to something which has no need of being produced. Every entity that is not God is an e*ns creatum*" (SZ 92). The thought of God, understood as the all-knowing creator of all, keeps the world essentially open to knowledge and thus hides the earth.

---

[207] "The Age of the World Picture," *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans William Lovitt (New York: Harper, 1977).

A further increase in our forgetfulness of Being, decisive for our situation, occurs with Descartes. Following traditional metaphysics, Descartes thinks the *ego cogito* as that which is always present where there is thought and therefore does not need to be secured. Every being that is not subject is object. "This objectifying of whatever is, is accomplished in a setting-before, a representing (*Vor-stellen*) that aims at bringing each particular being before it in such a way, that man who calculates can be sure, and that means be certain, of that beings" (HW 80; AWP] 125). Man founds and confirms himself as the authoritative measure for all standards of measure with which whatever can be accounted as certain, i.e. as true, i.e. to say as in being — is measured off and measured out" (HW 101-102; AWP 151). Enough has been said of Cartesian method to enable us to see why Heidegger would insist that modern science and technology have their foundation in this interpretation of being. In Heidegger's later works we find thus an increasing concern for the essence of technology and thus for the essence of' the world which seems to assign us our place. Only in the form of technology, Heidegger suggests, does metaphysics assume absolute dominion in the realm of beings (VA[208] 76). Having reduced beings to objects, truth, as Heidegger understands it, i.e, truth as disclosure, too, is lacking; lacking because truth is established only in the interplay of earth and light. The work of metaphysics, too, has here its now forgotten and passed over origin. To the extent that modern man understands the entirety of being as the objective world, he is no longer open to the dimension in which alone he can hear the call of the earth. Losing truth, man also loses his own essence. "Because reality consists of the uniformity of planning and calculation, man, too, has to enter into this uniformity, if he is to remain up to reality. Today a man without uni-form already makes the impression of something unreal that no longer belongs." (VA 93) That statement is from a collection of observations from the years 1936-1946 that Heidegger collected and chose to publish in 1953, giving it the title "Überwindung der Metaphysik," 'The Surpassing of Metaphysics."

---

[208] "Überwindung der Metaphysik," *Vortrage und Aufsätze* (Pfullingen: Neske, 1978); also GA 7.

25. Poetry and Metaphysics

1

If we accept Heidegger's interpretation of the essence of poetry (and art) as an establishment of the world and at the same time his interpretation of the course of history, there would seem to be no place for poetry, and poetry here includes art, in our modern world. The more our objective Cartesian spirit lets us overlook the earth, the less is art still a possibility.

This finds its reflection in the tendency, so characteristic of our time, to connect ART with the past. Faced with the art of our time we are unsure; everything important seems to have been done, the vocabulary of art exhausted, and attempts to develop new vocabularies more interesting than convincing. Hegel's assertion, that art has no real future, no longer seems so farfetched (cf. HW 66-67).

Characteristic of this autumnal view of art is the association of art and museum. As we know it, the museum is a comparatively recent institution, emerging only in the first half of the nineteenth century, lagging somewhat behind such related phenomena as archeology, art-history, and neo-classical and neo-gothic architecture, all expressions of a museal attitude extending far beyond the arts to religion and even to nature. Consider for example, the significance of setting aside a certain piece of nature as a national monument. Monuments serve to commemorate, most often the dead. What then do natural monuments commemorate? Perhaps nature herself? Does nature then need commemorating? We do indeed live in an age where nature seems to belong increasingly to the past, having no place in our modern world. By trying to preserve it in especially created monuments or parks, we show that this loss, although perhaps inevitable, is nevertheless felt to be serious.

In a similar fashion we approach works of art as “cuItural monuments.” Like “nature,” “cuIture” leads us back to a past threatened, by the present. Stepping into a museum or concert hall, we enter an "aesthetic church,” a sublime and rather chilly necropolis, stretching across time, where Palestrina and Beethoven, Michelangelo and Van Gogh, Shakespeare and Goethe join frozen hands. Part of this museal attitude are an often almost religious veneration and respect, but also a certain indifference. We know

that what really matters lies elsewhere. Art needs special attention precisely because it has lost its place in our world and must therefore be given a special place often at great cost.

But suppose art so understood is a thing of the past, what does it matter? As we have seen, on Heidegger' s view there can be no genuine novelty without art and poetry. To say this, is of course not to deny that there will not be new discoveries, future journeys to as yet unvisited places, beyond the moon to Mars, for example, only that whatever we shall encounter there already has its assigned place in our world. The place of whatever will be discovered has already been provided for. The shape of our world has been established once and for all.

In this connection it is interesting to think back to men's first steps on the moon and their impact. Watching Neil Armstrong and Edwin Aldrin's curious leaps across lunar dust, I was struck by the contrast between what appeared on the television screen and the rhetoric attending it: a completely new step in the evolution of man, the beginning of a new era, an event rivalling, even exceeding in importance Columbus' discovery of a new world. But did it not have quite another significance? Columbus did discover a new world and by so doing helped shatter the security of the old, revealing new, mysterious horizons. Man's journey to the moon, on the other hand, constitutes a victory for the established scientific, technological world. There is nothing in the nature of that victory to shake our confidence in that world. Quite the opposite. Stanley Kubrick's film 2001 gave us an idea of what space travel would have to be like to have that significance that so many desperately try to find in it, but to do so Kubrick had to leave science and technology behind and turn to the surreal.

If art must do more than point to and reiterate what has already been established, if it must establish a new place, thus changing the shape of our world, this is possible only in a world that still permits the marvelous. Art is essentially
a journey beyond the taken for granted into the unknown. Every genuine artist
must take leave from the world he has inherited. And the more this world seems to permit no outside, the more difficult and the more violent this leave-taking will be. Once the world has become a prison or a labyrinth that has no outside,
the leave-taking will turn into destruction.

On this view of art and of our world, authentic art today can only be negative or destructive. It liberates us, but establishes no new place, it only shows us an exit, without revealing where this exit leads us. But this violent destruction of the old world is also work that presents what Heidegger calls the earth, and perhaps, since modern art and poetry are forced to break more completely with the world than more traditional works, the earth is made more immediately visible here than was there the case.

2

Perhaps we have come somewhat closer to an understanding of why Heidegger tends to oppose poetry and community. Poetry can serve the world and the established community as long as this world preserves the earth. To make the same point, using another vocabulary, poetry can serve the world as long as this world is open to transcendence. With the reduction of being to objective being in which metaphysics triumphs even as philosophy tends to disappear, transcendence becomes an empty nothingness. The divorce of poet and community that must lead poetry towards silence has its foundation in our historic place. If this is accepted, it follows that Hölderlin' s progress towards insanity should not be seen as paradigmatic for the poetic project as such, but only for the poetic project in an age that is experienced as having sacrificed the earth to its world.

But perhaps we should question Heidegger's interpretation of this age. Is Heidegger not exaggerating the power of metaphysics? Heidegger fails to do justice to the many dimensions of our world understanding. The structure of our being-in-the-world is polyphonic; we never hear only one voice, but many, pointing in different directions, calling us to different, often incompatible tasks. Even today, while it is impossible to deny the immense power of the scientific-technological world, this world is still not *the* world but only one theme, a dominant theme, but perhaps not even the most important one. The leave-taking from the world of metaphysics need not mean a leave-taking from the world. Even if we grant the danger that world poses to the essence of man, is there not still another world, older than the world of metaphysics, which requires interpretation and needs to be preserved, and to it belong desire and suffering, love and hate, birth and death. Our history does not begin with the Greeks; our world preserves

much that is far older than the pre-Socratics.

And yet we have to grant Heidegger at least this much: the power of the scientific-technological establishment is great enough to make it difficult for us to hear these other voices. This shows itself not only in Heidegger's thought, but more decisively in modern art and poetry, and beyond that in a general uneasiness with whatever has been established, which easily turns to violence in the hope that such violence will lead us to a new world. But such hopes remain indefinite. Besides this world there seems to be nothing; to its power the modern poet can oppose nothing more than the silence of the earth and his own empty freedom.

3

This journey from logic to poetry was begun in the hope of showing that the Socratic conception of the philosopher as critic of an already established language and way of life can be justified. It seems that, judged by this hope, it must be declared a failure. The place we are assigned by the established language-games in which we are caught up can be meaningfully challenged only if we can oppose to it another place which does greater justice to our being; an established order can be criticized only if it has its measure in a higher reality. But where is such a higher reality to be found? Where should we stand? Traditional philosophy looked to reason for an answer? So did Socrates, so did Plato. And this remains Kant's answer and the answer of those many philosophers who continue to think in the Kantian orbit. But does reason have sufficient content to provide such an answer? That depends on how we understand reason. Plato's Socrates certainly thought that reason held the key to the ideal that should preside over our life.

As long as the essence of language is sought in logic at least a shadow of this Socratic conception of philosophy is preserved. Thus we find Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus* attempting to point out conditions that must be met if our speaking is to make sense. But, as we saw, among these conditions we find nothing like criteria telling us what we should do and where we should stand. One place appears to be as good as another. In Wittgenstein's logical space there is no room for God or values, nor is there room for responsible action. The world is reduced to a collection of objective facts that

just happens to be as it is. And this, as I have tried to show, has its foundation, not in certain peculiarities of the *Tractatus*, but is implicit in that reduction of being to objectivity that marks much of modern philosophy and provides the key to what Heidegger calls this age of the world picture.

The retreat from such Cartesian attempts to seek the essence of language in logic to our ordinary language in all its complexity, recovers the ties between language and action: to be caught up in a language-game is to be caught up in a way of life; caught up in a way of life, we are given life's meaning. But if established and accepted language furnishes us the only ground we have, the philosopher must serve this language and rid himself of his pretensions to appear as its critic.

Following Heidegger, I argued that we cannot accept ordinary language as a ground, but must seek this ground elsewhere. Heidegger's distinction between authentic and inauthentic discourse restores a tension to language that again makes a critique of ordinary language possible. Yet this critique is not so much a critique of the place we are assigned by ordinary language, as it is a critique of the way in which we usually take possession of this place: authentic man makes his place his own, while inauthentic man does not. To question the place itself, perhaps to reinforce its authority, would require more substantive criteria than the merely formal criteria provided by the concept of authenticity. But where are such criteria to be found?

4

Perhaps our failure shows no more than that we have looked in the wrong direction — and, in spite of the at times startling differences between Heidegger’s and Wittgenstein's discussions of language, it seems that we have been looking in just one direction. If only in a preliminary way, we can mark this direction with the word “essence. " At each stage of our journey we were looking for the essence of language. But what is the meaning of this search? Does it even make sense? Must language have an essence? To ask such questions is not to ask for a recapitulation of the search; what we want to know is rather what such a search presupposes and what its point is. To search for something is to assume that what is searched for is not at hand or missing. To search for the essence of language is to presuppose that language as it usually presents

itself to us does not reveal its true being — The essence remains hidden. That this should be so is hardly surprising. Just because language is so close to us, because it provides a space in which we always find ourselves, it tends to be passed over and taken for granted. This may seem obvious enough. Still, why not be content with the phenomenon as it presents itself? Why look beyond or beneath it for something like an essence? Our discussion of the *Tractatus* provided at least the hint of an answer. Following Nietzsche and the Wittgenstein of the *Investigations*, I suggested that there is no such thing as an essence in itself; what is taken to be essential has its foundation in some particular project.

The attempt to seek the essence of language in logic was said to have its foundation in the desire to grasp and hold fast what is. **The search for essence appears as the search for firm ground**. This finds expression in the demand for clarity, which bids us go beyond the elusiveness of everyday language. We want to know what it is that is really being said. "Really" suggests that a distinction should be drawn between the sense of a discourse and its appearance. The sense of discourse is thought to be independent of what this or that individual might read into what has been said; it is objective and without ambiguity. To do justice to this sense we demand a purified language that is equally objective and without ambiguity. To re-present what is said in our language in the medium of such a pure language is to exhibit its real sense. This is the point of logical analysis. Such re-presentation is to place discourse on what appears to be firmer ground.

But how do we gain such firmer ground? Let us raise this question first in a more specific form: how does Wittgenstein in the *Tractatu*s establish logical space as the ground or essence of language? An answer has already been given. Beginning with the Cartesian conception that all that can be said can be said clearly, Wittgenstein proceeds to exhibit the conditions that alone make such discourse possible. The authority of logical space is established by a transcendental argument. Such arguments presuppose that the phenomenon whose essence is to be exhibited is seen *sub specie possibilitatis:* our language could be other than it happens to be; there is no logical reason why there are just these languages and no others. The multiplicity of languages is part of facticity and like all facticity groundless. This groundlessness of phenomena invites a search for a

ground, where it is clear that only what resists all attempts to view it *sub specie possibilitatis* finally furnish us with the demanded ground.

If the view of phenomena *sub specie possibilitatis* reveals their groundlessness, it also reveals them to have a form that must be presupposed if we are to be given anything at all. The crucial notion here is that of "anything at all." To frame this conception, I must be able to transcend my experiences in such a way that I can separate what ties an experience to a particular place and time from what makes it an experience. We can call this form, which is supposed to be constitutive of experience, its essence. Similarly we can speak of the essence of language. To arrive at this essence it is again necessary to separate what ties language to a particular place and time from what makes it language.

Earlier I tried to show that the requirement of clarity unduly restricts experience and language, and that Wittgenstein's argument in the *Tractatus* provides therefore only a distorted account of the essence of language and the world. Nevertheless, if we can arrive at a conception of language and experience that transcends particular experiences and speaking here and now, it should be possible to give a transcendental argument to establish an *a priori* that transcends time. Such an *a priori* cannot be imagined to be other than it is. Its mode of construction implies that it will present itself to us *sub specie aeternitatis,* i.e. as ground.

That man does indeed transcend his particular situation has already been shown. My situation is not a prison. I recognize that I see the world from certain perspectives, and to the extent that I do, I am already beyond these perspectives. For example, as I look at some object in space, I am also aware that this same object will look different to others whose point of view is not my own. My awareness of my point of view implies an awareness of other possible points of view. The same is true if the way I speak and think. Thus I can say without much difficulty that my world is not that of the Eskimos, or that my world is not yours. "World" is thought here as a perspectival phenomenon, as having its foundation in a particular point of view. To the extent that I can think this perspectival nature of my world, I must already be in some sense beyond it, capable of conceiving other possible points of view, and not one of these points of view can be considered a prison, since all are transcended in thought. At least this much must be granted, and it is enough to demand a rethinking of the *Investigations*: constitutive of

man is the ability to transcend any perspective he recognizes to be just a perspective. Wherever there is such recognition, there is also some awareness of the trans-perspectival. This makes it possible to oppose to the concrete "I" and its vision of the world a transcendental or pure I, whose vision of the world is a-perspectival. The idea of such an "I" — and it is only a regulative idea that provides direction for our attempts to uncover the a priori essence of language. We can use it to judge one version of the supposed *a priori* harder than another: the greater the degree to which particular perspectives have been transcended, the more ideal, and thus the harder the *a priori*. In this sense the rules governing our use of the word "good" transcend my particular perspective, they provide us with a common measure and in this sense furnish something like an *a priori*, but this *a priori* lacks the hardness of, let us say, the rules governing counting, or of such logical principles as the law of non-contradiction.

Does this movement to the progressively harder come to an end, e.g. when we exhibit the conditions of any possible experience? If so, it should be possible to establish firm ground! But perhaps even the principles of logic can be considered perspectival phenomena, as e.g. Nicolaus Cusanus tried to show in his discussions of the *coincidentia oppositorum,* the coincidence of opposites; if so man can transcend them. With Cusanus the step beyond all perspectives turns out to be a step beyond the prison of the finite into an infinite clearing. But this must remain no more than a suggestion on which little depends; all I want to argue for here is that the idea of an a-perspectival point of view is inseparable from our being and provides as a regulative ideal something like an Archimedean point, a transcendental absolute, a place where it would be possible to stand without fear that this place, too, will be recognized as relative. And this ideal, I have argued, is sufficient to provide the pursuit of truth as it presides over our science with a measure that allows us to speak here of genuine progress. In this the ontology of the present-at-hand has its ground. But can a similar point be made about ethics? Does a similar regulative ideal preside over it, too?

Conclusion

1

Concluding our last session, I claimed that the **idea of an ideal subject,** of a standpoint beyond all perspectives, and the closely related idea of **objectivity,** has its foundation in the power of self-transcendence that is constitutive of human being. That idea provides as a regulative ideal something like an Archimedean point, a transcendental absolute, a place where it would be possible to stand without fear that this place, too, will be recognized as relative. And this ideal, I suggested, is sufficient to provide the pursuit of truth, as it presides over our science, with a measure that allows us to speak of genuine progress. **Truth demands objectivity**. In this the ontology of the present-at-hand has its foundation, as does the opposition of an ideal, supposedly more essential language, as represented by symbolic logic, to ordinary language. A philosopher may thus try to exhibit the structure of logical space and if he believes logical space to be the space of all possible worlds, he may want to call the exploration of that space **metaphysics**.

2

Can a similar point be made about **ethics**? Does a similar regulative ideal preside over it, too? Both Plato and Kant, to name perhaps the two most significant representatives, held some such view. Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* calls such an approach to ethics into question. And what is said there about ethics, that is has no place in logical space, can be generalized: The transcendental search for the essence, be it of language or of reality, has to lead us away from the Socratic conception of philosophy as a critique of the way we act and speak first of all and most of the time. But why? Does that conception not presuppose that it is possible to oppose to the demands of the established order the demands of a higher reality that can provide the critic of the established with the ground to stand on? And are transcendental arguments not able to establish such a ground? Why not use transcendental arguments to give a foundation to ethics? Kant attempted something of the sort.

But the word "ground" calls for closer attention. What is required, it seems, if the Socratic conception of philosophy is to be defended, is a ground that presents us human

beings with something like demands, that tells them what to do. The ground furnished by transcendental arguments is of quite another sort. What then is a **transcendental argument**?

3

Transcendental arguments seek to point out formal principles constitutive of the phenomena under investigation; e.g. what are the principle constitutive of all possible experience. Under no circumstances can such principles prescribe what needs to be done! Such prescription makes sense only if there is a possibility that what is prescribed might remain undone. But transcendental principles are established as necessary presuppositions of all possible experience, speaking, etc. That means it is essentially impossible to violate them. **The necessity that attaches to all transcendental principles prevents them from prescribing the place that we should occupy.** The place defined by such principles, if they can indeed be established, is a place we cannot but occupy. Perhaps we should not even say that transcendental principles define our place; what they exhibit is the form that any place we can occupy must possess.

4

But in spite of what has just been said, it seems that both Wittgenstein and Heidegger use transcendental arguments to establish prescriptive principles. Thus in the *Tractatus* the logical essence of language is established by what appears to be a transcendental argument while at the same time this essence prescribes what discourse should be like; and in the *Investigations* ordinary language tends to function as the quasi-transcendental ground of language, presupposed by all language that idles, on which Wittgenstein bases his critique of other, especially philosophical discourse, "unmasking" it as, precisely, language idling.

And Heidegger, too, establishes poetry as the essence of language by something rather like a transcendental argument — idle talk is said to presuppose a more authentic discourse, which Heidegger comes to understand as poetry — and proceeds to use as a measure by which everyday discourse is found wanting. How then are we to reconcile this with what has just been said about transcendental arguments?

Most easily of course by showing that these quasi-transcendental arguments are in fact not proper transcendental arguments. Consider logical space. We may admit that Wittgenstein succeeds in exhibiting the presuppositions of clear speaking as he understands such speech. But as he subsequently had to admit, these conditions are not the conditions of all speaking, even if Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus* presents them as such. Why should only clear and distinct speaking count as speaking? Should we all try to adjust our speaking accordingly? Perhaps. But, at any rate, whether we should or not cannot be settled by a transcendental argument. Only if we keep in mind that the basis of Wittgenstein's "transcendental" argument is not experience as such or language as such, but something rather less wide, can we understand the prescriptive function of the *Tractatus*. The principles that are exhibited are at most constitutive of a particular region, a region where objectivity is demanded, i.e. the region in which scientific discourse is at home, not of the whole. To prescribe them is to demand that we settle in this smaller region — in this particular case it turns out to be an uninhabitable region as Wittgenstein came to recognize — and this demand has much to do with what is taken to be important and little with transcendental arguments.

To be sure, in the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein does not use the language of prescription. He puts what he has to say in such a way that logical space seems as hard as anything established by transcendental arguments. In part this is a rhetorical device; just because transcendental arguments tend towards formal absolutes they attract those who would furnish our thinking with firm ground. And should it turn out that our transcendental principles fail to cover all the phenomena of which they were supposedly constitutive, it is easy enough to dismiss the most recalcitrant phenomena as being in a deficient mode, as, e.g., the *Tractatus* would have us dismiss most speaking as not really speaking at all. Later of course he recognized that he had failed to do justice to language.

Similar considerations apply in case of the *Investigations*; only that now ordinary language is thought to provide our thinking with the only available ground. Just as we can ask what is necessary if our speaking is to be clear, so we can ask what is necessary if our speaking is to be ordinary in this sense. In answer we can point to the ways in which Wittgenstein's language-games integrate language and some activity. Again it is clear that such integration does not mark all of our speaking —otherwise it would be pointless

to speak of an idling of language. Here we have once again a deficient mode of speech. To speak of deficiency presupposes a measure. That this measure is to be sought in ordinary language can again not be justified by a transcendental argument, but rests on Wittgenstein's inadequately articulated convictions concerning the place that man should occupy.

5

Heidegger's use of "authenticity" is more easily explained. Authenticity should not be thought of as being constitutive of man in the way in which categories are constitutive of objects. Authenticity is constitutive of man only as a possibility. Man is understood by Heidegger as a being who can gain himself, and this already suggests that he can also lose himself. Authenticity and inauthenticity are co-constitutive of man. That authenticity comes to be established as something rather like a value cannot be defended by anything like a transcendental argument, but, as Heidegger admits, must be given its foundation in the thinker's personal stance.

"Poetry" poses greater problems. Heidegger does seem to establish its priority by what appears to be rather like a transcendental argument: poetry was said to make other discourse possible. We also discussed poetry as authentic discourse. This would mean that poetry is not a necessary condition of, but a possibility for language. But what then does Heidegger mean when he suggests that the essence of language has to be understood through the essence of poetry? Does poetry function here as the ground or measure of other speech? Heidegger tries to maintain both. Poetry is said by him to be the foundation or origin of language and as that foundation it provides subsequent speaking with a measure.

But if so, can the word “transcendental" as it has been used in this conclusion help us to understand the meaning of “foundation”? Our argument that no transcendental ground can yield prescriptive principles would have us question it. And these doubts are increased by the fact that Heidegger seems to attribute to poetry something like a temporal priority. What does this temporal priority have to do with transcendental priority?

A similar problem is raised by Wittgenstein's discussion of ordinary language. It

would seem that its priority over language idling has to be temporal and transcendental. Why is it that these two terms "temporal" and "transcendental" which at first seem to point in different directions, now draw together? Does this drawing together rest on a confusion, related to the already discussed confusions between the logical and psychological, between the transcendental and the realistic? Here I only want to argue that ***if*** poetry is made constitutive of our world in the sense that it provides it with a transcendental ground, there can be no question of accepting or rejecting the place it assigns us. Poetry then establishes the limits of our world and we are unable to think beyond them. Poetry can present us with something like a demand only to the extent that it points out a place where we can, but need not stand.

6

Transcendental arguments cannot by their very nature establish anything like prescriptive principles. As pointed out, such arguments have their foundation in the self-transcendence of man. In the transcendental ego man attempts to grasp himself, not as he is, but as the form of all that he might possibly be. With this the place he actually occupies becomes only one of infinitely many possible places, his world only one of infinitely many possible worlds. The transcendence of the ego can thus not be separated from the vision of the world *sub specie possibilitatis*, i.e. as essentially groundless. As the attempt is made to found the world in formal transcendence, material transcendence threatens to reduce to an opaque facticity. And if the meaning of "ground" is reduced to its transcendental sense, then whether man occupies this or that particular place cannot but appear groundless. But if there is to be a justification of prescriptive principles it must be possible to show that one place has a better claim on us than another, that we should go here rather than there. Transcendental arguments cannot, by their very nature help us here, notwithstanding the hopes of philosophers such as Habermas.

7

But to what extent-does such talk about essence and transcendental arguments really help us to understand the later work of Heidegger and Wittgenstein? Do not both seek to escape from traditional, including transcendental philosophy? We only

have to recall Wittgenstein's attacks on traditional philosophy, which he characterizes as a search for the essence of things, to wonder whether talk of the essence of language must not miss the point of the *Investigations*. Wittgenstein would appear to reject a thinking that chases after the phantom of some firmer ground beyond everyday language. And although Wittgenstein fails to show in adequate detail the presuppositions that make such thinking, that is the kind of thinking represented by his own *Tractatus*, possible and the sense in which we can indeed reach firmer ground, there is something right about his critique: as we have seen, the pursuit of transcendental absolutes has to present the world s*ub specie possibilitatis*. And while beyond our groundless world a firmer ground may appear, this ground will prove too formal and weightless for concrete man to stand on. **Understood transcendentally, the search for essence has to lead to nihilism**. Yet, as I have tried to show, Wittgenstein's own turn back to our language does not completely break with transcendental philosophy. Ordinary language does function rather like a transcendental ground, although this ground is now tied to time in a way incompatible with traditional transcendental philosophy.

With Heidegger the rejection of transcendental philosophy is less obvious. Unlike Wittgenstein, he continues to describe his own thought in terms of the search for essence; this search requires that we look beyond phenomena as they first present themselves. But the word "essence" should not mislead us. In *Being and Time*, too, we find a rejection of the pure subject and the dependent conception of a pure *a priori*.

> The ideas of a 'pure I' and of a 'consciousness in general' are so far from including the *a priori* character of 'actual' subjectivity that the ontological characters of Dasein's facticity and its state of Being are either passed over or not seen at all. Rejection of a 'consciousness in general' does not signify that the *'a priori'* is negated, any more than the positing of an idealized subject guarantees that Dasein has an *a priori* character grounded upon fac (SZ 229)

Heidegger retreats from the pure *a priori* to what we can call a more concrete *a priori,* such as that furnished by the existentials. This retreat has its foundation in a recognition that the traditional conception of the *a priori* demands something like a pure subject; but

this subject has rather little to do with the way we really exist, in the world and subject to time.

Heidegger goes on to suggest that the conception of the pure subject rests on a confusion of theology and philosophy.

> But the contention that there are 'eternal truths' and the jumbling together of Dasein's phenomenally grounded 'ideality' with an idealized absolute subject, belong to those residues of Christian theology within philosophical problematics which have not as yet been radically extruded. (SZ 229)

It is indeed hard to deny that there is a historical and systematic connection between the Christian idea of God and the transcendental or ideal subject, which comes to replace God as the foundation of all that can be. But while both imply a point of view beyond all definite perspectives, there is also a crucial difference: God provides not only the form but also the matter of what is. While the transcendental subject is radically opposed to material transcendence, formal and material transcendence are reconciled in God.

Furthermore, to suggest a historical connection between God and the transcendental subject —a point we have to grant — is not to discredit the latter. Challenging Heidegger, I want to insist that the idea of such a subject has its foundation in the self-understanding of concretely existing man, who is aware of himself as occupying a particular point of view and with such awareness already transcends it. This movement of self-transcendence comes to rest only when we arrive at a "point of view" that transcends all perspectives. Our subjective awareness has its measure in the never completely realized ideal of a genuinely a-perspectival understanding.

To understand the subject as a subject that transcends all particular points of view, is to presuppose that consciousness is tied to perspectives, but transcends these perspectives in the awareness that they are just perspectives. **The *transcendental* subject has its foundation in the *transcending* subject**. As this transcending subject man is a bridge between the concrete and the ideal, between time and eternity. **A transcendental argument inquiring into the possibility of transcendental arguments returns us thus to concrete and perspectival experience.** It shows us, we are tempted to say, that transcendental philosophy is itself in need of a foundation, and that this foundation, the

transcendental ground of transcendental philosophy, is furnished by concrete perspectival existence; **to the ontology of objectivity that corresponds to the pure transcendental subject, we must oppose something like Heidegger's fundamental ontology. Or perhaps, as Wittgenstein thought, traditional philosophy must be led back to its home in ordinary language.** But such formulations are misleading when they suggest that the perspectival is prior to the trans-perspectival without inquiring into the meaning of this **priority**. Perhaps the perspectival must be given temporal priority; but temporal priority is not transcendental priority. **What we have to recognize is that perspective and the trans-perspectival cannot be divorced.** If we recognize that the human being in his self-transcendence stands in between the two, we have to admit that *Being and Time* and the *Investigations* are also one-sided and no more fundamental than traditional transcendental philosophy. This suggests itself when Heidegger briefly considers the possibility that his fundamental ontology might be too tied to our modern western perspective to be of much help in the interpretation of more primitive cultures (SZ 82). To even entertain this possibility, we have to admit that Heidegger's fundamental ontology can be transcended in thought.

Similarly Wittgenstein invites us to imagine language-games very different from the ones we are as a matter of fact playing. **Neither the existentials of fundamental ontology nor the grammar of our language furnish limits that we cannot transcend in thought**. Neither provides a foundation in the sense in which traditional transcendental philosophy thought it could furnish a foundation that could not in turn be transcended.

But can there be such a final foundation? It could be established only if it were possible to pass beyond concrete experience to **all possible experience**, beyond particular languages to all that language can be. **But how can we ever know whether the possibilities we can conceive are indeed all possibilities?** What content can we give to "all possibilities"? What we can conceive depends on what and where we are, and this includes the language we speak. Perhaps others, better equipped and more imaginative than we could do better. And even they could never claim to have an understanding of all possible experience or of all possible language. Transcendental arguments remain tied to possibilities that we can conceive at a given time. Thus the

transcendental philosopher remains tied to a given language, even as he takes a step beyond the limits it imposes. The absolute ground of which he dreams must elude him. Transcendental philosophy cannot escape its ground in the concrete.

Similarly a philosophy that seeks the essence of language in logic retains its ground in ordinary language. Logic and language are tied together in a circle, a circle from which we cannot escape, because it is just an expression of man's ecstatic essence, of our place in between spirit and body, light and earth.

8

To the extent that language does justice to the measure provided by the transcendental subject and to the correlative ideal of complete objectivity, it will be impossible to tie it to either a particular individual or to Heidegger's "they"; the speaker can no longer be identified at all and disappears; **that disappearance of the speaker is demanded by the pursuit of truth that presides over the progress of science.** That pursuit has its sufficient foundation in the human being's power of self-transcendence. But, as the Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus* recognized, the price of this pursuit is the loss of meaning. **The pursuit of truth, so understood, and nihilism go together. The life-world is replaced with its invisible ghostly counterpart, the world as constructed by science.**

If language is to retain its tie to the life-world, the measure provided by the transcendental subject may not be thought to do justice to its essence; to this measure we have to oppose another that emphasizes perspective and content. Such a measure is provided by our language.

But as something that has come to be established and accepted our language is itself in need of a ground. With his conception of poetry as inaugural speaking Heidegger points to this ground. Without such creative speaking meanings could never become definite and no linguistic space could arise. **There is thus a sense in which logic and ordinary language can be said to presuppose poetry.** That this is true of logic was suggested by Heidegger's quotation from the philosopher Hermann Lotze,[209] who takes the transformation of impressions into meanings to be the first creative

[209] Hermann Lotze, *Logik* (Leipzig, 1874), p. 14.

achievement of thinking. This first achievement amounts to the establishment of some linguistic space that alone makes thinking as it is usually understood possible. An analogous point can be made concerning ordinary language. But to admit this is not to say that poetry furnishes a transcendental ground of language. Perhaps we can again distinguish between a formal and a concrete *a priori*. Consider a statement like: our world is not that of the Middle Ages. This could be taken to mean, among other things, that in our world there is no longer a place for God, that our world is determined by the objectifying spirit of science that rules out such a place. Given the limits of my world certain things no longer make sense. This does not mean that I am totally imprisoned in that world. I can put myself in another place, as I do, for example, when I contemplate the art of another age, but this place is occupied by me only in a metaphorical sense. Part of me is allowed to visit there, but the place I really occupy is quite another. In this sense it is quite possible to admit that my world is but one of many, that it may give way to others in the future, and yet to insist that it limits not "what I can think," but ,"what I can make sense of." Thus if I were I to really see the Fourteen Saints dancing in Grove Street Cemetery, this would shatter my world.

The **concrete *a priori*** as it has been understood here has come to be established and can again be destroyed. It thus has its origin in time. Given a pure transcendental point of view such a concrete *a priori* should not be called that at all. After all, I have just admitted that this *a priori* is transcended by reality and thus does not furnish a transcendental foundation. And yet, in what sense is it transcended? I can indeed conceive of other places, but these places are not places I can really make sense of; they are mere possibilities, not real possibilities at all. While the pure *a priori* circumscribes the space in which all possibilities must find their place, the concrete *a priori* circumscribes only the space of what are now my real possibilities. But these two terms "mere" and "real possibility" should not be taken to indicate clearly demarcated realms. Possibilities can be more or less real; real and mere possibilities merge imperceptibly. The poles of this spectrum are marked on one hand by the idea of the transcendental subject, on the other by the idea of a consciousness so devoid of self-transcendence and submerged in the present moment that for it all possibility disappears. At both ends of the spectrum we have something like a vision *sub specie aeternitatis*, due in both cases to

the disappearance of the distance between form and matter, although in the former case matter is sacrificed to form, while in the latter case form is sacrificed to matter.

If poetry can be said to provide the ground of our language and thus something like an *a priori*, *a priori* must be taken in the concrete sense. Poetry is essentially in time.

9

In earlier sessions I have pointed out some of the difficulties that attend Heidegger's attempt to seek the origin of language in poetry: given the connection between poetry and authenticity, which would makes poetry the work of a solitary individual, it is difficult to do justice to a genuine "we." To be sure, as we have seen, Heidegger does want to tie poetry to community: only the poet's speaking establishes a common language. But how is this to be thought? How are others to hear and understand the poet if his speaking is radically his own? If the poet is to be understood, his words must transcend his unique perspective; his speaking must have its foundation in the community. But all community presupposes a common language. It would seem that the poet's speaking must have its origin in that language. Yet we shouldn't forget Heidegger's argument that all established language presupposes establishing language, i.e. poetry. As I suggested, we find ourselves moving in a circle and this shows us that we are trying to separate what really belong together.

The attempt to seek the origin of language in poetry leads to another difficulty. The poetic dimension of language, it was argued earlier, is necessary if we are to do justice to novelty. But novelty is a disruptive force. If poetry were to become an individual's only language, life would disintegrate into a series of poetic episodes lacking continuity. In this sense Heidegger's Hölderlin provides us with an example of the poet who subordinates himself too completely to the poetic ideal so understood and whose life disintegrates as a result. If my life is to be *one* life, my language must also in an important sense be *one*. To the demand for novelty, we must oppose the demand for unity. Heidegger roots this unity in the ecstatic being of man, most importantly in his being unto death, which provides him with the key to his understanding of authenticity. But man is not alone and this again means that he must be willing and able to share a

language with others if he is not to lose himself. Poetry is thus essentially between the authentic silence of the call of conscience and idle talk.

Again and again the particular claims that confront us challenge us and threaten to cast us beyond the language-games that we are playing and in which we have found safety. Heidegger gestures towards the experience of such claims, an experience that shatters what has come to be established and accepted, with the word *Ereignis,* naming an event, a happening in which something numinous becomes manifest. But if such an *Ereignis* is not to shatter us we have to transform and preserve it in creative work; if the claims we encounter are not to prove destructive, we have to integrate them into our language, even if to do so we have to do violence both to these claims and to established language. If such integration is to be possible, there must be a sense in which my reach can go beyond the language-games I now play to all that can become my language.

We fail to do justice to man, when we view him only as prisoner of his own perspective and of the perspective of the community to which he belongs.

10

Regardless of whether we look for the essence of language in logic, in ordinary language, or in poetry, in each case there are arguments that force us to acknowledge that something essential has been gotten hold of and that something essential has been missed. Nor should the sequence established by our journey be taken too seriously. The reasons for moving, as we did, from logic to everyday language to poetry have more to do with the history of modern philosophy than with the essence of language. Logic, everyday language, and poetry must not be understood as three stages, where each successive stage is taken to be more fundamental than the one that preceded it, but as three dimensions that have to be seen together. But if logic, ordinary language, and poetry are said to be co-fundamental, this, it would seem, cannot mean that they are equally constitutive of all speaking.

E.g., when we look at language as it is spoken usually and most of the time ordinary language or what Heidegger calls idle talk undoubtedly deserve priority. This is not denied by the admission that such speaking has its origin in establishing speech, for this origin is now passed over and forgotten, even as it still defines the limits of our

world. The explicit recovery of this origin remains a possibility as does the transcendence of the place assigned to us by established language towards other possible places. But such escapes from established language, to poetry on the one hand or to the rarefied realms of the pure spirit on the other, remain most of the time no more than possibilities.

We were looking for the essence of language, for what makes language language. But this search for the essence of language was to be more than an attempt to point out what language is and can be. Our determination of the essence of language was to present us with something like a demand; it was to show what language and with it life should be. This "should" remains hollow until we root our determination of the essence of language in what we, each one of us, takes to be important. To admit the normative status of the threefold essence of language as it has here been described — and such admission must rest on something rather like Platonic recollection — is to insist also that man has to affirm himself not only as joined to others in the community of what one says and does, but also as a solitary self, speechless in the experience of something that cannot be assigned its place in what has already been established, but also as spirit, passing in thought beyond all perspectives. The essence of language is dialogue that preserves the tension between individual, community, and what is higher. If the philosopher is to do justice to this essence, he may not accept one of the three dimensions of language as a foundation, but must try to preserve their uneasy balance. His task is thus not simply to serve and observe established language, but also to measure it by his understanding of what matters.