The Limits of Silence:

Descartes, Heidegger, and Wittgenstein on Philosophy and Ordinary Language†

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De quo consultus, an esset
tempora maturae visurus longa senectae,
fatidicus vates "si se non noverit" inquit.
(Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, iii, 344-46)

1. Introduction*

To affirm the decisive impact of the linguistic turn has, it seems, become a commonplace these days. Certainly, a broad consensus prevails among both Analytic and Continental philosophers: the turn initiated at the beginning of the last century by Heidegger and Wittgenstein is simply irreversible, comparable, perhaps, to the impact the Copernican Revolution had on modern philosophy. Individual thinkers may disagree on what consequences this will have for the status of philosophy and its relationship to the everyday. There can be no doubt, however, that traditional conceptions of rationality are greatly affected once the turn to language is made.[i]

Before the linguistic turn, philosophy usually dealt with language by either making it ancillary to philosophical analysis or by completely ignoring it. Descartes is a pivotal representative of this line of thought. It was thought the matter at hand always took precedence over

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considerations of language. After all, language is merely a means to an end. It's only a passive expressive medium of consciousness, thought or mind, barred from playing a constitutive role, and not at all of decisive importance in settling questions of meaning, reference or truth. If the matter could not be pursued wholly in isolation from language, then one could at least use language as a vehicle to express and communicate one's findings—let us call this expressive use of language "communicative intent." On all interpretations it was somehow thought possible to argue one's case (settle the *quaestio juris*) prior to all communication. As a result, the tradition ultimately sought a grounding of rationality outside the public, discursive sphere. No wonder traditional philosophy had such a low view of communicative praxis![ii]

With the linguistic turn, a concerted effort was made to overcome the traditional, and specifically Cartesian, disparagement of the ordinary. Towards this end both Heidegger and Wittgenstein take their departure from everyday language. Insofar as philosophy not only makes its appearance within our common language, but also aims to share its findings therein, it cannot avoid getting caught up in it. How, then, can it altogether refuse to heed the strictures of communicative language? It may still be possible, of course, to mount a reasoned defense of *extra*-ordinary discourse. However, merely appealing to the primacy of reason or mind is bound to be a question-begging exercise. We might just as well undercut this primacy altogether by denying the instrumentalist view of language outright. Barring a reduction to total silence, therefore, philosophy needs more than communicative intent.

Needless to say, this will have far-reaching consequences for the status of philosophy itself. If meaning and truth can no longer be gauged prior to ordinary language, then traditional philosophy has effectively lost its unquestioned preeminence. The real question is whether this spells the end of philosophy itself. If philosophy can never leave ordinary language entirely behind, then is philosophical discourse not simply dissolved into it

(Wittgenstein)? Or is there a way, perhaps, to integrate ordinary language into a more comprehensive account (Heidegger)? Notwithstanding the recent disagreement over the specifics of this new rapprochement between philosophical discourse and ordinary language, the *quaestio juris* must still be faced in the end. Specifically, can ordinary language be genuinely affirmed without sacrificing, in the process, the justificatory force of one's own claims? If this cannot be done, then are Wittgenstein and Heidegger not at bottom involved in a similar evasion? And if so, exactly how much progress has really been made vis-à-vis Cartesian philosophy?

This paper aims to problematize the relationship between philosophical discourse and ordinary language with a view to the issue of justification. Heidegger and Wittgenstein do, I submit, constitute an advance insofar as they, unlike Descartes, are willing to explicitly discuss the strictures of communicative language. However, neither a simple dissolution of philosophical discourse (Wittgenstein) nor its further aggrandizement (Heidegger) seems warranted if taken as a comprehensive view. Both, in fact, are rather unconcerned with providing discursive justification for their respective positions. The issue is either deemed incommunicative (Heidegger) or it is simply dismissed out of hand, being turned back on the interlocutor herself (Wittgenstein). Discursive justification arguably requires (a) communicative intent, and in addition (b) a willingness to settle the issue interlocutorily *in* language itself.

The procedure of this paper will be to show, by a kind of philosophical reenactment, what follows from Heidegger's and Wittgenstein's philosophical positions—on their own terms. In both cases the outcome is inconclusive, suggesting that the question of justification has not been adequately resolved by either philosopher in question. It is in this sense, I think, that the question of the Cartesian legacy remains an open one.

2. Silent Thinking

The imaginary scenario conjured up for the benefit of the reader at the beginning of the first Meditation is characterized by maturity, solitude, and the absence of speech. The one who addresses us, we are told, has left his childhood behind. He is alone in his study, silently meditating, engaged, presumably over a period of several days, in the task of progressively rethinking his own thoughts with a view to scientific truth (Meditation I: CSM II, 12 / AT VII, 17-18; Meditation II: CSM II, 15 / AT VII, 22-23; Meditation III: CSM II, 22-23 / AT VII, 34-35; Meditation IV: CSM II, 37 / AT VII, 52-53; Meditation V: CSM II, 44 / AT VII, 63-64; Meditation VI: CSM II, 50 / AT VII, 71-72).

At first blush, nothing essentially new or out of the ordinary is taking place here. Plato, too, conjures up various imaginary dialogical scenarios, the second best thing in his opinion to oral communication. And Augustine, well ahead of Descartes, not only depicts his life as an inward narrative, but also dramatizes with great acumen reason's interior monologue with itself.[iii] Still, there is a sense in which Cartesian discourse is predicated on a more radical incommunicability. First of all, no interlocutors are ever found conversing with each other. In fact, nothing is ever spoken out loud by anyone. Secondly, the interior soliloquy of the thinker is from the very outset aimed at systematically suspending any veridical or semantic force that communicative language may possess—including, one may assume, written communication.

The reason for this unprecedented insulation on the part of the author is, as is well known, that Descartes wanted to provide an absolutely infallible source for scientific knowledge (*scientia*), something which he thinks must be established by conceptual thought in the privacy of the individual, thinking mind. This is not to say that the language of the community is inherently incapable of meaning or truth, of course, nor that perceptual or imaginative discourse cannot have a role to play in the search for it. The narrative form and the use of the imaginary scenarios

alone suggest this. Then again, since ordinary language so easily misleads us, it must nevertheless be regarded as necessarily meaningless or false, at least for theoretical purposes:

> I am thinking about these matters within myself, silently and without speaking (*apud me tacitus et sine voce considerem*), nonetheless the actual words bring me up short, and I am almost tricked by ordinary ways of talking (*decipior ab ipso usu loquendi*). We say that we see the wax itself, if it is there before us, not that we judge it to be there from its color or shape; and this might lead me to conclude without more ado that knowledge of the wax comes from what the eyes see, and not from the scrutiny (*inspectione*) of the mind alone. But then if I look out of the window and see men crossing the square, as I just happen to have done, I normally say that I see the men themselves, just as I say that I see the wax. Yet do I see any more than hats and coats which could conceal automatons? I *judge* (*judico*) that they are men. And so something which I thought I was seeing with my eyes is in fact grasped solely by the faculty of judgment (*judicandi facultate*) which is in my mind (*in mente*). However, one who wants to achieve knowledge above the ordinary level (*supra vulgus*) should feel ashamed of having taken ordinary ways of talking as a basis for doubt (*ex formis loquendi quas vulgus invenit dubitationem quaesavisse*) (Meditation II: CSM II, 21 / AT VII, 31-32)[iv]

It would therefore be facetious to claim that the logical coherence or argumentative force of Cartesian discourse is wholly negated by the fact that it is communicated in the form of writing, as it would to merely point out that Descartes uses with a view to truth what he regards as necessarily false. For if charged with either taking poetic license or committing a communicative fallacy, Descartes could always fall back on a mentalist or essentialist defense in the strict sense. According to Descartes, we all have to reflect inwardly and independently on what we read. The matter at hand may be translated into the form of communication or writing, but it is never reducible to it. In fact, if confronted with opposing views the thinker can always dispense with communication altogether.[v] If I thereby reduce myself to silence, so much the worse for ordinary language!

What can be thought to be otherwise must be doubted. Whatever is inseparable from the sensible can be thought to be otherwise. Therefore, it must be doubted. This is perhaps the main posture deployed by Descartes in the first two Meditations. He does this in order to bracket not only the unreliable veridical (or semantic) force of both the senses, but the imagination as well. It is clear, namely, that the vagaries of the imagination are even more inherently deceptive than are the testimony of the senses. For not only does the imagination point back to the senses, but also, unlike sensation, it is produced manifestly at will. Both must be made transposed if infallible truth is to be countenanced. What remains, strictly speaking, is a class of residual ideas altogether beyond the pale of common sense, viz. the clear and distinct ones (CSM II, 11, 18, 37, and 50ff. / AT VII, 15, 27, 53, 72ff). The "lower" or "worldly" parts of consciousness is wholly infected with ordinary language. Only when the mind (*mens*) or reason (*ratio*) has overcome its plasticity and deceit will truth be seen with complete certainty.

Therefore, we should not let ourselves be mislead by the seeming alignment with communication. First of all, the sensible and the imaginary are inessential modes of reason. Secondly, external, public or communal language is presumed to be expendable. It is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition of truth for Descartes. So the Cartesian remains where he began: in silence.[vi]

3. The Meaning of Silence

It might be said that Descartes is the father of modern philosophy; that philosophy, in fact, really only came of age with him; that subsequent philosophy has been merely a variation of a theme; that Heidegger, along with Wittgenstein, finally overcame this whole tradition by turning to language; that Heidegger, nevertheless, in the end merely wanted to provide this tradition with a deeper grounding.

Whatever the relative worth of these claims, the fact remains that Heidegger did project a recontextualizing (*Destruktion*) of the philosophical tradition as early as in *Sein und Zeit* (1927). The modern ideal of philosophy as science is retained in this work (*SZ* §7), as is the claim that neither representation (*Vorstellung*) nor communication (*Mitteilung*) is sufficient for truth in its essential sense (*SZ* §34, 162-63). It cannot be denied, either, that the human being (*Dasein*) still retains its age-old privilege of being the point of reference here. Even so, fundamental ontology aims to subvert the Cartesian claim that ordinary language is methodologically and materially dispensable.

First off, communicative language is obviously not *reducible* to theoretical or assertoric speech (*apophansis*). Just think of the great variety of ways in which we discourse with others: assenting, refusing, demanding, warning, pronouncing, consulting, interceding to name a few (*SZ* §34, 161-62). Now, it could be objected this claim is hardly controversial or, for that matter, new. As far back as Aristotle in fact, language was being submitted to a similar taxonomy. This exercise may be useful of course in setting off the theoretical or the epistemological from the everyday. The latter may still be expendable—at least for philosophical purposes. Heidegger would not necessarily disagree with this, but he would want to point out that this objection already presupposes as self-evident the basic coincidence of philosophy with theoretic (or noetic) discourse. But is it? If we choose to make it so, are we not then forced to abandon every pretension of providing a comprehensive, philosophical account of language? (*SZ* §34, 162-63) What if we want to pursue this line of inquiry? Are we not forced to give up the fundamental status of the theoretical and mental?

It is interesting to note that Heidegger is trying to turn the tables on the Cartesian here by phrasing his account in the interrogative mode. For Heidegger, question-begging is a *fait accompli*. The salient point is

whether or not we go on to clarify the limits of language from the *right* presuppositions (*SZ* §34, 162-63).

Regardless, the problem with the tradition is that both human existence *(Dasein*) and discourse (*Rede*) have always been made co-extensive with entities being merely present-at-hand (*Zuhandensein*). Consequently, the many senses of Being have always been reduced to one only, viz., presence (*ousia*). This interpretation of *logos* underlies all traditional logic—the primacy of assertion and/or intuition (*noein*) in fact both presuppose it (*SZ* §27, 129; §29, 138; §31, 147; §33, 159; §44b, 225; and §69b, 363). In order to question this "logical" or "theoretical" interpretation of language, we need to adopt a new starting point. Heidegger proposes that we take as our point of departure the way we discourse factically, i.e., proximally and for the most part in our average everydayness (*Alltäglichkeit*). A complementary hermeneutic of language or discourse (*logos*/*Rede*) will serve as our methodological guide (*SZ*, §§6, 7b, 10).

If this is attempted we will soon come to realize that ordinary discourse in the sense of being ready to hand as with equipment and tools (*Vorhandensein*) and being-with as in communication (*Mitsein*) are genuinely closer to us than noetic, presentational discourse (*Zuhandensein*). Do we not first have to "view" something *as* something, as something practically understandable and communicable, before we can go on to regard it with a "blank stare" (i.e. view it as something merely present at hand)? If so, should theoretical discourse not be relocated to, fitted within hermeneutic discourse? Although the theoretical is always inextricably bound up with the hermeneutical, the hermeneutical is certainly not reducible to the theoretical (cf. *SZ* §31, 148-49). It would seem it is really only an unnecessary accretion of the hermeneutical. The Cartesian, in fact, is living in a world turned upside down.

Take a piece of equipment, for instance. Do we ordinarily comport ourselves toward it indicatively, restricting the artifact to a mere object

which we go on to make theoretical assertions about? No, in an everyday setting it's not really present at hand at all. In this mode, it simply is not articulated as a thing consisting of properties that we gauge in either a symbolic or intuitive fashion. Instead of representing it, we regard it "practically" as something that can be produced and/or used with a specific purpose in view: it is discursively organized as something ready to hand. This basically entails that a thing shows itself to us only as something *in relation to something else*. This occurs within the essentially non-objectified context of our involvement with tools or artifacts in general. For rather than relating to a piece of equipment in an isolated, presential way, its being ready to hand implies that the artifact is intrinsically relational, fitted within a larger practical context of our circumspective concern—we use the hammer to drive in the nail into the board in order to make a house, for instance (*SZ* §15, 68; §69a, 353ff.).

The same holds, *mutatis mutandis*, for our deportment toward other human beings. For rather than relating to other human beings as objects, my everyday discursive comportment toward them, and theirs toward me, is mutually implicated—characterized by solicitation (*SZ* §34, 161-62). This is not to say, of course, that we *cannot* objectify human beings, reducing them, say, to automata in the way Descartes does.

Ontologically speaking, therefore, we discourse in more ways than one (ready to hand, present at hand, and being-with). And Heidegger calls the structural totality of this hermeneutic involvement the "world" (*Welt*). Ordinary language, in fact, is inseparable from being in the world (*in-der-Welt-Sein*). This implies that the world is shared rather than being merely private or subjective; relational rather than thing-like; historical and dynamic rather than static or formal: richer than revealed by either "consciousness" or "logic" or "representation". The human being and the world are "entangled". Discourse is a native possession of human existence, as being-in-the-world. Assertion or intuition are just contingent accretions (*SZ,* §§31-32, 148-50 and §§41-43a, 195-203).

This line of attack seems to carry with it a certain necessity for dialogue between philosophy and communicative language. Once ordinary language is deemed indispensable to philosophical discourse, the question of how to negotiate the two becomes an issue, especially since private (noetic) discourse has been shown to be inseparable from the public or communal. Will Heidegger's account not have to face the burden of discursive justification—on its own terms?

This, of course, assumes that the limits of language coincide with communicative discourse, which was never the case for Heidegger. When stretched to its limits, we find that hermeneutic discourse is suggestive of something altogether transcending the ordinary. The realm in question comes not only before the theoretical, but the worldly as well. This, Heidegger thinks, is because human existence is prone to anxiety. And when we're in the throes of anxiety, communication recedes wholly into the background and a soliloquy of the human being with herself takes center stage. Anxiety isolates the human being from the world of things, relations, other human beings. Not that this world completely drops out of view, but it certainly pales in comparison. If she now listens in silence to the voice of her own conscience, she will realize that being human in the real, authentic or proper sense (*eigentlich*) means being-towards-death (*Zumtodsein*)—one's own. Death is the limit, which throws into ultimate relief the temporal finitude of the human being, and so language itself. Upon sounding the depths of language, we will come to see that *logos* is at bottom extraordinary (*SZ*, §§34, 40, 57, 65, 68).

So even if Heidegger turns the tables on the Cartesian by turning the relationship between the theoretical and the communicative on its head, an unresolved tension between philosophical soliloquy and ordinary language still remains in force. Heidegger could never fall back on the Cartesian's resolute appeal to noetic silence. After all, ordinary language is a necessary condition of ontological discourse. What is more, whatever sense can be made of the latter will always have to stand in an internal,

inseparable relationship to the former.[vii] Nevertheless, by insisting on the ultimate priority of soliloquy over communicative exchange, Heidegger makes sure that meaning or truth remains silent.

Existential phenomenology is at bottom non-public too. This, I hold, follows from the primacy given to the pre-communicative. Existential phenomenology tries to get at the essence of things, which is argued to be non-reducible to communicative discourse. In fact, it is thought to precede communication altogether. How, then, can phenomenology be accountable—correspond—to the ordinary? Surely, this would require the relationship between the extraordinary and the everyday to be reciprocal and bi-directional rather than unilateral as it is in *Sein und Zeit*. Notwithstanding the advance made on Descartes, Heidegger's early work still comes across as an echo. Interestingly, the methodological issue is among those least developed in the whole work. With the exception of §7, it is hardly discussed at all. Again, one wonders whether philosophy is capable of more than communicative intent.

Heidegger, it seems, later came to think that the problematic of his earlier work had not been broad—deep—enough. To resist the reduction of language to a *presential thing* is not enough. In order to pursue language to its very roots, we need to do more. The basic obstacle to a complete rethinking of the problematic of language is the fact that it has been conceived in *human-centered* terms ever since Plato and Aristotle. The many interpretative permutations notwithstanding, language has always been interpreted as something basically possessed by, and therefore subject to, the human being (*psyche*, *anima*, *mens*, *Bewusstsein*, etc.). No wonder language has always been seen as merely a means to an end![viii]

In 1934 there's talk about an overcoming (*Überwindung*) of the whole Western tradition through a historical mindfulness (*Besinnung*) on language (*logos*).[ix] Language, truth, the human being—they're all

connected. Plato only had to give a specific interpretation of these to effect a lasting transformation of human existence as a whole. Somewhat simplistically put, priority is for the first time given to the relationship between statement and thing.[x] Language can now only bespeak meaningfully or truthfully of things. Language is rooted in the human being; that of which it speaks is basically made out to be an idea (*idea*, *eidos*) that somehow can only be seen in the privacy of the individual soul (*psychê*) or mind (*nous*). Language is turned into an expressive instrument here, something possessed and used by inner minds to indicate to each other things that are present only to them. Plato, then, is credited with introducing both an anthropocentric and noetic bias into human history. This is the basis of the subsequent tradition's views, including those of Descartes. This is basically what language becomes with Plato: A human tool.

From this time to the end of his career, Heidegger will always return to earlier Greek thinkers for inspiration in his attempts to overcome language in this ordinary sense. His hope was that going all the way back to the beginning would facilitate a leap to a "second beginning," reversing the decisive turn initiated by Plato. If language is to be rethought, then Parmenides and Heraclitus eminently qualify. Thinking is found there in its purest form, i.e., without the constraints later introduced by Plato. Just think of the way they sharply contrasted the real or the "deep" with the human-rooted or thing-like when speaking of "seeing" (*noein*), "speaking" (*legein*), and "truth-disclosing" (*alêtheuein*).[xi] The extra-ordinary may not be separable from the ordinary, to be sure, but neither are they to be co-ordinated in a genuinely reciprocal way:

> In the immediate circle of beings we believe ourselves to be at home. The being is familiar, reliable, ordinary (*gehauer*). Nonetheless,… [f]undamentally. the ordinary is not ordinary; it is extra-ordinary, uncanny (*un-gehauer*) (*OWA*, 31)

> Truth will never be gathered from what is present and ordinary (*Gewöhnlichen*)… [E]verything ordinary and hitherto existing becomes an unbeing (*Unseienden*). This unbeing has lost the capacity to give and to preserve being as measure (*Mäss*) (*OWA*, 44-45).

It would be quite futile, therefore, to charge the later Heidegger's "thinking" with merely repeating the gesture of his earlier "fundamental ontology". Disdain for the ordinary is almost as old as philosophy itself. Moreover, a good case could in fact be made for Heideggerian discourse eventually beginning to show telltale signs of attrition on the issue of the decisiveness of the Platonic turn.[xii] Still, if challenged to justify himself, Heidegger could always fall back on silence in the deep sense:

> According to the usual account, language is a kind of communication (*Mitteilung*). It serves as a means of discussion (*Unterredung*) and agreement (*Verabredung*)… But language is neither merely nor primarily (*nicht nur nicht erstlich*) the aural and written expression of what needs to be communicated. The conveying of overt and covert meanings is not what language, in the first instance, does. Rather, it brings beings as beings, for the first time, into the open… Language, by naming beings for the first time, first brings beings to word and to appearance… Such saying is a projection of the clearing… the releasing of a throw by which unconcealment sends itself into beings as such… Projective saying is poetry: the saying of world and earth… The prevailing language (*jeweilige Sprache*) is the happening of that saying in which its world rises up historically for a people… Language itself is poetry in the essential sense… poesy happens in language (*OWA*, 45-46)

> The setting-into-work of truth thrusts up the extra-ordinary (*Ungeheure*) while thrusting down the ordinary. (*OWA*, 47)

Language speaks silently: truth sets itself into work. The Thinkers and Poets quietly respond. This is the primordial sense of ordinary language. Only when the Great Ones have had their say can the many begin their chatter. Should we not question ever more in the direction of the most profound silence—is that not how it has always been?[xiii]

4. Silence, Sense, Nonsense

There are marked convergences between Heidegger and Wittgenstein on the issue of the limits of language. First, both continued to seek out a delimitation and transposition of representational discourse from within. Second, both of them became convinced that this could only be achieved if ordinary discourse was shown to be indispensable to, as well as inseparable from, philosophical discourse itself. (Heidegger in fact anticipated the later Wittgenstein on this score.) Finally, they both came to think that a transfiguration of the traditional paradigm of philosophy is the eventual outcome of this process. (Wittgenstein, as we shall see presently, anticipated Heidegger here.) I do submit, however, they always disagreed on whether, or to what extent, this *makes sense*.

In his first major work, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1919), Wittgenstein is at pains to draw limits to the discourse of sense (*Sinn*). Sense is basically coextensive with the representational language of the natural sciences. A proposition with sense is a—non-mental—thought saying something definite about objective reality according to the basic requirement of bivalence (being possibly true or false)(TL 2.1; 2.14; 2.21; 2.221; 3; 3.34; 4; 4.1121). This all by itself sounds very traditional. We could be forgiven for thinking Wittgenstein slips back into a traditional cast of mind. The next two steps in his argument are truly revolutionary.

Logical propositions cannot be representational. This because logical form constitutes the universal condition of the possibility of both language and world. Logical propositions will as a matter of fact always fall short of saying something specific. Logic is tautologous; logical propositions—senseless (*Sinnlos*) (TL 1.13; 2.013; 2.033; 2.15; 2.161; 2.172-74; 2.18; 4.12).

And then there's philosophy. What's left to say when symbolic logic and natural science have had their say: is there a mean between saying something and saying nothing at all? Philosophical propositions are metaphysical, nonsensical (*Unsinn*)—including Wittgenstein's own. All

metaphysical propositions must ultimately be overcome (*Überwindet*) (TL 4.0031; 6.53-4). Philosophical conceptualization always lead to pseudo-propositions. After all, philosophical propositions are comprised of general words ("concept", "object", "thing", "fact", etc.) that defy both truth-conditionality (the sensical) as well as logical symbolism (the senseless). So why shouldn't they be passed over in silence (TL 7)?

Several responses are possible here:

(1) We could, for instance, object to this *reductio ad absurdum* of philosophical discourse, claiming that it is parasitic on the prior acceptance of Wittgenstein's specific understanding of the relationship between the sensical and the senseless. The question, though, is whether that is the way we discourse proximally and for the most part. What if it can be shown that representational language is only a special case of practical, everyday discourse? If so, then can't we go on to ground everyday discourse through a description of its essential structures and so retain the foundational role for thinking (Heidegger)? All by itself, the *reductio* is question-begging—nonsensical silence can still be meaningful![xiv]

(2) We might also choose to take Wittgenstein at his word. The *Tractatus*, it could be said, favors an "austere," strictly nonsensical view of silence.[xv] Any effort to discursively delimit sense is bound to be nonsensical since a transgression is implied in the very attempt. It's quixotic to imagine one could make sense beyond this limit.

(3) Or we could simply say with Augustine that *any* mention of silence has a self-canceling effect since we are thereby bound to speak of that which we claim cannot be spoken. Rather than being said, therefore, silence can only be coherently safeguarded in—complete—silence.[xvi] *And the same could be said of nonsense*. Either way, we're bound to be taking leave of the ordinary and to leave the *quaestio juris* unanswered.

Whatever the relative strengths of these three, the fact remains that Wittgenstein turns explicitly to ordinary language later on. Even so, he continued to evade the question of justification. If anything, the refusal grew even more stark:

Say we want to delimit the term "language" (*Sprache*). First of all, it is not self-evident that the concept is closed off by a limit. We can *use* (*gebrauchen*) the word more or less rigidly, but only with a specific purpose in view. We may equally deploy it more loosely as we in fact more often do. The concept is played out differently, all depending on the use we put it to. Let's say go with this and define language-use as a kind of "game" (*Spiel*). This concept is not sharply delineated either. Do all games have one thing in common which makes us use the word in the same way in all of them? Are all games "amusing"? Is there always winning or losing? Must they everywhere be limited by rules? What does or does not count as a game? Can an a priori limit ever be fixed (PU §§ 65-68)?

> Here we come up against the great question that lies behind all these considerations—For someone might object against me: You take the easy way out! You talk about all sorts of language-games, but have nowhere said what the essence of a language-game, and hence of language, is: what is common (*gemeinsam*) to all these activities. … And this is true.—Instead of producing something common to all that we call language, I am saying that these phenomena have no one thing in common which makes us use the same word for all,—but that they are *related* to one another in many different ways. And it is because of these relationships, that we call them all "language" (PU §65)

It is interesting to see how Wittgenstein turns the tables on the the philosopher here (his earlier self included), viz., by a dogged insistence on the irreducible variety of possible quotidian uses of words. Of course, there is a sense in which his descriptions beg the question. His questions *are* rhetorical—hectoring even.[xvii] For Wittgenstein, though, ordinary language is all we got. The salient point is whether or not we go on to

clarify these quotidian uses without transposing or subliming them in the process (PU §§ 65-109). The absence of rigid limits never troubles us when we ordinarily apply words. So why create endless questioning like Plato, Descartes (or Heidegger) does by insisting on depth, inwardness, fixidity? If words are always used in more ways than one, and use is always open-ended, then the only thing gained by an essentialist insistence on the reducibility of ordinary language to something "extraordinary" is what he explicitly doesn't want, viz., a loss of breadth and clarity (PU §§ 10-14 and 107).

> We are under the illusion that what is peculiar (*Besondere*), profound (*Tiefe*), essential (*Wesentliche*), in our investigation, resides in its trying to grasp the incomparable essence of language. That is, the order existing between the concepts of proposition, word, proof, truth (*Wahrheit*), experience, and so on. This order is a *super*-order between—so to speak—*super*-concepts. Whereas, of course, if the words "language," "experience," "world," have a use, it must be as humble (*niedrige*) a one as that of the words "table", "lamp", "door" (PU § 97)

It is true that the later Wittgenstein retains the delimiting function of philosophy (PU §§5, 90, 92, 126, and 133). What has changed is the way he conceives of it. Philosophy is now purely "descriptive," a piece-meal, multiform investigation of how the humble uses of words get exploited for metaphysical ends. By holding on tenaciously to everyday language and seeking to bring some measure of clarity to it, a reduction of words from their metaphysical to their everyday use is projected, in each case giving philosophy peace (*Ruhe*) (PU §§90, 97, 106, 116, 122, 124, 125, 132, and 133).

Clearly, the later Wittgenstein's scruples about the language of essence, as well as that of limit, allow him to question the viability of Descartes' and Heidegger's efforts at grounding language (cf. PU §124). In fact, the very gesture now appears self-defeating in a deeper sense than the merely logical or semantic, arising as it does out of a

misunderstanding of the way our common language really works (§§ 66; 90-93). That does not mean, however, that it can be ruled out by fiat. He has reached the conviction that philosophical problems are rooted in deep disquietudes rooted in ordinary language itself. His account has simply gained too much in terms of intricacy since the *Tractatus* to allow for a comprehensive *reductio ad absurdum* of philosophical thinking. For if sense (or meaning) is no longer uniformly conceived then how much, exactly, is gained by roundly rejecting it as "nonsense"? A mere appeal to the formal identity of meaning with use is bound to be an exercise in futility (PU §43). The nonsense epithet may ultimately be applicable to philosophy or "thinking" (cf. PU §§40, 119, 134, and 464). All the same, Wittgenstein is obliged to apply it in a much more attentive, nuanced way.

So it would be too metaphysical merely appealing to Wittgensteinian discourse being philosophically phrased as showing it's guilty of a "performative contradiction".[xviii] A similar response could be made if we merely point out that his quotidian view of the ordinary smacks of linguistic "Rousseauism".[xix] Or we hold that philosophy is only an extension of everyday discourse anyway and that it may have something of its own to contribute. For if challenged in these ways, Wittgenstein could always fall back on the therapeutic defense in the strict sense. On Wittgensteinian "principles" everyday discourse is a *fait accompli*. Language may seduce us into thinking we can do more, of course—but have we ever? If we in fact accomplish less that way, we would be better off simply dissolving these "delusions of grandeur". Denying the disease only affirms the needfulness of a cure. If the philosopher and the "thinker" resist, so much the better for the physician!

5. The Limits of Silence

A response to the foregoing: perplexity at the unresolved tension between philosophy and ordinary language and the persistent evasion on the part of philosophy (or "thinking") of the question of communicative justification.

Descartes believes in the primacy of the mind, which basically makes communication into a mere afterthought.

Heidegger impugns this approach with being deaf to the ordinary. He claims it's indispensable to philosophy, being inseparable from it. If so, the problem of discursive justification is bound to insinuate itself even more forcefully—as long, that is, as we don't aim straight away for an *even deeper* silence!

Wittgenstein goes even further, adopting a "no-nonsense" attitude. He would charge both with blind condescension toward the ordinary, with a "narcissistic" unwillingness to face anything but their own extraordinary reflection.[xx] Then again, if evasion is a telltale sign of implication, who's to heal the physician?

* In addition to the standard edition and translations for Descartes used in this volume, I have used the following (with their corresponding abbreviations): For Heidegger, I have consulted the *Gesamtausgabe* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann)(GA). I have cited the following editions and translations of Heidegger's works: GA 2, *Sein und Zeit* (1927)(SZ); *Der Ursprung des Kuntswerkes* in GA 5, *Holzwege* (1935-1946), translated as "Origin of the Work of Art" (*OWA*) in *Off the Beaten Track,* eds. and trans. Julian Young and Kenneth Haynes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002): 1-56; *Nietzsche I & II* in GA 6.1-2; *Platons Lehre von der Warheit* and "*Brief über den Humanismus"* in GA 9, *Wegmarken* (1919-1961), translated as "Plato's Doctrine of Truth" (*PDT*) in *Pathmarks*, ed. William McNeill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998): 155-82; *Aus einen Gesprach von der Sprache (Zwischen einen Japoner unde einen Fragenden)*, in GA 12, *Unterwegs zur Sprache* (1950-1959); *Zur Sache des Denkens* (1962-4) in GA 14, translated as "End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking" (*SD*) in *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (New York: Harper Collins, 1993): 427-49; GA 38, *Logik als die Frage nach dem Wesen der Sprache* (1934); GA 65, *Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis)* (1936-1938). For Wittgenstein, I have cited the *Tractatus Logico-Philisophicus*, trans. B. F. McGuiness and D. F. Pears, with an introduction by Bertrand Russell (London: Routledge, 1993) (TL); *Philosophical Investigations*, bilingual ed., trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001) (PU). This paper is the product of a course on the later Heidegger given by William Richardson, S.J. (Boston College, Fall 2001) and owes much of its impetus to his mention of Wittgenstein as a "post-metaphysical" thinker.

[i] The literature on the linguistic turn is vast. For an excellent anthology, containing contributions from all the major players in both the Analytic and Continental traditions working in the aftermath of the turn, see *After Philosophy: End of Transformation?*, eds. Kenneth Baynes, James Bohmann, and Thomas McCarthy (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1987). See also *The Linguistic Turn: Recent Essays in Philosophical Method*, ed. Richard M. Rorty (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967).

[ii] This is, of course, a very broad characterization of Western philosophy from Plato via Descartes, Hobbes and Kant to Hegel and Marx. Notwithstanding the individual differences amongst them, they all share, I submit, a rather low view of everyday language—praxis. This is ultimately related to the consistent subsumption of everyday language under philosophical rationality; for it was thought that philosophical discourse somehow preceded and could be gauged in isolation from ordinary language.

[iii] For the relationship of orality and writing in Plato, see the *Phaedrus* 274dff. Raoul Mortley, in *From Word to Silence*, 2 vols. (Bonn: Hanstein, 1986), I, 95, thinks that the Socratic affirmation of the communicative power of oral exchange is opposed to "the drive towards silence, and the suspicion of language." Plato, on the other hand, presumably lacked the same conviction. For by arguing for a matter which is treated appropriately neither in writing nor in verbal exchange—the primacy of mind (*nous*), I think, is crucial in this regard—, he is bound to entertain doubts on the power of communicative discourse. These doubts are also implied in *The Seventh Letter* 341c-d and the *Symposium* 201ff. Still, the Classical period is ultimately characterized, as Mortley argues, by a basic confidence in *logos*. The drive towards silence and the suspicion of language became effective only in late Antiquity (with Skepticism, Gnosticism, etc.) (Mortley, *From Word to Silence,* I, 59-62). In Augustine's *Soliloquia*, an early work, the device of reason's interior monologue with itself is already deployed. Augustine was also,

as far as I know, the first thinker to explore human life as an inward narrative. Crucial in this regard is the way individuality, time, historicity, and language are seamlessly interwoven in the *Confessions*. So even if Augustine was greatly impacted by these above currents of late Antiquity, he did not share their radical appeal to silence and the concomitant dissatisfaction with *logos*. (See also Mortley, *From Word to Silence*, II, 192-220 and 242-54).

[iv] Descartes, of course, never subjected language—least of all his own—to methodological doubt. In fact, with the exception of the passage just referred to the *Meditations* altogether bypasses linguistic or semantic considerations. This is related to his advocacy of the separability of the mind from language (see n.V below).

[v] This seems to be implied in Descartes' Letter to Mersenne, 20 November 1649, and *a fortiori* in the polemic against Hobbes in the Third Set of Replies. Descartes' rejection of a universal grammar or language in favor of a rational taxonomy of ideas in the letter to Mersenne merely assumes as evident the primacy and separability of reason and its ideas, viewed as essential and common to all men. Actual historical languages, by contrast, are not only seen as coincidental, and so instrumental, to philosophical inquiry, but they are also thought to be endemically prone to semantic confusion (Letter to Mersenne: CSMK 10-13 / AT I, 76-82). An even stronger indication of Descartes' unwillingness—hostility even—when it comes to dealing with the strictures of communicative discourse is to be found in his replies to Hobbes' objections. Confronted with Hobbes' doubts about the cohesiveness of the implicit "a priori" demarcation between language, imagination, and ideas assumed in the *Mediations* (CSM II, 120-22, 124-27, 128-29, and 135-36 / AT VII, 172-73, 177-80, 182-83, and 193-94), Descartes, it seems, merely falls back on an appeal to self-evidence, to something evident "to all," to all those who use reason rightly, viz., to those who use words the way *he* uses them (CSM II, 123, 125-26, 127-28, 128-30, 132-33, 134-35, and 136 / AT VII, 174, 177-79, 181, 183-85, 189, 191-92, and 194). This, of course, only begs the question on a communicative level. This is not to say, of course, that Descartes falls short of communicative intent. The *Meditations* are obviously written for a reading audience (as evidenced by the Dedicatory Letter to the Sorbonne, the Preface to the reader, and the Synopsis of the whole work). However, language, it seems, is for Descartes rooted in the material (sounds and images), and as such to the bodily organism (cf. *Passions of the Soul*, §50: CSM I, 348 / AT XI, 369). Ideas, by contrast, are thought to be essentially spiritual, something wholly prior to and separable from the material—the linguistic. It would seem that meaning and truth were wholly disparate for Descartes. Communicative language, we conclude, is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition of truth.

[vi] There is a sense in which Cartesian discourse can be viewed as an offshoot of Platonic discourse. For it can be argued that both advocate the primacy of *nous* over *logos* (in the communicative sense). Cartesian discourse, however, is bound to entertain more radical doubts about the power of communication. (This doubt is never really thematized.) In this it shows a closer affinity with movements like Neo-Platonism, Skepticism, and Gnosticism than with Plato (see n.III over).

[vii] The authentic and the inauthentic, the ontological and the ontic, and the existential and the existentiell, even if "distinct," are for Heidegger always "inseparable." Still, the first term holds priority over the second (cf. *SZ* §§2-3 8-15; §45, 231-35).

[viii] See *Logik als der Frage nach dem Wesen der Sprache* (I §5c). This work, I submit, is the first real step in that direction. For although it could be said that even *Sein und Zeit* is somewhat tainted by the subsumption of "language" under *logos*, from this work onward they are made co-extensive. (Heidegger himself acknowledges this work as a turning point in his *Aus einen Gesprach von der Sprache (Zwischen einen Japoner unde einen Fragenden)* (93-94). It has often been remarked how underdeveloped *logos* is vis-à-vis the other two fundamental existentials in *Sein und Zeit*. Cf. Richardson, *Through Phenomenology to Thought*, 66-70 and Jan Aler, "Heidegger's Conception of Language in *Being and Time,*" in *Martin Heidegger: Critical Assessments*, III, ed. Christopher MacAnn (London: Routledge, 1992): 13-38. Although language is now upgraded to the center of attention from a means to an end, and is even allowed to hold primacy over the human being later on (see, e.g." *Brief über den Humanismus"* (145-94), that does not mean Heidegger changed his mind on the issue of the *problematic* centrality of discourse or *logos*. If anything, my exposition has shown that there are good indications it was there from the beginning.

[ix] In *Logik als der Frage* (1934), the necessity of overcoming logic is explicitly announced. However, only with the *Beiträge* and *Nietzsche I-II* of 1936-45 is the appeal to the needfulness of a second beginning explicitly dealt with. The importance for this turn, of the change from talking about recontextualizing to advocating the need for an overcoming, has been emphasized by Dominique Janicaud in *Heidegger: From Metaphysics to Thought* (New York: SUNY Press, 1995), especially chs. 1 and 2.

[x] Plato discusses language explicitly in the *Cratylus*. It is true that more than one position is discussed in this work, with the outcome of the whole discussion being inconclusive. No position, however, is dealt with in this work (or any other work that I am aware of) that does not hold language as relating essentially to things. Despite the variety of positions and the aporetic outcome, therefore, the unspoken assumption always remains the same. For Heidegger this "reified" (ontic) view of language is ultimately related to the ascendancy of truth as correspondence between mental representation (and by derivation, assertion) and thing. This indicative or apophantic view, Heidegger argues, is decisively exemplified in the *Republic*, above all in the so-called allegory of the Cave (514a-17a) (see especially *PDT,* 168, 173-74, and 176-78). Plato, therefore, is credited with articulating the basic paradigm underlying Cartesian discourse.

[xi] There are numerous examples of the Parmenidean and Heraclitean polemic against Homer and Hesiod, as well as their "disdain" for the "mortal", the "many," the merely "political", and so on. For the fragments, see *The Presocratic Philosophers*, eds. G. S. Kirk, G. E. Raven & M. Schofield (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

[xii] The Heidegger of 1964, it is true, acknowledges that both *logos* and *alêtheia* had been understood apophantically ever since Homer. This is especially evident in *Zur Sache des Denken*, a work completed after Friedländer's and Tugendhat's criticisms (both of which Heidegger was aware). See Paul Friedländer, *Plato*, vol. I, trans. Hans Meyerhoff (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 223-34 and 229; Ernest Tugendhat, "Heidegger's Idea of Truth," in *The Heidegger Controversy*, Richard Wohlin (ed.) (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992), 245-64. Heidegger doesn't deny that the notion of truth also had a *non*-ontic function. So it's still possible for him to claim that this isn't *any less* basic than the indicative or

apophantic one. Finally, it has to be admitted that of all of Heidegger's works *Der Sache des Denken* holds the most promise in lessening the impression of Heidegger as a foundationalist thinker. For in this work he not only recognizes the basic validity of these criticisms (*SD*, 445-47), but he more than ever—for what it's worth—highlights the fact that the kind of unassuming thinking he's *now* in favor of no longer seriously entertains foundationalist hopes (*SD*, 436). Heidegger seems to be acknowledging here that what he calls thought is no better off than either traditional philosophy and/or ordinary language (cf. *SD*, 447). The *quaestio juris*, though, is not dealt with here either.

[xiii] If I am right, this exposition has shown there's a continuity between the earlier and later Heidegger, *insofar*, that is, as they both conceive the relationship between silence and communication in a hierarchical, asymmetrical, unilateral fashion. If anything, the appeal to silence became even more emphatic when the turn was made from *Dasein* to Language/Truth/Being. There is a sense in which Heidegger's "sigetic" approach is fundamentally "un-Greek." Neither the Presocratics nor Classical philosophy seems ever to have thought of silence as the *ground* of language. As shown by Mortley, silence does play some role in Greek tragedy—the figure of Tiresias is emblematic of a kind of telling silence (*From Word to Silence*, I, 112). Not until late Antiquity, however, with the rise of Gnosticism did silence become fundamental or was the attempt made to transcend both *nous* and *logos* (in the communicative sense). When Heidegger appeals to a "place of stillness" (*SD*, 445), he (like Descartes before him) might be seen as following in the footsteps of Gnosticism, say, rather than of either the Classical or the Archaic age (see also n.III over).

[xiv] It is true that Wittgenstein did talk about the aesthetical, as well as about the ethico-religious, as somehow showing (*Zeigen*) itself in the world rather than being sayable (TL, 6.42-6.522). Perhaps what this means is that art, ethics, and religion, like philosophy, can no longer have a genuinely veridical or semantic force. Wittgenstein himself seems to have preferred reading the poetry of a Rabindranath Tagore to explaining the Tractatus to his logical positivist admirers! Cf. Ray Monk, *The Duty of Genius* (London: Random House, 1991), 242-43. It's also interesting that Wittgenstein, in conversations with them, acknowledges Heidegger's thoughts on anxiety as suggestive of the limits of language. Cf. "On Heidegger on Being and Dread", in *Heidegger and Modern Philosophy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978): 80-83. For a general background, see Alan Janik and Stephen Toulmin, *Wittgenstein's Vienna* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, Inc., 1973) and *Wittgenstein and the Vienna Circle: Conversations Recorded by Friedrich Waismann* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1979). The problem, though, is that by reducing the sayable to science and logic, Wittgenstein makes it seem as if philosophy, religion, or art are either altogether unworthy of speech or sublimely ineffable. (Or are they both perhaps? None?)

[xv] This position is urged by Cora Diamond in her book, *The Realistic Spirit* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1995), 3-4, 18, and 35.

[xvi] Cf. *De Doctrina Christiana* I.6.6. See also Mortley, *From Word to Silence*, II, 217-20.

[xvii] This point has been made by Warren Goldfarb in "Wittgenstein on Fixidity of Meaning," in *Early Analytic Philosophy*, ed. William Tait (Chicago: Open Court Publishing Company, 1997): 75-89. See also his "Metaphysics and Nonsense: On Cora Diamond's *The Realistic Spirit*", in *Journal of Philosophical*

Research 22 (1997): 57-73.

[xviii] This is the position of K. O. Apel in "Wittgenstein and Heidegger: Language Games and Life Forms," in *Heidegger: Critical Assessments*, vol. IV, ed. Christopher MacAnn (London: Routledge, 1993): 342-74.

[xix] Erich Heller, in *The Artist's Journey into the Interior, and other Essays* (New York: Random House, 1965), 223.

[xx] This is pretty much the accusation leveled against Heidegger by Stanley Cavell throughout his book *The Quest for the Ordinary: Lines of Skepticism and Romanticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).