

Splitting the Subject: Carnap, Heidegger, and the *Tractatus*

Deidre Nelms

Abstract

An oblique confrontation occurs, in 1931, between Rudolf Carnap and Martin Heidegger, within Carnap's essay "The Elimination of Metaphysics through the Logical Analysis of Language." Carnap and Heidegger's fundamental disagreement is here articulated in terms of competing answers to the following question: can metaphysics be excised from the practice of philosophy? Whereas Carnap insists that the statements of metaphysics can be delimited and eliminated from philosophy without loss, Heidegger maintains that philosophy and metaphysics belong to each other intrinsically. In what follows, I trace the indebtedness of this problematic to Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*. I argue that, due to the remarks made in Wittgenstein's preface, Carnap is not unjustified in interpreting the *Tractatus* as an attempt to articulate criteria of sense and nonsense, by means of which a "strictly correct" philosophy might sharply delimit sensible propositions from metaphysical pseudo-propositions. However, I argue further, if the *Tractatus* is interpreted along Carnap's lines, as an attempt to definitively excise metaphysics from philosophy, it must be deemed a failure.

I. The Elimination of Metaphysics

Carnap's 1931 *Elimination* purports to carry out a decisive splitting within the subject of philosophy. This performative task requires 1) delimiting two distinct rhetorical communities operative in Europe, of which Wittgenstein and Heidegger are named for the first time as opposing representatives¹ and 2) delimiting legitimate propositions, which express a sense, from nonsensical pseudo-statements, which express nothing. In Carnap's essay, "metaphysics" is used to refer both to a rhetorical community, and "the slag

¹ Wittgenstein is first named one of the "leading representative[s]" of the Vienna Circle's "scientific conception of the world" by Neurath, Carnap, and Hahn in 1929. Carnap also names Heidegger as a paradigmatic "metaphysician" in his 1931 essay.

of historical languages,” or rather, the set of all pseudo-statements now vestigial to philosophical texts. Metaphysics, according to each usage of the word, is to be delimited and excised from philosophy by means of logical analysis.

Carnap maintains, following Wittgenstein, that logical analysis is not to be understood as a collection of assertions, but rather “only a method” (1959). Logical analysis is a way of comporting oneself towards the speech of another with questions and follow up questions, in order to determine whether or not he is speaking sense. Carnap lists several exemplar questions: Can the sentence in question be translated into logical notation, and manipulated according to the rules of logic? Can it be negated, and do we understand what its antithesis means? Under what conditions is the sentence in question true or false, and how can its truth or falsity be verified?

This very line of questioning, however, depends in obvious ways upon a fixed set of criteria intended to delimit sense from nonsense, which Carnap presents explicitly as “the sufficient and necessary conditions” for a sentence S(a) “being meaningful” (1959). Whereas Carnap is keen to emphasize that logical analysis is “only a method,” as opposed to a set of claims, logical analysis is nevertheless a method that depends upon true assertions and successful criteria. In the passage below, Carnap respectfully credits Wittgenstein with an assertion that he reformulates and endorses.

Wittgenstein has asserted that (2) “Under what conditions is S supposed to be true, and what conditions false?” expresses what philosophers mean by (4) “What is the meaning of S?” :

The meaning of a sentence consists in its truth-condition. (Carnap, 1959)

This claim is foundational to the method of logical analysis, because it serves as a criterion for what counts as a meaningful sentence. It could be paraphrased as follows: *A sentence is meaningless (Unsinn) if its speaker cannot specify the empirical conditions under which such statement is true, and conversely the conditions under which such statement is false.*² This criterion plays a central role in Carnap’s polemic, both in delimiting the

² Carnap lists a version of this statement as one of four of the “sufficient and necessary conditions” for sentence S(a) “being meaningful”. He adds that each of the four criteria listed “ultimately say the same thing.” In Carnap’s exact words, “the truth conditions for S(a) must be fixed.” (Carnap, 1959).

speech of two distinct rhetorical communities (the Vienna Circle's "scientific philosophy" and Heidegger's "metaphysics") and in delimiting legitimate, logically correct assertions from metaphysical nonsense.

Carnap goes on to demonstrate the manner in which Heidegger fails logical analysis. He attends to a string of sentences culled from Heidegger's 1929 Inaugural Lecture course "Was Ist Metaphysik?" most of which are questions.

How do things stand with the Nothing? ...Where do we seek the Nothing?.. How do we know the Nothing? Anxiety reveals the Nothing.. That for which and because of which we were anxious, was 'really'- nothing. Indeed: the Nothing itself-as such- was present. (Carnap, 1959)

Logical analysis, Carnap's introduction suggests, might require an arduous process of questioning. Translatability of a sentence into logical notation is not a sufficient condition to establish whether or not a sentence is meaningful, merely a preliminary test. Given, however, Heidegger's outspoken unwillingness to translate the word "Nothing" into logical notation with an existential quantifier and a negation symbol, no further analysis is necessary to determine the nonsensicality of the sentences in which it appears.³ The logical analyst could persist in asking more questions, e.g. "What conditions must adhere such that we can truthfully assert that anxiety reveals the Nothing? How might the presence of the Nothing be verified?" But to proceed in this way, Carnap suggests, would be a fool's errand.

As other scholars have noted,⁴ there is little in Heidegger's original text that would suggest he would *contest* the results of logical analysis, leaving both parties in startling agreement. The unsatisfying quality of Carnap and Heidegger's exchange, and its relevance for contemporary philosophy, continues to incite scholarship and debate. In my research, I have encountered three different narratives of the confrontation that bring in the *Tractatus* as an interpretive element, each with a distinct account of what happened and what was at stake.

According to the first narrative, best put forward by Peter Luchte (2007), Carnap's diatribe betrays an utter disregard for context, thus missing ironies

³ Carnap does not deny the possibility that a new meaning might be assigned to the word "Nothing," but he claims that Heidegger has not attempted to assign one. (1959).

⁴ Friedman, M. and Luchte, P.

and anticipated arguments in Heidegger's lecture that render the results of logical analysis moot. In his defense of Heidegger against Carnap and the early Wittgenstein, Luchte illustrates the manner in which Heidegger is concerned with "another locus of truth, that of a primary topos of disclosure, prior to and more fundamental than empirical verifiability and logic." Luchte analyzes the exchange in question with thoroughness and care. His very discursive approach, however, illustrates a pressing predicament for continental philosophers attempting to engage the analytical community "in the wake of significant historical contestations," especially considering Luchte's claim that the very "task of philosophy" is here at stake. Given that it is Heidegger's *discourse itself* that is put into question by Carnap's analysis, and that Luchte's defense of Heidegger is presented in the very discourse that is on trial, it is unlikely that Luchte's historical analysis will be compelling to anyone not already convinced of Heidegger's merits and sense.

According to the second narrative, as told by Peter Hacker (1996), Carnap's *Elimination* is a notable, but not revolutionary, landmark in the history of analytic philosophy. Hacker treats and values Carnap primarily as one of Wittgenstein's earliest readers, contextualizing all of Carnap's work from 1931–1935 with discussion of the *Tractatus*. Hacker tacitly credits Carnap with first distinguishing, by use of Wittgenstein's method, "Analytic Philosophy" from "the obscurities of speculative metaphysicians, such as Hegel, Bradley, or Heidegger."⁵ Although Hacker, following the later Wittgenstein, rejects the results of nearly all of Carnap's projects (verificationism, his protocol language, his systematic meta-logic) Hacker finds no fault with Carnap's diagnosis of Heidegger's speech, and claims further that any "difference between Carnap and Wittgenstein on this issue lies largely in the bedside manner." (Hacker, 2003). In short, Hacker rather uncritically recounts the exchange in question as a successful excision of metaphysics from the practice of analytic philosophy.

The third narrative is drawn from interpretive debates concerning the elucidating purposes of Tractarian propositions, as put forward by James Conant. Conant's primary motive is not to provide a defense of Heidegger or of metaphysics per se, but rather to claim that logical analysis, as Carnap

⁵ Although Hacker does not reference Carnap by name in the quote referenced here, he makes a clear allusion to Carnap's 1931 indictment of "speculative metaphysics." Hacker goes on to suggest that Carnap's original demarcation, while valid, must do "more work" than merely distinguish analytic philosophy from metaphysics if "Analytic Philosophy is to be useful as a classificatory term."

employs it against Heidegger, rests upon a fundamental misappropriation of the *Tractatus*. (Conant, 2001). Conant contests the idea that Wittgenstein intended to sharply demarcate philosophy, above all “scientific philosophy,” from metaphysics. He furthermore opposes the assumption that Wittgenstein ever intended to develop a rigidly systematic method of logical analysis, or a set of criteria, for the purposes of demarcating meaningful discourse from nonsense. (Conant, 2001).

In what follows, I address the issue of criteria in the *Tractatus*, and examine Carnap’s inheritance of Wittgenstein as the inheritance of a troubling and repetitive question: that of philosophy’s relationship to its metaphysical origins. Whereas Carnap thinks that metaphysics can and should be eliminated from the practice of philosophy (and indeed that metaphysical questioning never occurs as what is to be called “thinking”), Heidegger maintains that philosophy and metaphysics are inseparable. I argue that the *Tractatus* raises, ambivalently and indecisively, the very question with regard to which Carnap and Heidegger are irreparably split. For this reason, I attend to Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus* as a pertinent but inconclusive case study.

II. The Vanishing *Tractatus*

The reading of the *Tractatus* that I present here attempts to avoid any speculation regarding Wittgenstein’s authorial intentions. I center my reading instead on the preface, in which Wittgenstein explicitly declares what the book to follow will *do*, and gives his readers clear standards by which to judge the success or failure of the text’s attempted act.

Wittgenstein prefaces his text by declaring “this book will draw a limit to thinking, or rather- not to thinking, but to the expression of thoughts,” specifying further, “it will only be in language that the limit can be drawn.” (Wittgenstein, 1961). Wittgenstein’s declared task is thus to demarcate what is to be called thinking- or rather, what is to be called a thought- from what is not to be called a thought. This demarcation can only be made “in language,” by *articulating* the limit between a thought and its degenerative other, as yet to be defined. That which is not to be called a thought- “that which lies on the other side of the limit,” Wittgenstein asserts “will simply be nonsense.”

My central interpretive premise is that a promise to draw a limit within language is, unambiguously, a promise to articulate criteria. Given that Wittgenstein defines a “thought,” quite rigidly, as “a proposition with a sense,” and that the text’s self-proclaimed task is that of drawing a limit to the

expression of thoughts, Carnap is hardly unjustified in taking these declarations seriously, and seeking out in the text that follows a criterion statement that delimits sense from nonsense. Wittgenstein goes so far as to provide readers with standards by which to judge whether or not the text succeeds in fulfilling its declared task. The preface states, “if this work has any value, it consists in two things,” the first being that “thoughts are expressed in it” and the second being that “the truth of these thoughts” is “unassailable and definitive.” (Wittgenstein, 1961). In other words, any criteria articulated within the text must, according to themselves, count as legitimate *propositions*.

Should it be shown that the text to follow does *not* contain legitimate propositions, Wittgenstein maintains that it will have *no value*. If the forthcoming criteria cannot themselves be said to count as propositions- if it is deemed that any sequence of words within the *Tractatus* does not express a sense- then said sequence of words expresses *nothing*. What will follow will thus either be a definitive success, in which case the text will articulate meaningful criteria with which “the final solution” to all the “problems of philosophy” will be demonstrated, or the text will fall short of expressing thoughts, in which case it will resoundingly fail.

What then, is to be called thinking? Wittgenstein delivers a series of numerical statements articulating necessary conditions of what is to be called a “thought.”

- 4 A thought is a proposition with a sense.
- 4.023 A proposition is a description of a state of affairs.
- 4.03 A proposition states something only insofar as it is a picture.
- 4.06 A proposition can be true or false only in virtue of being a picture of reality.
- 2.18 What any picture...must have in common with reality, in order to be able to depict it, correctly or incorrectly- in any way at all, is logical form, i.e. the form of reality.
- 2.201 A picture depicts reality by representing a possibility of existence and non-existence of states of affairs.
- 4.2 The sense of a proposition is its agreement and disagreement with possibilities of existence and non-existence of states of affairs.
- 4.024 To understand a proposition means to know what is the case if it is true.

(Wittgenstein, 1961)

Carnap reformulates 4.2 and 4.024 as the assertion “the meaning of a sentence consists in its truth-condition,” (1959) which might be reformulated in turn as the criterion statement *all sentences (x) are such that, if the truth conditions of x cannot be specified, then x is nonsense, and x does not constitute a thought.* 4.023 might be translated as the criterion statement *if a sentence does not describe a state of affairs, then it is nonsense, or all sentences (x) are such that, if x does not assert the existence of a state of affairs, then x does not constitute a thought.*

The penultimate sentence of the *Tractatus*, in which Wittgenstein declares all of his own statements to be nonsense, is well known. If however, according to the interpretive premise that I have adopted, these statements are understood as *criteria of nonsense*, the “only value” of which consists in that they express thoughts, consideration of the text is complicated in light of a strange paradox. Wittgenstein’s propositions are not only “nonsensical,” they are nonsensical *according to themselves*.

Criterion statements, by definition, do not describe contingent states of affairs, or assert that one of two bivalent possibilities is in fact the case. By definition, criteria do not have specifiable “truth conditions” in the same way that statements of empirical fact have truth conditions. Any criterion of nonsense that Wittgenstein delivers in the text is no exception. Statement 4.024 “to understand a proposition means to know what is the case if it is true” does not function to assert that a given contingent possibility is the case, as opposed to a mutually exclusive possibility. If statement 4.024 does indeed constitute a criterion that articulates the limits of sense, this criterion oversteps its own limits, and therefore must be “thrown away” as nonsense.

6.54 My propositions serve as elucidations in the following way: anyone who understands me eventually recognizes them as nonsensical, when he has used them- as steps- to climb up beyond them. (He must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after he has climbed up it.) (Wittgenstein, 1961)

If Wittgenstein’s “propositions” are understood as the *criteria* promised by the text’s preface, the purpose of which is to delimit sense from nonsense, then serious interpretive problems arise. If Wittgenstein’s criteria of nonsense do, as the preface claims, *express true thoughts*, then it must be concluded that these criteria are nonsense according to themselves. However, if these criteria are indeed *nonsense*, then they cannot be said to express thoughts (or

express anything) and thus cannot be used to delimit sense from nonsense, or for that matter, to “recognize” their *own* nonsensicality.

In its preface, the *Tractatus* promises both to delimit sense from nonsense, and to express true thoughts. It fails, by its own impossibly rigid standards, in doing both. Given that the criteria of nonsense within the *Tractatus* cannot survive their own expression, Carnap’s 1931 *citation* of these very criteria does indeed, in a cursory examination, appear misguided. Contra Conant, however, I do not believe that Carnap’s insistent inheritance of the *Tractatus* is the outcome of inattentive reading. On the contrary, Carnap is highly attuned to the internal collapse of Wittgenstein’s text, and the central problematic that it raises, but ultimately fails to resolve. This problematic, concerning the relationship between philosophy and metaphysics, arises explicitly in the third to last entry of the *Tractatus*.

6.53 The correct method in philosophy would really be the following: to say nothing except what can be said: i.e. the propositions of natural science- i.e. something that has nothing to do with philosophy- and then, whenever someone else wanted to say something metaphysical, to demonstrate to him that he had failed to give a meaning to certain signs in his propositions. Although it would not be satisfying to the other person- he would not have the feeling that we were teaching him philosophy- *this* method would be the only strictly correct one. (Wittgenstein, 1961)

The above passage informs Carnap’s desire for a “strictly correct” philosophy, from which metaphysics might be excised. Wittgenstein here conflates “metaphysical” speech with nonsense, and imagines a confrontation similar to the one that occurs in Carnap’s *Elimination*, in which the philosopher takes it upon himself to demonstrate, by means of a “strictly correct method” (presumably logical analysis), the metaphysician’s failure to express a sense. The failure of the *Tractatus*, however, lies in that it leaves the philosopher no language in which this demonstration might be sensibly made, given the nonsensical status of his criteria.

According to Wittgenstein, the questions, assertions and criteria of the logical analyst are just as nonsensical- just as metaphysical- as the speech of the metaphysician. If the *Tractatus* does indeed eliminate metaphysics, it does so only at the cost of condemning all philosophy to silence. The delimitation promised in the *Tractatus* occurs only as a self-destructive

vanishing act, an unmet promise that deprives its readers not only of its own metaphysical system (according to which “the world is all that is the case”), but also of a valid criterion by which this system might be dismissed. The *Tractatus* leaves its readers with *nothing*.

III. “But what, then, is left?”

Carnap responds to the collapse of the *Tractatus* with a question. “But what, then, is left over for philosophy, if all statements whatever that assert something are of an empirical nature and belong to factual science?” (1964). As previously discussed, Carnap maintains that “what remains is... only a *method*,” albeit a method that depends upon criteria problematically inherited from and attributed to Wittgenstein. In the period 1929–1937, Carnap demonstrates hesitancy in using the word “philosophy” to classify his own anti-metaphysical activities, and wavers between adopting the terms “scientific philosophy,” “logical analysis” and “the logic of science”. (1964). Carnap remains unsettled, furthermore, by the closing injunction of the *Tractatus*.⁶ In 1937, he finally states his grievances with Wittgenstein in print.

According to [the *Tractatus*], the investigations of the logic of science contain no sentences, but merely more or less vague explanations which the reader must subsequently recognize as pseudo-sentences and abandon. Such an interpretation of the logic of science is certainly very unsatisfactory. (Carnap, 1964, 282)

As early as 1931, Carnap expresses the lingering anxiety that the “unsatisfactory” performative contradictions within the *Tractatus* will be repeated in his own work.⁷ In the *Elimination*, directly in the wake his analysis of Heidegger, Carnap concedes that the diagnostic and criterion statements within his own critique remain questionable.

⁶ See *Tractatus* 6.54. “What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence.” As Conant notes, Wittgenstein explicitly stated in a 1932 letter to Schlick that he believed Carnap to have “completely misunderstood” this injunction. (Conant, 2001).

⁷ One cannot help but be reminded again of *Tractatus* 6.53 “Although it would not be satisfying to the other person- he would not have the feeling that we were teaching him philosophy- *this* method would be the only strictly correct one.”

The question regarding the logical character of the statements which we obtain as the result of a logical analysis, e.g. the statements occurring in this and other logical papers, can here be answered only tentatively: such statements are partly analytic, partly empirical. For these statements about statements and parts of statements belong in part to a pure metalogic (e.g. “a sequence consisting of the existence symbol and a noun, is not a sentence”), in part to descriptive metalogic (e.g. “the word sequence at such and such place in such and such a book is meaningless”). (Carnap, 1959, 78)

In the above passage, Carnap all but acknowledges that the exceptional status of the very diagnostic and criterion statements employed against Heidegger remains, as yet, unjustified and unexplained. Carnap’s willingness to discuss the inconsistencies still riddling logical analysis, and his eagerness to resolve these inconsistencies (by means of a “metalogic,” a logically correct language in which the analyst might construct “sentences about sentences”) both marks a significant departure from Wittgenstein, and demonstrates Carnap’s persistent belief that philosophy can survive the elimination of metaphysics. Whereas the *Tractatus* denies the philosopher or analyst the possibility of arriving at “philosophical propositions,” from 1931–1937, Carnap understands his task to be that of “provid[ing] a system of concepts, a language, by the help of which the results of logical analysis will be exactly formulable.” (1964).

The fact that Wittgenstein does not believe in the possibility of the exact formulation of the sentences of the logic of science has as its consequence that he does not demand any scientific exactitude in his own formulations, and that he draws no sharp line of demarcation between the formulation of the logic of science and those of metaphysics. (Carnap, 1964)

Carnap ultimately deems the *Tractatus* to be a failed attempt in sharply demarcating philosophy from metaphysics. If Carnap and Heidegger’s fundamental disagreement rests, as I have claimed, upon whether or not this demarcation can and should be made, then the *Tractatus* constitutes an important case study. Can metaphysics be excised from the practice of philosophy? To what degree is the contemporary philosophical community

still divided in its response to this question? How is this question understood, and what does it mean?

In contemporary analytic philosophy, many of Carnap's central projects, including the construction of a logically correct meta-language, have been largely discredited and abandoned. Full discussion of Carnap's metalogic, and analysis as to whether or not it overcomes the contradictions of the *Tractatus* would lie beyond the scope of this article. However it is reasonable to claim that many analytic philosophers, following the later Wittgenstein, lost interest in Carnap's efforts to salvage Wittgenstein's first text primarily because they came to reject the central task of the *Tractatus* itself, as it is declared in the text's preface. As Peter Hacker notes, Wittgenstein came to disavow the project of formulating a single, *universal* criterion by means of which sense and nonsense might be delimited, instead focusing his efforts upon disclosing mal-formed questions and statements on a case-by-case basis. (Hacker, 1987).⁸

A subtle inconsistency comes to light, however, when one considers that whereas Hacker (and "Analytic Philosophy" for which he portends to speak) has abandoned Carnap's *criteria of nonsense*, Hacker preserves Carnap's original delimitation between philosophy and metaphysics, according to which Heidegger is classified and dismissed as a "speculative metaphysician." (Hacker, 1996). Given that, in Carnap's *Elimination*, "metaphysics" is defined in terms of nonsense, and nonsense is defined in terms of the very criteria subsequently rejected by the analytic philosophical community, the question arises as to how "metaphysics" is now to be defined. If, for figures like Hacker, the Carnap–Heidegger exchange constitutes a kind of philosophical event, the consequences of which were the "elimination of metaphysics," the question arises: *what*, exactly, has been eliminated? What, potentially, has been lost?

IV. What is Metaphysics?

Heidegger's 1929 text, containing a string of statements and questions concerning "the Nothing" is not structured as a defense of metaphysics, but

⁸ See also Wittgenstein's reflection, prior to writing the *Investigations*: "One asks: 'Where is the boundary between the meaningful and the meaningless?' As if one had the task of demarcating two realms from one another, while the real peculiarity of the question is that it can only be answered...from case to case... we are no longer tempted to suppose that there is, as it were, a continent of the meaningful which- with unknown boundaries- rises out of the sea of the meaningless: this imagery is created by misleading speech patterns." (Wittgenstein and Waismann, 2003).

as an *inquiry* into metaphysics. Indeed the “question concerning the Nothing” is posed performatively, not as a self-contained philosophical inquiry, but rather as a pedagogical demonstration. The question of the Nothing is posed only in service of another, more pressing inquiry.

“What is metaphysics?” The question awakens expectations of a discussion about metaphysics. This we will forgo. Instead we will take up a particular metaphysical question. In this way it seems we will let ourselves be transposed directly into metaphysics. Only in this way will we provide metaphysics a proper occasion to introduce itself. Our plan begins with the unfolding of a metaphysical inquiry, then tries to elaborate the question, and concludes by answering it. (Heidegger, 1977)

Metaphysics is given the most forceful occasion to arise and unfold, Heidegger provokingly continues, when science is compelled to articulate a philosophical account of itself. When we “researchers, teachers and students” pursue science, we both *act* confidently, according to our established methods for treating various “objects of inquiry,” and *speak* confidently, by restricting our speech to material things and observable empirical processes. (1977). In pursuing science, we refer unproblematically to things that exist (“beings”), attribute properties to these existing things, and form predicates in accordance with “the rules of logic.” When the scientist attempts to articulate his relation to the world, however, Heidegger suggests that this confident action must arrest itself, and this confident speech must deviate from its habitual referents and predicates. Heidegger delivers three caricatured statements, in the voice of the scientist, expressive of the scientific *Weltauffassung*.

That to which the relation to the world refers are beings themselves- and nothing besides. That from which every attitude takes its guidance are beings themselves- and nothing further. That which the scientific confrontation in the irruption occurs are beings themselves- and beyond that nothing. (Heidegger, 1977)

These statements are naturally Heidegger's own, but their structure nonetheless echoes that of statements expressed or cited by Carnap himself.⁹ They echo, furthermore, Wittgenstein's problematic injunction to "say nothing except what can be said, i.e. the propositions of the natural sciences." (Wittgenstein, 1961). In their very articulation, Heidegger notes, these repetitive restrictions to strictly empirical speech overstep their own bounds.

What is remarkable is that, precisely in the way scientific man secures to himself what is most properly his, he speaks of something different... What about this nothing? The nothing is rejected precisely by science... Science wants to know nothing of the nothing. But even so it is certain that when science tries to express its proper essence it calls upon the nothing for help. It has recourse to what it rejects. What incongruous state of affairs reveals itself here? (Heidegger, 1977, 95)

The "question of the nothing" arises, within Heidegger's caricatured demonstration, when "scientific man" attempts to understand himself and his relation to the world. The emergence of this question, its imperfect articulation, and its irreverent pursuit, pedagogically demonstrates the occurrence of metaphysics. The questioner who persists in asking about the nothing, even in spite of her uncertainty regarding the "object" of her inquiry, demonstrates a distinctive questioning attitude, the cultivation of which Heidegger deems essential to the practice of philosophy itself. Philosophy, Heidegger asserts, demands of its practitioners a radical readiness for the possibility of failure.

Metaphysics...stands in closest proximity to the constantly lurking possibility of the deepest error. For this reason, no amount of scientific rigor attains to the seriousness of metaphysics. Philosophy- what we call philosophy- is metaphysics getting under way, in which philosophy comes to itself and its explicit tasks. (Heidegger, 1977.)

Metaphysics, as Heidegger understands it, is characterized not by its dogmatic rejection of logic or of science, but rather by its readiness for error

⁹ The Vienna Circle declares, "neatness and clarity are striven for, and dark distances and unfathomable depths rejected. In science there are no 'depths'; there is surface everywhere: all experience forms a complex network... Everything is accessible to man; and man is the measure of all things" (Hahn, Neurath, Otto and Carnap, 2014).

and its persistence in questioning, even and especially when the meaning of the questions themselves remain to be worked out. The fundamental disagreement between Carnap and Heidegger, I have claimed, lies in their respective desires to eliminate and preserve metaphysics. How is this difference between them to be considered, however, given that the very *language* in which each respectively defines “metaphysics” reflects already a foregone conclusion, thereby precluding the possibility of considering the relationship between “philosophy” and “metaphysics” on neutral ground?

Carnap defines “metaphysics” as nothing more than “the slag of historical languages,” the set of sentences vestigial to philosophy, to which no meaning has been assigned, and by means of which no sense is expressed, that still linger in philosophical texts like so many useless limbs. Heidegger defines “metaphysics” rather as the collected history of mankind’s attempts and failures to articulate human existence in words, the collected history of failed formulations of the question of Being. These definitions foreclose their other’s possibility. They cannot be reconciled, and yet, they both define “metaphysics” in terms of a profound *failure to say*.

I have here presented a reading of the *Tractatus* as a distinctively metaphysical failure, one that unfolds plainly and without apology. The distance between Carnap and Heidegger can be measured in terms of this failure. Whereas Carnap held that philosophy should do everything in its power to secure itself from the eventuality of performative contradiction, error, and indeterminacy of speech and sense, Heidegger understood aporia, anxiety, and the willingness to err as intrinsic, necessary conditions to philosophical questioning. It is challenging to articulate, in philosophical rather than political terms, what was at stake in Carnap–Heidegger exchange. I have claimed that their confrontation is best explained as a disagreement concerning two incompatible understandings of philosophy’s relationship to failure.

Acknowledgements

Many thanks to Adam Sitze, Alexander George, and Hans Ruin.

References

- Carnap, R. (1959). *The Elimination of Metaphysics Through the Logical Analysis of Language*. In (ed.) Ayer, A. *Logical Positivism*. New York: The Free Press, Co.
- Carnap, R. (1964). *The Logical Syntax of Language*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

- Conant, J. (2001). Two Conceptions of Die Überwindung der Metaphysik. In (ed.) McCarthy, S and Stidd, S. *Wittgenstein in America*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Friedman, M. (2002). Overcoming Metaphysics: Carnap and Heidegger. In (ed.) Dreyfus, H. and Wrathall, M. *Heidegger Reexamined*, Vol. 4. New York: Routledge.
- Hacker, P. (1987). *Insight and Illusion: Themes in the Philosophy of Wittgenstein*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hacker, P. (2003). Wittgenstein, Carnap and the New American Wittgensteinians. In *The Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 53, No. 210, pp. 1–23.
- Hacker, P. (1996). *Wittgenstein's Place in Twentieth-Century Analytic Philosophy*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.
- Hahn, Neurath, Otto and Carnap. (1929). *The Scientific Conception of the World*. Retrieved from <<http://evidencebasedcryptography.org/pdfs/wiennacircle.pdf>> November 30, 2014.
- Heidegger, M. (1977). What is Metaphysics. In (ed.) Krell, D. *Basic Writings*. San Francisco: Harper Collins Press.
- Luchte, P. (2007). Martin Heidegger and Rudolf Carnap: Radical Phenomenology, Logical Positivism and the Roots of the Continental/Analytic Divide. In *Philosophy Today*. Vol. 51, Number 3, pp. 241–260. Retrieved from <[Http://luchte.wordpress.com](http://luchte.wordpress.com)> November 20, 2014.
- Wittgenstein, L. (1961). *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. (Tr.) Pears, D. and McGuinness, B. London: Routledge Classics.
- Wittgenstein, L. and Waismann, F. (2003). *The Voices of Wittgenstein: The Vienna Circle*. (Ed). Baker, G. New York: Routledge.

Deidre Nelms
Philosophy Department
Georgetown University
Dn244@georgetown.edu