

**What Must Be Left Unsaid, and Saying It Anyways:  
Logic and Metaphysics in the Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century**

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Carnap's 1932 "Elimination of Metaphysics" is typically criticized as a poor reading of Heidegger. However, recent works have come to reject this reading. Although Carnap's paper itself fails on several fronts, it is indicative of the overall character of his project, and there is good reason to suppose that Carnap would read Heidegger seriously. In fact, the two authors share many of the same predispositions and assumptions. In this paper, I wish to explore these undercurrents, and to expose the origin of the difference between these giants of 20<sup>th</sup> century philosophy.

First, I will go over the historical and political movements which fuel their projects. The philosophers' positions will then be discussed against the then-dominant Neokantian school and the influence of Edmund Husserl's phenomenology. I will then discuss the matters on which they agree and find themselves in contrast. The discussion will proceed through an analysis of the authors' conceptions of fundamental epistemology, metaethics, and their relation to language.

### **Historical Background, Political Origins**

Carnap and Heidegger were young men in 1914, when the world went to war. The horror of industrial warfare and the decline of Western religious practices scarred a generation, prompting a radical political split. The classic dilemma of is and ought had come to engross the age: What are we to do about the incommensurability of (empirical-scientific) facts and (theological-existential) meaning? In 1917, the sociologist Max Weber wrote the following.

...what is the meaning of science as a vocation, now after all these former illusions ...have been dispelled? Tolstoy has given the simplest answer, with the words: "Science is meaningless because it gives no answer to our question, the only question important for us: 'What shall we do and how shall we live?'" That science does not give an answer to this is indisputable. The only question that remains is the sense in which science gives "no" answer, and whether or not science might yet be of some use to the one who puts the question correctly. (Weber 2014, 139)

For Carnap and his Vienna Circle, the limitations of science are themselves the limitations of knowledge. Anything which can be said about material things (including individuals and their societies) can be stated clearly, in scientific language. The rise of psychology and sociology as empirical disciplines alongside the development of formal logic provided further fuel for their attitude. Metaphysical pronouncements outside the scope of logical analysis – about abstract essences or universal ethics – were considered “nonsense.” This term is not to be taken as a complete dismissal, however; the scientific worldview is meant to “serve life”, not the other way around. Practical philosophy is to proceed from empirical grounds, as a sociopsychological science. But the Vienna Circle was not without their preferred conclusions.

In “The Scientific Conception of the World,” they explicitly link their worldview with the socialist movements of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. They acknowledge a widespread disenchantment among Weberian lines, connected with the industrial mode of production. The European public “with their socialist attitudes tend to lean towards a down-to-earth empiricist view. In previous times *materialism* was the expression of this view; meanwhile, however, modern empiricism has ... taken a strong shape in the *scientific world-conception*” (Hahn et al. 1973, 21f). Their solution to the disenchantment can be found in the hope they place in science and collectivist movements taking shape throughout the continent.

While scientific reason takes the priority for the positivists, Heidegger focuses on the lost sense of existential meaning. For him, the Western philosophical project is extremely fruitful, but overly restrictive. He aims to destruct the canon, clearing the space for a new philosophy. The scientific worldview is, after all, one among many.

It is well-known that Heidegger took the rectorate at Freiburg under Nazi reign, and delivered several lectures expounding on the “inner greatness” of the Nazi party. Throughout his life, he was taciturn about his involvements in the party. In a late interview with *der Spiegel*, published only posthumously, Heidegger claims his

involvement with the Nazi party was at least partially out of a sense of obligation, in order to keep the university intact, and to secure his position as rector. Regardless of the nature of his involvement with fascism, it is clear that Heidegger was against communism in any form, especially the technocratic version which the Vienna Circle would undoubtedly espouse. He argues that communism and “Americanism” (what I assume to be industrial capitalism) are forms of global technicity, that is, a movement away from viewing human beings in their full nature towards the total organization and technologization of human behavior in cybernetics. In his language, all beings, even Dasein itself, become uprooted from the earth and become ready-to-hand, no longer capable of being seen in their true essence. Although he does not make his political end-goal explicit, it is against this technicity, and towards a *Volkish* ideal that Heidegger strives (Heidegger 1981, 2008c).

Heidegger and Carnap are both seated within the Western philosophical tradition, and both are attempting to overcome it. Their methods differ quite dramatically, however, as do their end goals. Carnap wishes to clear away the cruft of the past few millennia in order to see rightly; fundamentally, he believed the Western canon was on the right track. Heidegger, however, wants to destruct the method and the worldview which evolved from Plato through Kant. Both do so in order to found a worldview which is capable of overcoming the existential conditions which underlie false metaphysical inquiry. These conditions are immediately tied up in both material analysis and practical philosophy, in questions concerning both empirical facts and lived meaning. In the next section we will take a look at their shared philosophical background, after which we will analyze how they each moved past it.

### **Kant and Husserl**

(Stone 2017) recognizes three core aspects of Kant’s critique of traditional metaphysics: (1.) Kant acknowledges that metaphysics correctly identifies the grounds

of science in the transcendental causes and principles of reason. (2.) He denies any knowledge of the suprasensible subject-matter of metaphysics (noumena). (3.) His goal is to save practical philosophy by limiting our knowledge, to “limit reason in order to make room for faith.” But Kant’s critiques left open two large concerns. First, the notion of noumena seems to be largely without basis. Why believe in a realm of suprasensible things-in-themselves if we are only given access to the phenomena which represent them? Second, the rational faculties are based on spatiotemporal sensory intuition, but there is concern about the primacy of these intuitions.

In order to overcome the limitations of Kant’s system, Husserl proposes to link our perceptions and the noumena, thus grounding our faculties and overcoming representationalism at once. Husserl’s claim is that phenomena do not exist as objects-in-themselves, independently of our own interpretation. Rather, phenomena are those objects whose whole existence is dependent on our postulation through an intentional (directed) interpretation of sense experience. This transcendental process reveals to us the *Urregion* of pure consciousness, containing the necessary and absolute entities (phenomena as such) which ground our human faculties. But here Husserl has solved the problems of noumena and intuition by the creation of a realm of suprasensible entities! He has, in effect, reinstated metaphysics. (Stone 2017, 4f)

What about practical philosophy? For Husserl, ethics would appear as an objective science the same as any other. What is objectively good is what must necessarily appear good. Analogously to the postulation of sensory phenomena, evaluative phenomena are found in the *Urregion* of consciousness insofar as they are postulated on top of volitional or emotional data. Ethics, then, takes on the shape of an objective science analogous to material phenomenology (5).

In overcoming metaphysics, Heidegger and Carnap are proceeding from, but overcoming, the phenomenological method which Husserl had laid out. Between them, there are a few shared concerns. Although they both wish to overcome metaphysics, I

will focus on their stances on the nature of logic and value theory. In particular, I will show how for each author: (1.) Scientific thought is formal in nature and cannot capture values; (2.) Language is a key aspect of relating between the mind and the world; (3.) The manner in which we use language corresponds directly to our practical, political, and ethical aims.

### **Rational Construction**

For Carnap, the end of science is to “find and order the true statements about the objects of experience” (*Aufbau*, §179). This can be split into two further goals: to create a constructional system corresponding to formal logic, and to investigate the relationships between objects of non-constructed experience. We then have two foundational aspects of construction theory: conventional stipulation of logical syntax and verification through empirical investigation.

Carnap proceeds from unanalyzable phenomenological units which he calls basic experiences: these are whole-field conscious experiences which appear epistemically prior to the analysis of their constitutive parts. They are precisely the object of phenomenological analysis in Husserl’s sense (*Aufbau*, §64).<sup>1</sup> However, basic experiences do not have any relation to a subject; the “for-me-ness” is analyzed into it after the fact. Similar to how we can only call integers “integers” in contradistinction to the real numbers once we have constructed them, we only understand our basic experiences as autopsychological in contrast with the later-constructed physical and heteropsychological objects. (*Aufbau*, III.C *passim*.).

Despite the inability to analyze the experiences themselves, he “quasi-analyzes” them by creating a formal allegory and examining the structures thereof. This amounts

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1. Carnap believed his system to be compatible with the three major epistemological movements: realism, idealism, and phenomenism (*Aufbau*, §177f). Nonetheless, he chose the Husserlian phenomena as his starting point.

to a functionalization of objects, a switch from an ontological/material perspective to a structural/functional perspective. In this way he constructs the world through a purely formal analysis of basic experience. On this basis he claims to transform foundational epistemology from a speculative practice into a mathematically rigorous, logistical process.

In the *Aufbau*, Carnap aims to formulate a “one true language” from which to construct the world. In response to formal difficulties arising from the construction of the physical from the autopsychological, he is forced to reconsider his stance on logic, eventually realizing that there are many valid formal logics. Once we reach the *Syntax*, this stipulatory nature is formalized into the principle of tolerance.

*In logic, there are no morals.* Everyone is at liberty to build up his own logic, i.e. his own form of language, as he wishes. All that is required of him is that, if he wishes to discuss it, he must state his methods clearly, and give syntactical rules instead of philosophical arguments. (*Syntax*, §17)

Since logistics is the ideal evaluative framework, but there are multiple valid logistical systems, it is up to us to find the ideal system to relate to our practical aims, whatever they may be.

Analogous to the ontological and functional perception of gestalt phenomena, Carnap distinguishes between two modes of speech, the material and the formal. The distinction is defined by a translation between the formal-structural semantic statements of the kind discussed in the *Syntax* and the material-ontological mode of speech which postulates properties of objects with little concern for structural soundness. Crucially, some material sentences, specifically those that propose spurious universal properties, cannot be translated into formal syntax. While Carnap claims that the material mode of speech is perfectly acceptable, and in fact unavoidable, he warns us that untranslatable material statements lead us to speak metaphysically. Metaphysical statements are a kind of expression, but they cannot be subject to claims about truth and falsity in the sense of logical-empirical validity, and so have no place in a scientific philosophy.

*Translatability into the formal mode of speech constitutes the touchstone for all philosophical sentences ... Sentences which do not give even a slight indication to determine their translation are outside the realm of the language of science and therefore incapable of discussion, no matter what depths or heights of feeling they may stir. (Syntax, §81)*

So Carnap has his linguistic prescription: if you wish to be intelligible, you must speak in a manner consistent with the formal mode of speech.

It is precisely this attitude which spells out the dangers of metaphysics. Metaphysical speech has the appearance of scientific rationality, while in fact only prescribing an orientation toward the world. This can lead to an unearned sense of authority for the individual. Carnap's argument against metaphysics - and especially against Heidegger - consists in this: speculative metaphysics is inherently authoritarian by lack of verifiability. In contrast, a social-scientific ethics undoubtedly places a large emphasis on the authority of the group and the sentiment of comradeship which is essential for the scientific enterprise.

Carnap claims in a 1932 lecture that ethical claims are in essence prescriptive statements, specifically imperatives. These statements are manifestations of an attitude toward life. Importantly, imperatives are *not* translatable into formal language. We can see how easy it is to spin up spurious universals by analyzing ethical statements. "Do not kill," for example, is clearly an imperative, while "killing is evil" is an assertion about a universal property which does not admit of empirical evidence (Carnap 1996, §1.4). "Evil" is not a material thing, nor a property thereof. Carnap's own prescription, the scientific worldview, must then itself be an expression of an attitude toward life, and admits of no proper evidence other than a particular kind of faith in science.

Whence then our confidence that our call for clarity, for a science that is free from metaphysics, will be heard? It stems from the knowledge or, to put it somewhat more carefully, from the belief that these opposing powers belong to the past. ... Our work is carried by the faith that this attitude will win the future. (*Aufbau*, xvii.f)



The inability to formalize value statements leads Carnap directly into the famous argument against positivism, that the verification principle itself is a prescription, and cannot be verified. Any justification for a value must be made within the language of science, but the objects of its study are a matter of *psychology* and not something which can be derived from universal principles of reason. Any prescriptive claim must take the shape of formal-logical arguments proceeding from *volition*, ultimately amounting to an arbitrary (set?) of formal languages which capture the ethical feelings which express themselves as part of our basic experiences.

In summary: (1.) Science is logistic in nature, proceeding from basic experiences to the construction of the world, while value postulation is a matter of irrational prescription, an animal reaction to chance situation. (2.) The material mode of speech is natural but insufficient, leading us into confusion. If one is to proceed scientifically, they must speak in a way which is translatable into the formal mode of speech. (3.) Material language has potentially deleterious psychological effects. The formal mode of speech most clearly aligns itself with a communitarian ethic, and specifically, the communist politic, while the material mode of speech aligns itself most easily with authoritarianism, specifically, the fascist politic.

### Beyond Logic

Heidegger, like Carnap, begins his analysis from phenomenological grounds. But his idea of a phenomenon is quite different. His system is very intricate, so we will only have the space to cover a small fraction of it here, mainly as it appears in *Being and Time*.<sup>2</sup> We will focus only on what is necessary to contrast his understanding of scientific rationality from Carnap's.

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2. References to *Being and Time* are to the original page numbers, prefixed with an H. in the cited edition.

Heidegger's project is to study what it means for anything to be at all. This is the question of Being. For Heidegger, the question of Being is the proper aim of philosophy; it will take shape as a fundamental ontology. The goal of ontology is to set the *a priori* foundations for the study of beings in general. In analogy with Carnap, Heidegger's approach is to analyze both the ontic, object-oriented sciences and the ontological, functional structure of consciousness in general. In doing so he and Carnap take on Husserl's goal of uniting the phenomena and the grounds of our rational faculties. However, in contrast to Carnap, in order to understand the object Heidegger believes we must understand it *as* an object, i.e., as it appears. We cannot functionalize it, proceed by analogy, and consider this to be a full explanation. We must consider phenomena in its relation to our Being as a *whole*, picking apart its various equiprimordial roots. In doing so we will come to a better understanding of the ambiguity inherent in the material mode of speech.

We humans are exceptional in that our ontic existence is in fact ontological; that is, our Being is something we recognize, and which forms a problematic for us. This recognition makes us naturally capable of ontology. Because of this exceptional feature, it is through an analysis of *our* Being, what Heidegger calls Dasein (lit. "being-there") that we can come to an understanding of Being in general. Further, this analytic must occur as Dasein exists "proximally and for the most part," in its everydayness. In so doing we will not only found the sciences, but all other meaningful orientation toward the world. (BT, Int. I)

The method of this analysis is phenomenology. Though the term "phenomenology" implies a scientific approach, the form of *lógos* Heidegger has in mind is quite different from both the traditional syllogistic logic and the new mathematical logistics. What Heidegger means by *lógos* is closer to Hegel's dialectical logic, though he attains his definition through an etymological analysis of the original Greek terms. *Lógos* is the manner in which a discussion allows the object of discourse to be seen (in Aristotle,

*apophaínesthai*). In this way, truth (*aléthia*, lit. “not to escape notice”) becomes a manner of “disclosing” or “discovering” (*phaínesthai*, lit. “letting-be-seen”) the phenomenon, with falsity being a manner of “covering up” (*pseúdesthai*) to hide the “true” nature of the being as the object of discourse. So in this way, *lógos* as logistics cannot be the locus of truth. It is only in the phenomenon, or aesthetic experience, in which we find truth.

“*Aísthesis*, the sheer sensory perception of something, is ‘true’ in the Greek sense, and indeed more primordially than the *lógos* which we have been discussing” (*BT*, 33).

*Aísthesis* cannot cover up, as it displays itself as itself (as *noeîn*, cf Husserl’s *noema*); at worst it can be a kind of non-perceiving (*agnoeîn*). The object of *aísthesis* is the *ídia* as, and for example, color is the object of sight. Though *aísthesis* shows things as they are, covering-up occurs through synthesis, the showing of something as or through something else. *Aísthesis* does not occur through a faculty of cognition, but directly, thus avoiding the Kantian dilemmas. For Heidegger, rationality in the Kantian-scientific sense occurs only atop of apophantic logos, which itself is derivative of aesthetic/phenomenal understanding. (*BT*, Int. II.A, B)

So, the task of phenomenology is to (literally) discover the ideas (*qua* principles) of aesthetic perception. So in contrast to Carnap, “for-me-ness” is an essential aspect of the phenomenon. It is clear then that the *manner* in which things appear to us is of deep importance to Heidegger, and that the manner in which we express ourselves will be key to disclosing Being. Heidegger contends that our language has developed in accordance with the ontic perception. In order to overcome this, he requires us to rethink the manner in which we relate to, understand, and discuss the world.

Things in the world can show themselves to us in different ways. Two of the most important orientations are readiness-to-hand and presence-to-hand. Ready-to-hand entities are visible in their tool-use: they make themselves apparent to us in their useful capacities toward some goal or another. But when the tool breaks, we stop to consider

the entity as it is in itself, as a material thing with constitutive parts, etc. This viewpoint, when the entity is considered primarily *as* entity, is presence-at-hand.

Heidegger characterizes us as thrown into the world against our wills, made to orient ourselves. We do so through our state-of-mind, manifested as mood. Our moods turn us *away* from ourselves and toward the world, thus revealing beings to us in their factual nature. Entities only appear to us as present-at-hand (in their utility) or otherwise because we are already predisposed by our moods to find them in this way (*BT*, I.5 ¶29). Alongside mood, we find the equally basic relation of understanding. The world discloses itself to us, and thus we to ourselves, in our possibilities, that is, in all the potential relations which they may hold. Potentiality is always future-oriented as something not yet actual, and never necessary. Understanding, then, as equiprimordial with state-of-mind, is a future-oriented disclosure of the potentiality of the world. This aspect of understanding is called projection. Our moods, as a turning-away, close off certain possibilities for us, thus restricting our sight. The manner in which projection works out its restricted possibilities is called interpretation, and the manner in which we then see something *as* something is called articulation. But this potential-utility of the ready-to-hand object, for example, manifests itself through a *totality* of involvements. Every potentiality of the ready-to-hand is such an involvement, and the ready-to-hand is only understood as relating to the entire mesh of these potential involvements.

Since only what is understood can be articulated, all predication always already has the structure of understanding. As a matter of fixed predication, assertion is itself a kind of interpretation. But, since all understanding relates entities to Dasein and in so doing wraps up their being within Dasein's world, any *meaning* as such will be discovered alongside the Being of Dasein. (*BT*, ¶31f)

So, Heidegger characterizes meaningful entities as just those entities which are understood in relation to our thrown projection, restricted in their possibilities (for utilization) by our state-of-mind. This interpretive structure is circular: we project

meaningful possibility onto the ready-to-hand only because we already have a network of possibility structures in place by which to interpret them. Heidegger views this as a positive characteristic.

What is decisive is not to get out of the circle but to come into it in the right way. This circle of understanding is not an orbit in which any random kind of knowledge may move; it is the expression of the existential *fore-structure* of Dasein itself. ...In the circle is hidden a positive possibility of the most primordial kind of knowing. (BT, 153)

Logistical analysis then becomes a kind of interpretation, a tearing-apart of what has been seen together in synthesis. He characterizes logic as operating on the basis of an ontic, “apophantical ‘as,’” in opposition to the “existential-hermeneutical ‘as’” of the ontological stance. In the ontic approach, “The judgement gets dissolved logistically into a system in which things are ‘co-ordinated’ with one another; it becomes the object of a ‘calculus’; but it does not become a theme for ontological Interpretation” (BT, 159). That is to say, within the ontic mode of speech, we are unable to pursue an ontological discourse which can account for the socio-psychological aspects of our understanding. Apophantic logos misses the character of “thought” in Heidegger’s sense, as it does not clear the space for an existential-hermeneutic analysis, and so is vastly limited in its possibilities.

Now, finally, we come to characterize discourse or speech (*Rede*) as equiprimordial with state-of-mind and understanding. As shown, meaning-making is a manner of interpretation, which takes the form of articulation. Meaning is that which is articulated. But what has been understood, and thus articulated, is always a totality of significations. The meaning of an utterance can be broken apart into separate significations, as in apophantic logos, and mapped to words. (BT, 161ff)

In order to communicate, we must be able both to speak and to listen. Listening takes the form of *being quiet*; through this we open ourselves up to be *with* others. But listening, that is, hearkening to the understanding which is to be communicated, can

only occur because one is proximally alongside the Other. In this being-with, we find ourselves already with an understanding of the thing that any intelligible discourse is about. In order to be understood, one must already be in a shared state-of-mind (*BT*, 163ff). This is to say that understanding requires that one shares at least some portion of their “web of beliefs” with the other party, even if that understanding is as “minimal” as a shared natural language.

Now, with all this mind we can understand Heidegger’s call to destruct the Cartesian logical-empirical project. To Descartes, mathematical clarity, as an unchanging eternal ideal, is the arbiter of truth. To the extent that something truly “is,” its existence can be described in terms of mathematical rigor. But in order to do so, Descartes bases his ontology on the *res extensa*, i.e. on Nature, an entity which to us is always proximally ready-to-hand. The mathematical mode of thought is apophantical, taking entities as they are present-to-hand, and reduced to their material-empirical properties, a deeply artificial state of mind. Descartes “prescribes for the world its ‘real’ Being, as it were, on the basis of an idea of Being whose source has not been unveiled and which has not been demonstrated in its own right – an idea in which Being is equated with constant presence-at-hand.” (*BT*, 96) This second-hand knowledge - of material substance as constantly present-at-hand - forces us to avoid the question of value. As Carnap says, anything which goes beyond what can be empirically verified is nonsensical, i.e., cannot be formalized. This is exactly right, and it is exactly the issue.

As in the “Question Concerning Technology,” Heidegger claims that the empirical project, through modern technology, has dissociated humanity from its primordial nature. In addition to being a means to an end and a human activity, to Heidegger technology is a kind of revealing, an interpretive apparatus. Modern technology reveals the world as standing-reserve, available to us only in its possibility for consumption, i.e. translation into physical energy. Throughout his later work, as in “The Task of Thinking” and “Only a God can Save Us,” Heidegger uses this argument in explicit opposition to

socialism, which he calls “a form of planetary technicity” (Heidegger 1981, 206). A Marxist might consider this strange: it is the capitalist class who exploits his fellow-man with technology in order to gain the excess wealth of his production. But Heidegger would respond: the worker and capitalist are both enframed, driven to view the world as standing-reserve irrespective of their class status. Socialism will not fix this problem because it does not understand the essence on which it is grounded.

So, to conclude: (1.) Science is formal in nature, relying on an orientation which prefers ontic analysis over ontological. Values arise from existential considerations, which can be explicated only in terms of a hermeneutic analysis of Dasein. (2.) Our being-in-the-world, thus our understanding and our state-of-mind, is equiprimordial with and becomes intelligible through discourse, which reifies itself in language. (3.) The scientific worldview and its formal language lends itself to an ontic orientation which puts us at risk of dehumanization. Socialism and global capitalism, as technocratic regimes, reduce all Being into standing-reserve, potential for utilization toward an unexamined end.

### **Conclusion**

The values which we hold can drastically impact the style and substance of our analyses. If we are prone to clarity and simplicity, a form of mathematical rigor can emerge. If we are prone to the ambiguous, a poetic form of speech more clearly fits our needs. Irrespective of how and why we value what we value, it is a key sociological finding that our social environments impact what we believe. Whether or not we intend them to, our values will find themselves leaking through to our philosophical discourse. If we are truly free to choose a logical system to suit our needs, then that choice will reflect pre-theoretical considerations. If we are to investigate what fuels those practical choices, it is essential to understand psychologically and existentially why we value what we do.

Carnap unhelpfully throws his hands up at ethics, claiming that, because it is non-cognitive, we cannot say anything definite about its fundamental constitution, and thus ought to remain silent. Heidegger gives us an analytic which provides a method for grounding ethics, yet his understanding may lead us to obscurantism and an authoritarian worldview. If we are to overcome Heidegger's politics and Carnap's irrationalism, we must think *with* these thinkers *against* these thinkers. Perhaps we should take Carnap's penchant for semantic clarity and combine it with Heidegger's analytic of the non-cognitive, admitting that some ambiguity is necessary in the pursuit of transcendental knowledge. If we are to found ethics, we must think what cannot be said, and say it anyways.





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