What Must Be Left Unsaid, and Saying It Anyways: Logic and Metaphysics in the Early 20th 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 20th 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 author's 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 the midst of the great war, 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)

This essay aims to clarify why science gives no answer.

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 disciplines, with figures like Weber, Durkheim, James, and Wundt empiricizing questions typically reserved for philosophy, alongside theories of linguistic logic by Russell and Wittgenstein, 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. Ethics, and politics, is to proceed from empirical grounds, as a sociopsychological science. Of course, they were not without their bias.

In "The Scientific Conception of the World," they explicitly link their worldview with the socialist movements of the early 20th 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 empricist 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).

While strict empiricism takes the priority for the positivists, Heidegger focuses on the lost sense of meaning. For him, the Western philosophical project is extremely fruitful, but fatally flawed. He aims to destruct the Western canon, clearing the space for a new world-conception which can provide us the ground on which to found a new kind of philosophy.

If the sciences can provide us with the facts of their particular disciplines, and nothing further, Heidegger calls on us to examine the "nothing further" which by its nature sets the limitations of what can be known about beings. Similar to Kant, he is

asking us to examine our intuitions in order to found our scientific knowledge. He takes on a phenomenological hermeneutic of our lived experience in order to found our intuitions. In so doing, he engages with the emotions and our relationships with other people, in addition to our relationships to mere objects. We relate to the world in myriad ways, and Heidegger believes these are worth investigating. 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, published only posthumously, Heidegger claims his involvement with the Nazi party was taken 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 technocratic free-market 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, becomes uprooted from the earth and becomes ready-to-hand, no longer capable of being seen in its 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).

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 how they each went about this destruction.

Husserl and Neokantianism

Heidegger and Carnap were both educated in the Neokantian tradition. In keeping with the post-Kantian idealists, the Neokantians rejected the Kantian distinction between the realms of pure sensibility and understanding. Over spatio-temporal intuition, they preferred a pure logical basis for the object of knowledge. (Friedman 2000, 28) The tradition was divided between several schools, most notably the Marburg school and the Southwest school. While there are many differences between these camps, the primary distinction I will focus on is their stance on the distinction between logic and values.

Logic, being a discursive science aimed at proper thinking, was considered *normative.* For Rickert, a key player of the Southwest school, this leads to the claim that logic belongs to the realm of transcendental value. Pure logic is then to be distinguished from psychological knowledge, which proceeds by empirical means. This leaves us with the gap between *logic* as value, and *psychology* as fact (34ff).

Cassirer of the Marburg school rejected this distinction. Instead of cleaving the mind between transcendental psychology and pure logic, Cassirer claims that these gaps are *moments* of cognition. They are not essential features which then are synthesized in to a single cognition, but a unitary relation which has been artificially analyzed into parts. Value and fact are analogous to the universal and the particular, but for Cassirer this is a difference in matter of *viewpoint,* between understanding a thing in its "thinghood" (as it relates to universal/transcendental forms), and understanding a thing in its "context" (as a being among beings). This separation between viewpoints is

"artificial," only occurring after the initial unitary relation between mind and object. The originary perception finds these two aspects in unison (Friedman 2000, 34ff).

The parallels between Husserl and the Neokantian schools is fairly clear. Rickert writes positively of the *Logical Investigation's* polemic against psychologism, and there are clear parallels between the unitary relation of cognition in Cassirer and Husserl's unitary field of phenomenological consciousness (see *Ideas* §38). Akin to Rickert, Husserl ends up proposing transcendental phenomenological ideas as the basis of his ontology, but akin to Cassirer he proposes that value and fact are part of the same conscious process.

The phenomenon was proposed by Husserl as a way of bridging the gap between the conscious being and the thing-in-itself. If the phenomenon is understood in Kant's way as the empirical intuition of a thing, then it could be said that Husserl's phenomenon is closer to the transcendental intuition itself, the conditions for the possibility of experience in the first place. Reality shows itself through these conditions and through phenomenal appearances. It is the work of phenomenology to transcend the appearances and move "to the things themselves."

Drawing inspiration from this tradition, but moving past it, there are a few shared concerns for Carnap and Heidegger: (1) Scientific thought is formal in nature, so it cannot capture values; (2) Language is key to thought; and, (3) The manner in which we use language corresponds directly to our practical aims.

Rational Construction

The scientific worldview lends itself to the notion of a unified science. It is Carnap's goal to place science on a unified ground, and in so doing to eliminate the confusions which traditional philosophy ("metaphysics") has perpetuated. The goal 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).[1] 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 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.

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

> *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 syntactial rules instead of philosophical arguments. (*Syntax,* §17)

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

Crucially, Carnap distinguishes between two modes of speech, the material and the formal. The material mode is defined by a casual transposition of complicated syntactical statements of the kind discussed in the *Syntax* into ordinary speech. The move from discussion of syntax to discussion of material properties often leads to shorter and clearer explanations, but easily lends itself to confusion. While Carnap claims that this mode of speech is perfectly acceptable, and in fact unavoidable, he warns us that this translation leads us to speak of spurious universals - i.e., metaphysical essences. Additionally, some material sentences simply cannot be translated into formal syntax. Although these statements are useful for expressing ourselves, they cannot be subject to claims about truth and falsity, and so have no place in a scientific philosophy.

> If a sentence of the material mode of speech is given …, then the translation into the formal mode of speech …must always be possible. *Translatability into the formal mode of speech constitutes the touchstone for all philosophical sentences*, or more generally, for all sentences which do not belong to the language of any one of the empirical sciences. …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. This relates directly to his ethics. 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. Imperatives are not translatable into formal language, but the material mode

of speech allows us to slip up and propose spurious ethical essences. "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). Carnap's own prescription, then, must 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)

His inability to admit of value-statements leads him directly into the famous argument against positivism, that the verification principle itself is a prescription, and cannot be verified. Any justification for normative ethics 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 ethical claim must take the shape of formal-logical arguments proceeding from psychological principles of emotion, ultimately amounting to an arbitrary (set?) of formal languages which capture the ethical feelings we experience as part of our basic experience. In all cases, logic comes first, and the emotions come second.

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 verifiably. In contrast, a communist ethics undoubtedly places a large emphasis on the authority of the group and the sentiment of comradery which is essential for the scientific enterprise.

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, and we will only have the space to cover a small fraction of it here. We will focus only on what is necessary to contrast his understanding of scientific rationality from Carnap's.

Heidegger's project is to understand the essence of Being in its most general form. Already Carnap would stop us, claiming that the entire project is based on a delusion: we are here beginning our investigation in the material mode of speech. Further, Heidegger's goal to disclose fundamental ontology is directly opposed to Carnap's functionalization of the object. Heidegger knows this, and in fact this is his point. In *Being and Time*,[2] Heidegger engages in the form of a traditional philosophical-scientific treatise, but later he will abandon this method in favor of a more poetic style, essentially agreeing with Carnap that the scientific form is inappropriate for "the task of thinking." Nonetheless, let us continue outlining Heidegger's fundamental ontology by examining his phenomenological method.

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

Though the term "phenomenology" implies a science through its suffix, 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. "*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*); 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 dilemma of the interconnectedness of our faculties. Rationality in the Kantian-scientific sense occurs only atop of apohpantic logos. (*BT,* Int. II.A, B)

So, the task of phenomenology is to (literally) discover the (Platonic) ideas of aesthetic perception. In order to disclose the Being of beings as they are in themselves, we must go through the intermediary character: our *own* Being. To be clear, phenomenology cannot proceed in the form of propositional assertions as in Carnap. This form of logic separates the essential character of Being from its onto-historical context. By analyzing it in the abstract, the essence "gets understood in an empty way" and "loses its indigenous character" (*BT,* 36). It is clear then that the *manner* in which things appear to us is of deep importance to Heidegger. Indeed, he will characterize us

as having been thrown into the world irrespective of our will, perceiving the being-there of the world through the always-already-there character of mood. In bad moods,

> Being has become manifest as a burden. Why that should be, one does not *know*. And Dasein cannot know anything of the sort because the possibilities of disclosure which belong to cognition reach far too short a way compared with the primordial disclosure belonging to moods, in which Dasein is brought before its Being as "there." (*BT,* 134)

Heidegger's criticism of the scientific attitude can be most clearly seen in his criticism of Descartes (*BT,* I.3 B, espc. ¶21). Here he talks fairly explicitly about values. The critique of Descartes hinges on his conception of being-in-the-world, as opposed to beings present-at-hand. He claims that Descartes mischaracterizes the essential nature of beings as Nature, that is, as founded on "an entity within-the-world which is proximally present-at-hand" (*BT,* 95). As in the "Question Concerning Technology," Heidegger claims that Descartes has essentially made the world ready-to-hand, thus enclosing it and making all of Nature, including man, into "standing reserve." This view is somewhat ironic considering Heidegger's perceived Nazi sympathies, though reading Heidegger as a clear-cut Nazi hardliner is naive. In "Only a God can Save Us," Heidegger explicitly denies any ties with the Nazi party, considering himself an "unpolitical" person. In fact, he characterizes himself as "confronting the Nazi party" in his Nietzsche lectures, and as the subject of scrutiny under Nazi rule. Whether or not he was truly sympathetic to Nazi politics is a matter of debate, but in any case he is explicitly opposed to socialism as "a form of planetary technicity" (Heidegger 1981, 206).

Carnap actually would agree with Heidegger that Descartes' project is insufficient, but his critique would be quite different. Instead of offering an analysis of different "modes of being" as a criticism of the Cartesian worldview, he would offer the gestalt-theoretical experience as having nothing to do with an ego. This has to be constructed from the aspects of the experience; *res extensa* is not the most fundamental

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Heidegger prefers a holistic approach. The analytic of Dasein occurs piecemeal, but each piece influences and is influenced by the whole. Carnap prefers a constructivist approach, where the basic units of experience are assumed, and the rest is built from there.

Conclusion

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