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The Provocation to Look and See: Appropriation, Recollection and Formal Indication

While all of the great philosophers are difficult to read, Heidegger and Wittgenstein seem to be so in striking ways. Over the course of their philosophical development, these difficulties take different forms. The oracular quality of the *Tractatus* is often remarked upon, but Wittgenstein's later work is perplexing in a different but equally puzzling way; for example, that work is not technically complex but it prompts one to ask: what is Wittgenstein getting at? What is he trying to do? If he is making particular philosophical claims, why can't he spit them out? The later Heidegger seems to represent an even worse case of the condition that the *Tractatus* illustrates, a descent into 'windy mysticism' of the sort that Ryle foresaw for Heidegger's work (1928: 222), and the early Heidegger provokes not only perplexity, but even a kind of anger; according to Paul Edwards,

Heidegger never says anything simply and clearly if he can say it oddly, obscurely and ponderously; and I have no doubt that the desire to sound esoteric and original is part of the reason. (1979: 37, 35)

Edwards' reaction to what he calls Heidegger's 'hideous gibberish' (1989: 468) is an extreme one; but it's not unrepresentative of the widespread sense amongst analytic philosophers in particular that Heidegger's writing is somehow wilfully contrary or – as Edwards puts it - '*perverse*' (1979: 37).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Of the five sentences that Warburton devotes to Heidegger in his recent history of philosophy, the one that addresses the content of Heidegger's thinking reports the perception of BT as 'an incredibly difficult book that some people think is a major contribution to philosophy and others a deliberately obscure piece of writing' (2011: 210).

A related worry is that Heidegger and Wittgenstein seem to have an oddly casual view of the need to present us with philosophical proofs: the *Tractatus*, for example, can seem to be largely a body of assertions and, as Okrent observes, '[o]ne of the most striking things about the way in which the early Heidegger presents his views of understanding, and indeed all his views, is his seeming lack of concern for argument' (Okrent 1988: 110). Just as Heidegger and Wittgenstein seem unable to spit out clear articulations of the views that they are taken to be offering, commentators often seem to find themselves needing to 'reconstruct - in some measure, construct - the argument[s] implicit in what [they] say' (Okrent 1988: 110). Remarks of Heidegger's, in one way, encourage and, in another way, discourage such a response: for example, he insists that BT's existential analytic 'does not do *any* proving *at all* by the rules of the "logic of consistency"' (BT 363 (315)) and infamously claimed that 'the idea of "logic"' itself disintegrates in the turbulence of a more original questioning' (WM 92). Such remarks encourage the thought that work will have to be done to identify arguments which might support Heidegger's outlook; but they also suggest that, in attempting to do that work, there may be no point in searching Heidegger's own texts.

There surely is something right in the *kind* of response that Okrent makes, in that there is no avoiding the obligation to figure out what the thinker one is engaging with is getting at and why we should allow ourselves to be swayed by him or her. But I will explore in this paper what is, in a sense, a more radical response to the above features of Heidegger's and Wittgenstein's work. In the latter case, that reaction is to take seriously his claim in the *Tractatus* that 'the result of [his] philosophy is not a number of "philosophical propositions"' (TLP 4.112) a claim which seems to be echoed in the *Investigations*' disavowal of '*theses* in philosophy' (PI sec. 128). If it were the case that Wittgenstein were not actually espousing particular philosophical propositions, then that would make some kind of sense of the difficulties encountered by those who search his texts looking for such propositions and arguments in their support. A particular version of this response focuses on the claim that Wittgenstein's insights are, in some sense, incapable of being captured in propositional form; and a

central concern in this piece will be to consider how such a claim might also be made of Heidegger's insights.

From this perspective, the failure of these texts to conform to more familiar models of philosophical expression and persuasion would make a kind of sense: the work they have to do must be unlike that which philosophy that follows those models strives to do. Such texts would also then seem to call for a different kind of work on the reader's part. Might this explain, for example, Wittgenstein's description of philosophy as 'work on oneself' (CV 24) and Heidegger's insistence that '[i]t is of the essence of phenomenological investigations that they ... must in each case be rehearsed and *repeated* anew' (HCT 26)? Such a perspective might provide a way of understanding what otherwise seems a perverse reluctance on these philosophers' part to spell out clearly a set of philosophical opinions and the arguments upon which we assume such opinions would rest. But can we give substance to this perspective and to the possibility that some version of it is indeed at work in their texts? The first section of the paper will consider some attempts that have been made to do so, attempts about which I will raise doubts. In the rest of the paper, I will make an attempt of my own.

## 1. Heidegger and 'Theses in Philosophy'

Dahlstrom has argued that Heidegger faces a particular reflexive problem in articulating his fundamental ontology, a problem that he calls 'the paradox of thematization'. The paradox arises out of the fact that Heidegger appears to identify that which propositions reveal with what he calls 'the present-at-hand', to see himself as revealing to us forms of Being other than the present-at-hand, but also to perform that revelation by using propositions. Dahlstrom sees Heidegger as facing 'an uphill task', which he expresses through an obvious allusion to the early Wittgenstein:

[Heidegger] must be able to kick away the very ladder (‘worldly’ or ‘theoretical’ assertions, ‘objectifying’ concepts, and so on) on which he is forced to make his climb. (Dahlstrom 1994: 788)<sup>2</sup>

Since anything that might become the subject-matter of a proposition would thereby be ‘systematically objectified’ (Dahlstrom 1994: 778), Dahlstrom argues that we must instead see Heidegger’s texts as embodying another kind of self-expression, one which will achieve a brand of ‘nonobjectifying saying and thinking’ (2001: 242).

Dahlstrom is only one of a number of commentators who have been explicitly inspired by Wittgenstein’s example in developing readings of Heidegger as presenting insights that cannot be captured in propositional form. To add just one more example here,<sup>3</sup> when examining a range of early and later Heideggerian remarks, Adrian Moore finds it ‘increasingly difficult *not* to hear a Tractarian injunction to throw away the ladder’ and suggests that we consider the possibility that Heidegger’s proposals ‘resist[] being construed propositionally’ (forthcoming: 972). The claim that they do – which I will call our ‘key claim’ - has the virtue of suggesting an understanding of the problematic features of Heidegger’s work identified in the introduction, in that if it were true, then, despite appearances, Heidegger’s sentences would not be straight-forward articulations of philosophical claims and nurturing his insights in others would not seem to be the kind of achievement that straight-forward philosophical argument might be expected to achieve.

There clearly is some textual basis for seeing such a view in Heidegger. In addition to his above remarks on ‘proving by the rules of the “logic of consistency”’,

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. also Dahlstrom 2001: 17, 207f, 235-65, 352-69, 392f, and 433f. That a tension of the sort that Dahlstrom’s paradox illustrates can indeed be found in Heidegger is a not-uncommon view: Lafont, for example, identifies in Heidegger the ‘self-posed problem of how assertions, the objectifying tools *par excellence*, can be used to thematize the unobjectifiable’ (Lafont 2002: 233). For other expressions of this worry, cf. n. 23 of my unpublished.

<sup>3</sup> For others, cf. e.g., Cooper 2002 and Witherspoon 2002. As we will see, also relevant here would be Minar’s discussion of ‘Heideggerian reminders’ (2001: 209).

Heidegger also rejects the notion that an answer to the Question of Being might be ‘a free-floating result’, ‘what it asserts propositionally ... just passed along’ (BT 40 (19)). He warns that ‘a phenomenological concept ... may degenerate if communicated in the form of an assertion’ (BT 60-61 (36)) and claims that

[w]ith any philosophical knowledge in general, what is said in uttered propositions must not be decisive. Instead what must be decisive is what it sets before our eyes as still unsaid, in and through what has been said.  
(KPM 137)

The content of philosophical insights is presented in such remarks as something to be *seen*. So we read, for example, that in grasping ‘Being-in’, ‘the issue is one of *seeing* a primordial structure of *Dasein's* Being [*das* Sehen einer *urspruenglichen Seinsstruktur des Daseins*]’ (BT 81 (54)): ‘[t]he in-being of *Dasein* is not to be explained but before all else has to be seen [*zu sehen*] as an inherent kind of being and accepted as such’ (HCT 165). To such a ‘seeing’ one might expect to find a corresponding ‘showing’, and this is what one finds. Heidegger characterises phenomenology’s task as ‘to let that which shows itself be seen from itself in the very way in which it shows itself from itself [*das was sich zeigt, so wie es sich von ihm selbst her zeigt, von ihm selbst her sehen lassen*]’ (BT 58 (34)); this is a matter of ‘exhibiting [the phenomena] directly and demonstrating it directly [*in direkter Aufweisung und direkter Ausweisung*]’ (BT 59 (35)). The philosopher’s aim here is not that of ‘providing definitions or descriptions’ but of ‘really bringing structures out into the clear so that we can then see [*zu sehen*]’ them (L 178).

Such remarks raise many difficulties: on some construals, they can seem trivial, and on others, mystifying. For example, one might see such remarks as making the trivial point that it takes more than hearing an uttered sentence or having a written sentence pass before one’s eyes for one to grasp a philosophical insight. If rejecting that were all that Heidegger had in mind in such remarks, his claim would be true but trivially so, as surely no philosopher has ever thought otherwise. But such a construal

raises another obvious question: if that were indeed all Heidegger meant, why would he feel the need to stress this point which every philosopher would endorse?

There is also a construal of the above themes according to which Heidegger's view is trivially false. There is a sense in which Heidegger obviously expresses himself propositionally: his texts are full of declarative sentences. Our construal of the key claim cannot then be one which would parallel the insistence that, for example, Kant cannot be right to deny that 'exists' is a predicate since grammatically – or 'surface grammatically' - that's just what it is. While it's interesting that Wittgenstein's texts *are* marked by an unusual number of orders and apparently non-rhetorical questions, the same is not true of Heidegger's texts; so if it is to be at all plausible, our key claim mustn't be given this trivially false construal either.

One also might argue that Heidegger's view is neither trivially true nor trivially false because, in fact, it is hopelessly obscure. Okrent sees as 'desperate' the view that Heidegger's own insights might not be expressible through propositions (1988: 292); Philipse insists that, 'if Heidegger did not assert anything, there is nothing to discuss either' (Philipse 1998: 302); and the claim can seem to confirm Ryle's suspicion that a 'windy mysticism' awaits us. The ideas within Heidegger's texts to which commentators have turned in developing readings that make our key claim central might also seem to confirm this worry, since they are among his most difficult.

For example, Dahlstrom gives pride of place in his reading to the notion of 'formal indication'. The same notion is central to Kisiel's interpretation of Heidegger, according to which, the 'nerve of the undertaking' of BT is its attempt to provide through 'formal indication' a 'nonobjectifying understanding' of 'the full immediacy of human experience', this giving rise to 'a philosophy that is more a form of life on the edge of expression than a science' (Kisiel 1993: 376, 455, 59). But even otherwise sympathetic readers of Heidegger find 'formal indication' an obscure notion; for example, Blattner proposes that "'formal indication" is merely a name for the problem, not a solution' (2007: 239). Similarly, Lafont proposes that 'Heidegger never fully developed this view' and what we have been instead left with is 'a great deal of speculation' on commentators' parts 'about how "formal indication" should be

understood [and] to what extent it was supposed to constitute a genuine philosophical method' (Lafont 2002: 231). Even Kisiel concedes that the notion is 'esoteric' and '[n]ever thoroughly explained' (1993: 172, 497); and it is easy to doubt the prospects for such an explanation when one hears proposals such as that, through a formal indication, 'the object [is] "emptily" meant: and yet decisively!' (PIA 26) Nevertheless, we will revisit this – certainly problematic - notion later.

We also must not forget that trying to explain Heidegger's sympathy for our key claim by drawing analogies with Wittgenstein's own apparent sympathy for it, will be for many readers, trying to explain the obscure by drawing analogies with the equally obscure. How Wittgenstein is himself to be read on these matters is, of course, central to recent debate about his work and certainly, in developing such Wittgensteinian readings of Heidegger, an immediate question is: on which Wittgenstein is one's Heidegger to be based? The forms of 'phenomenological seeing' (IPPW 94) described above might seem to suggest the showing of ineffable truths, of truths - in Hacker's words - 'which *strictu sensu* cannot be said' (Hacker 2001: 19). One might perhaps see such a view in Dahlstrom's reading, but certainly not in Moore's; and we will return to this diversity and associated controversies later.<sup>4</sup>

But for now, I merely want to note that there are other significant worries about the readings of Heidegger sketched above. I have argued elsewhere that there is reason to doubt whether Heidegger endorsed the brand of idealism that Moore sees in his work,<sup>5</sup> or the claim that propositions only reveal the present-at-hand, one of the claims upon which Dahlstrom's 'paradox of thematization' rests.<sup>6</sup> This latter claim is highly implausible philosophically, and there is strong textual evidence to see formulations that suggest such a claim instead in a broader context within which they take on quite a different significance.<sup>7</sup> According to the alternative view I will explore

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<sup>4</sup> Witherspoon offers what one might call, in the terms of the recent debate about the *Tractatus*, a more 'resolute' Heidegger.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. my 2007, forthcoming-b and forthcoming-c.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. my forthcoming-b: chs. 4 and 8, and Schear 2007.

<sup>7</sup> Dahlstrom is aware of some of this evidence. Cf. his 1994: 778 n. 9 and 2001: 202-6 and 355-56.

here, there is a sense in which Dahlstrom is right in thinking that, for Heidegger, assertions play an important role in creating philosophical confusion, and that there is a kind of mismatch between Heidegger's concerns and their expression through the employment of assertions. But they are different senses than those upon which Dahlstrom focuses.

In what follows, I will sketch another possible reading of the above themes, and, in doing so, develop some other analogies between Heidegger's and Wittgenstein's thought. According to this reading, there is a sense in which one might well want to say that propositions cannot capture Heidegger's insights; given his understanding of philosophical confusion, bringing the confused to endorse a different set of philosophical propositions will not remove their confusion; and the work that the confused need to be brought to do can only be induced through propositions of a very special sort. The reading will go some way to addressing the worries raised in the introduction, avoids the textual difficulties that Moore and Dahlstrom's readings encounter, and, I hope, is less obscure and less 'windy' than the initial description that I have offered here might suggest.

## 2. Philosophical Confusion and its Causes

Where I suggest we begin is by considering Heidegger's characterisation of philosophical confusion and its causes. Though Heidegger charges philosophers with committing 'category mistakes' – in reflecting on entities using categories that obscure their basic character – he characteristically depicts what these mistakes lead to not – to use the terms from the recent debate about the *Tractatus* – as a kind of 'substantial nonsense', but more 'austerely' as talk that has descended into 'indeterminate emptiness' (HCT 269). Descartes, for example, errs in 'accept[ing] a completely indefinite ontological status for the *res cogitans*' (BT 46 (24)), resting in part on the fact that when one makes happy recourse in one's philosophical thought to the seemingly straight-forward notion of a 'Thing (*res*)' 'what one really has in mind remains undetermined' (BT 96 (68)). Similarly, when we talk of 'psychical processes'

we leave their 'kind of Being' 'for the most part wholly indefinite' (BT 339 (293)) and our typical understanding of 'knowing' 'remains the source of all sorts of confusion as a result of ... indeterminacy in regard to its Being' (HCT 166).<sup>8</sup> Such 'phenomena' are made 'visible' by a 'neglect' - by an 'ontological indifference' (HCT 222, 216). As he puts it in earlier lectures, such concepts are marked by a 'fading of meaningfulness' (PIE 26-27, 141) and include in their number 'the fundamental concepts of metaphysics', whose content he declares to be 'neutral, faded' (PRL 246); indeed Heidegger goes so far as to claim that the 'basic concepts of philosophy' 'amount to nothing more than the possession of words': in using them, one succumbs to 'the great danger that one philosophizes ... in words rather than about things' (IPR 7).

We see here, it seems to me, a connection with Wittgenstein, for whom philosophy's principal failure was not making false claims but talking nonsense. Quite how one understands that charge immediately leads us into controversy, of course; but I would suggest that there is a not-obviously-absurd construal according to which it is the charge that we make 'claims' to which we have assigned no clear sense; such claims are nonsense 'because we have given no *meaning* to some of its constituent parts', ('[e]ven if we believe we have done so.') (TLP 5.4733)<sup>9</sup> Quite how one interprets that claim is also controversial and, despite some of the more extreme claims made on behalf of 'resolute' readings – such as that philosophical nonsense 'is only ever sheer lack of sense' (Conant and Dain 2001: 72) – I have argued elsewhere that such readings too ultimately must see this failure as a failure to assign a *determinate* meaning to such claims: the relevant 'emptiness' or 'lack' is our running different senses of a particular term or terms together, flipping back and forth between

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<sup>8</sup> For other uses of these particular terms of criticism, cf. also, e.g., BT 84 (57), 108 (78), 249 (205), 251 (208), 382 (333), 441 (389), HCT 154, 197, 216, 222-23, BPP 175-76, EP 114 and 118-19.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. also NB 2, TLP 5.473 and PI 500: 'When a sentence is called senseless, it is not as it were its sense that is senseless.' In this piece, I will happily wander back and forward between early, middle and later Wittgensteins in a way that raises all sorts of questions which I do not have the space here to address.

different construals of a sentence, even if we believe we are not doing so.<sup>10</sup> As Heidegger puts it – and we will return to this point later – we see here an ‘indistinctness of ... meanings’, as ‘different meanings run confusedly through one another’, ‘a multiplicity of meaning-directions ... indicated’ (PIE 24).

Heidegger and Wittgenstein also seem to agree on at least one of the causes of this kind of ‘indistinctness’ in our reflections: ‘what confuses us is the uniform appearance of words’ (PI sec. 11). As Wittgenstein’s famous analogy puts it, ‘[i]t is like looking into the cab of a locomotive’, where ‘[w]e see handles’ which ‘are used to do a wide variety of things’ but ‘all looking more or less alike’ (PI sec. 12, PR 58); a certain ‘bewitchment’ by that ‘appearance’ - by ‘surface grammar’ - leads us to an ‘assimilation of expressions’ (PI sec. 109, 664. 14).<sup>11</sup> Heidegger sees this same cause at work when we fail to recognize where our thoughts are actually taken along ‘a multiplicity of meaning-directions’. For example, we are apt to conflate the modes of Being of entities described by different propositions because these differences ‘need not necessarily protrude ... in the linguistic form’ (BPP 212). We ‘never heed the variety of beings’ because of ‘the evenness, the undifferentiatedness of asserting and talking about ...’: ‘[t]he equal and regular possibility of an assertion about ... stones, trees, dogs, cars, “passers by” (human beings)’ gives the impression that ‘that all beings which can be spoken about are, as it were, of the same kind’ (EP 82-83).

This suggests that Dahlstrom is right in thinking that, for Heidegger, assertions play an important role in creating philosophical confusion; but they do so not by revealing only the present-at-hand but by tempting us to overlook the diverse forms of Being that characterise the entities which assertions describe.<sup>12</sup> For Heidegger, an ‘orientation towards the assertion and its indifference, towards its levelled and levelling character’ creates the impression that the ‘manifestness of beings [is] a universally even and regular one’ (EP 82-83), hiding the diverse forms of Being-in-

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. my forthcoming-a.

<sup>11</sup> My 2006 explores the role of this theme in Wittgenstein’s earlier thought, expressed in particular through his distinction of ‘sign’ from ‘symbol’.

<sup>12</sup> For further discussion of the issues raised in this section, cf. my forthcoming-b: ch. 8.

the-world within which these assertions are ‘founded’ and their ‘objects’ reveal themselves. As Wittgenstein puts what I suspect is a similar point, the ‘uniform appearance of words’ is a danger because ‘their *application* is not presented to us so clearly’ (PI sec. 11).

From this perspective, philosophical confusion arises out of a failure to reckon with the ‘life’ behind the words we use, the ‘life’ which gives those words their meaning and determines their subject-matter. But don’t Heidegger and Wittgenstein understand that ‘life’ in rather different ways? Heidegger calls for a ‘going back into factual life’ (PRL 97) which might seem to echo, for example, Wittgenstein’s stress on the importance of recognizing forms of language as forms of life (PI sec. 19). But Heidegger also calls for ‘a return’ to ‘original’ or ‘basic experience’ (PRL 50, PIA 16),<sup>13</sup> cashing out his charge that ‘the fundamental concepts of metaphysics’ have ‘a neutral, faded content’ as meaning that they are ‘uncharacterized by’ - by virtue of not ‘originally aris[ing] from’ – any determinate ‘sphere of experience’ (PRL 246). Similarly, Wittgenstein gives a particular twist to the above proposals when he insists that we ‘bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use’ (PI sec. 116). Although BT begins its work with an examination of *Dasein*’s ‘everydayness’, an equally prominent theme in Heidegger’s work is his insistence that we ‘disentangle ourselves from our ordinary conceptions of beings’ (FCM 296), the ‘everyday perspective’ in this sense identified with that of the inauthentic, ‘[t]he common sense of the “They”’ (BT 334 (288)).

While it would be foolish to deny the many important differences that there clearly are between our two thinkers, I think we ought not to be prematurely discouraged by the differences that the previous paragraph identifies from exploring the particular connections sketched above. Heidegger’s talk above of ‘experience’ clearly has no Cartesian implications, for example, and the above remarks about the ‘everyday’ need to be seen in the light of the equally fundamental theme in Heidegger’s discussion that, when combating our *Seinsvergessenheit*, ‘Being is never

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. also PRL 233 (‘Experience (‘life’’) and Heidegger’s appropriation in the early 1920s of a Husserlian call for a ‘return to origins’ and for a certain respect for ‘intuition’.

alien but always familiar, “ours” (MFL 147)). Though Heidegger claims that we are dealing with matters ‘concealed from the consciousness of everyday life’, he also describes what that calls for as a ‘[r]eturning to self-evident things’ (WDR 160). In this, Heidegger seems to confirm that Wittgensteinian thought that, for philosophy, ‘everything lies open to view’, that ‘nothing is hidden’ (PI sec. 126): to anticipate a later theme, the failure involved in philosophical confusion seems to be a failure to set to work – or to appropriate – an understanding we already have. It is also less than clear how much - and what kind of - weight Wittgenstein wishes to place on ‘the everyday’. There seems no basis for thinking that he sees common sense as somehow sacrosanct and I suspect Cavell is right to suggest that ‘[t]he notion of the ordinary in Wittgenstein’s later philosophy is meant only to contrast with the philosophical’.<sup>14</sup> So reassured to some small degree, let us now see if we can further develop the above connections.

### 3. Combating Philosophical Confusion: How Not to Do it

A central question will be: how, according to the above picture, does one combat confused philosophical ‘claims’? One thing is clear: one doesn’t *deny* them or attempt to *refute* them. When Wisdom told Wittgenstein of a conversation with another philosopher having gone badly, Wittgenstein is said to have replied: ‘Perhaps you made the mistake of denying something that he asserted’.<sup>15</sup> That could be seen as a mistake in that, if the meaning of one’s interlocutor’s ‘assertions’ is indeterminate, what one would oneself be saying, in saying that what she ‘says’ is the case is not the case, would be equally indeterminate.<sup>16</sup> Such a denial would be another move within the same game that those problematic terms ‘articulate’.

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<sup>14</sup> Reported by Putnam in his 2001: 176.

<sup>15</sup> Reported in Bambrough 1979: 51.

<sup>16</sup> This is a theme in Phillips 1999 (cf., e.g., pp. 8, 24-25, 41-42) and is, I think, what is true in Hacker’s insistence that ‘the negation of a nonsense is a nonsense’ (1990: 55), which I have seen leave some philosophers unmoved.

The same consideration casts a new light on the possible significance of argument within attempts to combat such confusions. Heidegger insists that ‘the danger of every dialectic’ is that, ‘as far as results are concerned’, such a dialectic can ‘bring[] to light an abundance of conclusions’ whether it ‘is clear and critical about its own interpretive origin and interpretive significance’ or ‘works mechanically with propositions’ that are ‘blind to themselves’ (PIA 108). If the meaning of the terms from which one reasons is ‘faded’ and ‘indeterminate’, ‘deductions’ from ‘claims’ articulated using those terms will be too, further moves within the same ill-understood game. Though we will return to the question of how argument might yet figure in combating philosophical confusion as it has been presented above, I think we can already sense why for Heidegger, ‘the idea of “logic”’ itself disintegrates in the turbulence of a more original questioning’; his concern – his ‘questioning’ – focuses on the possibility that the meaning of the terms in which we think - using which deductions might be undertaken and ‘an abundance of conclusions’ ‘brought to light’ – may, for all that, be indeterminate.

The same considerations also give a sense to the notion that propositions themselves aren’t really to the point in capturing and communicating Heidegger’s insights. If the real sin Heidegger wants to expose is our allowing our thought and talk to descend into indeterminacy, there is a sense in which seeing propositions as potential vehicles of philosophical understanding is to misunderstand how philosophical misunderstanding comes about. To fail to be clear about the modes of Being of the entities we encounter is to fail to appreciate the ‘life’ of our non-philosophical propositions about them; to achieve philosophical illumination, is, so to speak, to restore life to our propositions; but one will not do that by adopting, as it were, a superior set of propositions equally ‘lifelessly’ understood. Philosophical misunderstanding is characterised by how we *take* sentences, by our failing to ‘see’ or ‘hear’ the appropriate ‘life’ in or behind those sentences; coming to do so, one might suggest, can be brought about by hearing another proposition only if we ‘hear’ the appropriate ‘life’ in that further proposition; and, as the philosophically confused are characterised above, it is precisely they who won’t. From this perspective, Dahlstrom is right in thinking that, for Heidegger, there is a kind of mismatch between his

concerns and their expression through the employment of propositions; but this is not because propositions reveal only the present-at-hand but because merely providing yet more propositions cannot address at its root the kind of problem that philosophical confusion is for Heidegger.

We will have reason later to refine some of the claims made in the previous paragraph. But for now, I want to stress that the ‘limitation’ it identifies is not what one might call a problem with propositions as such. To genuinely *hear* an assertion is to hear more than an empty sentence; rather it is to hear what is being said, to grasp the entities described in their Being and how they are said to happen to be. But, according to the conception of philosophical confusion presented above, that confusion is a falling away from the offering and evaluation of determinate claims about how things are towards the trading of sentences whose meaning is indeterminate. Propositions, one might say, are problematic only when their use descends into a kind of ‘rote saying’ or ‘idle talk’:

What characterises this rote saying [*Nachreden*] is that in being circulated the validity of what has been said becomes calcified and simultaneously gets disengaged from the very thing about which it is said. The more idle talk [*Gerede*] dominates, the more the world is covered over. It is in this way that *Dasein* has the tendency to cover over the world and, along with this, itself.  
(WDR 164-65)

We will touch on this connection between philosophical confusion and inauthenticity at several points below, beginning with the next section’s examination of Heidegger’s reflections on Platonic dialectic, which he sees as combating the sophist’s ‘idle talk’ and its ‘tendency to cover over’; in response, dialectic seeks a ‘*katharsis*’, a ‘purification’, which will ‘open[] up *Dasein* for a possible encounter with the world and with itself’ (PS 262).

#### 4. Combating Philosophical Confusion: *Anamnesis* and *Agnoia*

The above perspective casts doubt on Philipse's claim that, 'if Heidegger did not assert anything, there is nothing to discuss either'. But Philipse is certainly right to insist that '[i]t is up to the Heideggerians to explain what kind of speech acts Heidegger is performing if he does not make assertions and yet appears to do so' (Philipse 1998: 302). So what kind of 'speech act' is it? Given the above picture, philosophical confusion seems to arise out of a failure to bring to bear an understanding that we already possess and, in that light, there are a number of important motifs in Heidegger's metaphilosophical reflections to which one might turn.<sup>17</sup> But I want to consider one which points to another Wittgensteinian analogy: it seems apt to think of such confusion as embodying a form of 'forgetting', one which one might combat by 'assembling reminders' (PI sec. 127). Moreover, these are reminders and there are reminders; those relevant to our discussion are ones for which no-one *asks*, because they are reminders of what we do not realise we've forgotten; and this gives us the beginnings of a way of understanding just why the experience of reading these texts could be expected to be difficult.

The motif of 'forgetting' and 'recollection' appears again and again in the early Heidegger, most obviously in the notion of *Seinsvergessenheit*; indeed Heidegger claims that 'Being is what we recall' (MFL 146-47).<sup>18</sup> But, of course, neither he nor Wittgenstein introduced this motif into philosophy and an interesting discussion of it can be found in Heidegger's explorations of Plato's notion of *anamnesis*. He sees in that notion a 'mythologized' vision of a philosophy not dissimilar to that embodied in the motif of 'phenomenological reduction', a leading back - a re-duction - to the understanding on the basis of which we grasp entities.

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<sup>17</sup> One is that of redirecting one's attention; so, for example, Dreyfus proposes that Heidegger would distinguish his 'hermeneutic stance' from the scientist's 'objectifying stance' by claiming 'that his hermeneutics is a special form of involved deliberate attention', 'a systematic version of everyday noticing and pointing out' (1991: 82-83). For relevant passages in Heidegger, cf., e.g., PIE 142 and PIA 139.

<sup>18</sup> In the context of a broader reading of Heidegger's early work, my forthcoming-b develops a reading of those writings as engaging in a species of 'reminding'.

Such ‘a re-seeing’ (PS 231) is a ‘coming’ or ‘drawing back’ to the understanding that is always prior to our encounter with entities, to that ‘which was already once and already earlier understood’ but which is now ‘forgotten’ (BPP 326-27).

In *The Sophist* lectures, Heidegger identifies the sophist as the target of Platonic dialectic and characterises this target in ways that echo our earlier discussion. He proposes that ‘the dialectician and the philosopher... take that about which they speak seriously’ - they focus on its ‘content’ - whereas the sophist is ‘simply concerned with speech itself’ (PS 150). Her ‘intention’ is not to ‘conceal the matters at hand’ or to ‘deceive’; rather she is ‘unconcerned with substantive content’ (PS 159). She is ‘caught up in words’, her remarks characterised by a kind of ‘emptiness’ (PS 171, 159). Indeed Heidegger identifies ‘the activity of the sophists’ precisely with ‘idle talk’ and the latter as an ‘adhere[nce] to what is said’ in which we lose ‘an original relation to the beings of which I am speaking’ (PS 284, 18).<sup>19</sup>

The parallels with our earlier discussion can be taken further, for example, in reflecting on what it is to combat such ‘idle talk’. A denial of the sophist’s claims would be marked by the same ‘emptiness’ that marks it; ‘we cannot at all speak against’ the Sophist’s ‘empty’ words because ‘someone ... who formulates this negation ... incurs the same difficulty’: the difficulty ‘in a certain sense reverts back onto the one who intends to refute the sophist’ (PS 291-92). We also find echoes of earlier thoughts on the significance of argument:

Dialectic is not the art of out-arguing another but has precisely the opposite meaning, namely of bringing one’s partner to open his eyes and see. (PS 138)

[I]n the field of such fundamental considerations even the greatest display of scientificity, in the sense of proofs and arguments, fails. The only work to be performed here is that of opening the eyes of one’s opponent. (PS 327)

What we are attempting to bring about sounds simple: what could be easier than ‘opening your eyes’, or to echo Wittgenstein, ‘looking and seeing’ (PI sec. 66)? But

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<sup>19</sup> Cf. also PS 33 and 135-37

this ‘readiness to see’ is one that ‘most men do not possess’ (PS 240) and the ‘reminding’ which dialectic strives to induce is ‘not given immediately to man, but instead ... requires an overcoming of definite resistances residing in the very Being of man himself’ (PS 231). The resistance in question is now familiar: ‘a *mere* speaking about things, i.e. babbling ... is precisely what in the Being of man makes it possible for one’s view of things to be distorted’ (PS 235). Moreover, this tendency is precisely one of which we are characteristically unaware: ‘it is part of the very sense of *agnoia*’ - the sophist’s ‘forgetting’ – ‘to believe that it already knows’ (PS 260). Such forgetting represents ‘not mere ignorance, mere unfamiliarity, but a positive presumption of knowledge’ (PS 259), the presumption, one might say, that one does not *need* to ‘open one’s eyes’, or perhaps that one’s eyes are *already* open.<sup>20</sup>

Having recognized the character of this *agnoia*, ‘the question arises concerning a *techne* which ... would bring about [its] elimination’ (PS 259). It ‘cannot be eliminated through the infusion of definite bits of knowledge’ – ‘a definite stock of objective knowledge’; rather ‘a special task and a special kind of speaking are necessary ... in order to develop [the] readiness to see’ that the sophist lacks (PS 259, 240). ‘No one will learn anything about a subject he considers himself an expert in and thinks he is already thoroughly familiar with’ (*Sophist*, 230a6-7, quoted and translated at PS 260) and, through the dialectician’s distinctive ‘speech act’, the sophist must be taken aback, so to speak; what must be targeted is her ‘peculiar self-satisfaction at adhering to what is idly spoken of’ (PS 136). The sophist ‘coasts along in words [*an den Worten entlang läuft*]’ (IPR 8) and so must be *provoked* into ‘looking and seeing’.

So how is this done? What is the relevant ‘speech act’? Heidegger describes Platonic dialectic as ‘presenting the things spoke of in a first intimation’ or ‘indication’ – an ‘*Anzeige*’ (PS 136) - and the following section will show that the notion of ‘formal indication [*formale Anzeige*]’ seems to be envisaged as meeting the

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<sup>20</sup> Cf. PS 260: ‘the comportment which needs to undergo the purification, by its very sense, shuts itself off from ... instruction by considering itself dispensed with the necessity of purification in the first place.’

demands set out for dialectic in the present section, and as targeting philosophical confusion understood very much in line with the account Sec. 2 presented.

In a way, the difficulties associated with this ‘slippery notion’ (Philipse 1998: 257) have been exacerbated by our earlier discussion. Seen in the context of the above account of philosophical confusion, it may, for example, seem to invite a version of a fundamental worry about Wittgenstein’s early work. In response to philosophical propositions which Wittgenstein claims are ‘nonsensical’, he offers ‘elucidations’ which the reader who understands him ‘finally recognize[s] as nonsensical’ too (TLP 6.54). But how do such ‘elucidations’ differ from that which they combat? And how can more such nonsense help us? Similarly, in response to philosophical propositions, which Heidegger claims are meant in an ‘indeterminate emptiness’, he offers ‘formal’ – ‘empty’ – ‘indications’. How do such ‘indications’ differ from that which they combat? And how can more such ‘empty’ words help us? We will take some steps towards answering these questions in the following sections.

##### 5. Combating Philosophical Confusion: Formal indication

Heidegger discusses formal indication in some detail in PRL in 1920-21, PIA of 1921-22 and in FCM of 1929-30;<sup>21</sup> it is also invoked in BT but without explanation

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<sup>21</sup> Cf. e.g. PRL 36-45, PIA 25-28, 87, 104-6 and FCM 291-300. Cf. also PIE 21, 47, 57, 59, 65, 77, L 234 and 410-11 and PT 52.

there.<sup>22</sup> None of his discussions of this notion can be described as clear, but some themes are clearly prominent.

‘Formal indications’ are meant to, in a sense, stop us in our tracks: they perform a ‘prohibiting (detering, preventing)’ (PIA 105) role in that they are meant to ‘hold in abeyance’ the ways in which we have come to understand the entities towards which they point (PRL 44). As formal - that is, as possessing a certain emptiness - and as mere indications - as pointings, rather than descriptions – they are meant to draw our attention to how an understanding of the entities to which they refer us must arise out of a recovery of our own basic comportment towards them, ‘out of the mode *in which the object is originally accessible*’ (PIA 17). To echo the above discussion, performing this task does not require ‘the infusion of definite bits of knowledge’ about the entities to be grasped: our problem is ‘not mere ignorance, mere unfamiliarity’ (PS 259). Rather ‘[t]he necessity of this precautionary measure’ that formal indications represent ‘arises from the falling tendency of factual life experience’ (PRL 44): it is in that tendency that we find ‘the possibility and the factual necessity ... of formal indication’ as the ‘method of approach’ that philosophy must take (PIA 100).

When ‘fallen’, our reflections do not embody a determinate – or ‘concrete’ – grasp of their subject-matter, even if – to echo TLP 5.4733 above – we believe that they do. Instead they are marked by ‘indeterminate emptiness’, and it is the work of formal indications to press upon us ‘that concretion is not to be possessed ... without

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<sup>22</sup> Though Macquarrie and Robinson’s translation does not always make its occurrence easy to spot, it can be found at, e.g., BT 150 (114), 152 (116), 152 (117), 274 (231), 361 (313), and 362 (315). Kisiel and van Buren 1994 provide much useful documentation of Heidegger’s remarks on this topic but I am not at all sure that I understand the interpretations of those remarks that they offer. Dreyfus and Spinoza’s (1999) interpretation is one of the most clearly stated but also strikes me as one of the least plausible. Discussions I have found particularly useful are Dahlstrom’s (in his 1994 and 2001) and Crowell 2001a: ch. 7. For other literature, cf. McGrath 2006: 70, n. 16.

further ado but that the concrete instead presents a task of its own kind' (PIA 26).<sup>23</sup> According to 'the formally indicative definition of philosophy', what is at stake is the 'appropriation' of 'the basic sense of the factual situation of [our] comportment' towards these entities (PIA 48). We need to 're-appropriate' our 'original access' to them as our reflection on them has descended into 'rote saying'. By 'fending off' or 'keeps at arm's length' the ways in which we have 'fallen' into understanding the entities to which it points, a formal indication makes visible 'a quite definite task for the understanding of its content' (PIA 26) and forces upon us the realisation that 'the *appropriation of the concrete*' (PIA 47) is itself a task. Such 'concretion is not to be possessed ... without further ado' but something that needs to be achieved – or perhaps re-achieved – as the very formality of these indications makes vivid.

”Formal” refers to a way of “approach” toward actualizing the maturation of an original fulfilment of what was indicated”; it ‘means “approach toward the determination”’ (PIA 27), a determination that our present reflections - in which we ‘hear[] mere talk as talk’ (HCT 269) – lack.

Whether or not we can ultimately make sense of this notion of ‘formal indication’, we can at least see its appropriateness for the job in hand; or more cautiously, and to echo Blattner, we can see what an apt name it is for the problem of how one addresses philosophical confusion. There may seem something comical about the claim that, through a formal indication, ‘the object [is] “emptily” meant: and yet decisively!’ (PIA 26). But in judging it so, ‘we must not make illegitimate demands on the indication!’ (PIA 26) Such indications cannot represent ‘free-floating results’ or an ‘infusion of definite bits of knowledge’ because any remark which did

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<sup>23</sup> There are passages which suggest that formal indications are specifically designed to combat what one might call the ‘theoretical attitude’ and to prevent our understanding entities solely as present-at-hand (cf., e.g., FCM 297). There is a truth in that but, as my forthcoming-b: ch. 8 argues, it is a truth which confirms the broader view I present here; appreciating how requires an appreciation that both the ‘theoretical attitude’ and ‘presence-at-hand’ are more complex notions than they are often taken to be in the Heidegger literature.

would *fail* as a formal indication: to use an expression of Brandom's (1994), 'uptake' of formal indications takes quite a different form.

These 'empty' remarks may seem to leave the work of entertaining a thought half-finished – if that. But this would seem to represent not a failing on their part but instead a reflection of the need that they meet: the formality of these concepts and their character as mere indications is, in a sense, what it is that makes them a proper response to philosophical confusion as it is understood in Sec. 2's account: as indicative and formal, such remarks draw attention to the *need* to 'look and see'. Heidegger talks of the 'necessarily limited way of achievement of the formally indicating' (PIE 57); he says that formally indicative concepts call upon us to 'disentangle ourselves from our ordinary conceptions of beings' but also that such concepts 'can only ever address the challenge of such a transformation to us, [and] can never bring about this transformation themselves' (FCM 296). But if philosophical confusion is a matter of failing to *appropriate* an understanding one already has, then an 'infusion of definite bits of knowledge' is not what we need. As indicated above, the reader has all the 'knowledge' they need; instead they need to set it to work, to 'fill' the emptiness that these indications open up. The notion that formal indications are *disappointingly* empty now sounds like a misunderstanding of their function: they leave the reader much to do because their purpose is precisely to get the reader to do something,<sup>24</sup> here to 'recall' or set to work the understanding they already possess.

This would make sense of why Heidegger insists that '[i]t is of the essence of phenomenological investigations that they ... must in each case be rehearsed and *repeated* anew'. It would also explain why we cannot 'simply pull out results',

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<sup>24</sup> This theme has been picked up in other discussions of formal indication. As Dahlsrom puts it, such an indication is 'not so much a statement ... as it is a score or script to be performed' (1994: 790): they are 'directions not descriptions' (2001: 250 n. 31). Cf. also Lafont on the 'essentially enacting or performative character' of formal indications: 'understanding them requires performing an action, a transformation, that the concepts as (mere) concepts can only indicate but not actually bring about' (Lafont 2002: 231)

because ‘the whole thrust of the work serves to implicate the reader’ (HCT 26).<sup>25</sup> In what is surely a not-unrelated context - one in which ‘appropriation is the main point’ - Kierkegaard insists that ‘results are nothing but junk with which we should not bother one another, and wanting to communicate results is an unnatural association of one person with another’ (1992: 79, 242). ‘Appropriation’ is a feat ‘which a result hampers’ (ibid.) in that such a ‘result’ distracts from the real difference between the philosophically confused and the philosophically enlightened. Suggesting that what the latter ‘have’ could be ‘communicated’ to the former as a ‘result’ is indeed ‘an unnatural association of one person with another’.

Clearly, I have only scratched the surface of the difficulties here. In particular, one might well still wonder, with Lafont, whether Heidegger ever ‘fully developed this view’. ‘[T]o what extent [was it] supposed to constitute a genuine philosophical method?’ The remaining sections will give some suggestions – and no more than that - about how we might begin to deal with that question by considering whether we might see the ‘formal indicative’ vision sketched as actually at work in Heidegger’s texts.

## 6. Can we Read Heidegger’s Texts in these Terms?

As is often the case with metaphilosophical debates – and the recent debate about the *Tractatus* illustrates this better than most – it is one thing to argue on a priori grounds that a particular philosophical vision must be at work in a particular piece of philosophical writing and another to show that it really is. Irrespective of the philosophical virtues of such an argument, it may not have swayed – or indeed occurred to – the philosopher in question; or the philosopher may have held the vision that this argument supports but failed to implement it in her work. One not-implausible version of these worries would be that Heidegger might have contemplated the above metaphilosophical complexities; but does his work really

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<sup>25</sup> Cf. also PIA 100 on ‘[l]eaving the retracing to the individual’.

show the vision they express at work? For example, is a book like BT *really* formally indicative?

A straight-forward answer is impossible for at least two reasons. Firstly, Heidegger's early philosophy is - I believe - fundamentally shaped by on-going metaphilosophical rumination which does not obviously ever find resolution. So that philosophy is very much a moving target. I have argued elsewhere, for example, that BT re-interprets Heidegger's early ideas within a particular philosophical project which is formulated and adopted around 1925 and abandoned certainly by 1929.<sup>26</sup> That project imposes upon those early ideas a very particular metaphilosophical spin, in attempting to rehabilitate the notion of a 'science of Being' on the basis of an (attempted) demonstration that time is 'the possible horizon for any understanding of Being' (BT 19 (1)). Does that project involve the abandonment - even if only temporarily - of the 'formal indicative' vision sketched above? That concept certainly has a low profile in BT; but Heidegger did insist, in a 1927 letter to Löwith regarding that book, that '[f]ormal indication ... is still for me there even though I do not talk about [it]'.<sup>27</sup>

The second reason why we struggle to determine whether the 'formal indicative' vision is really at work in Heidegger's work is that that vision is so abstractly specified. Many different forms of philosophical work might be seen as implementing it, as Heidegger's discussion of Platonic dialectic itself illustrates. If there really are significant connections between Heidegger's own writings and Platonic dialogues, these must be specified on a rather abstract level, and I will suggest later that the latitude that that abstraction leaves open mirrors disagreements in recent discussion of Wittgenstein over quite what his own project - of 'reminding' us of the 'life' behind our words - involves.

But before turning to those difficulties, I want to make a rather rough-and-ready case for taking seriously the possibility that BT might indeed fit the - admittedly abstract - vision sketched. The case focuses upon our *experience* of that work, of how we find it difficult and - if that difficulty does not simply lead to us

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<sup>26</sup> Cf. my unpublished.

<sup>27</sup> Quoted in Kisiel 1993: 19.

close the book - how we end up reacting to it: that vision, I will suggest, makes a particular kind of sense of that experience, that difficulty and that reaction. What the 'formal indicative' vision suggests one should encounter in a Heideggerian text is a disorienting challenge to the ways in which we have come to understand ourselves and our world, one which drives us to reflect back on our basic experience of those phenomena. That, I think, is not a bad description of what BT is and does.

If the problem that philosophical confusion represents is that of *getting* people to 'look and see', and if formal indications are to provoke us into that action, they must destabilise our 'self-satisfaction at adhering to what is idly spoken of'. To do that they must positively *resist* assimilation to 'results' - to 'definite bits of knowledge' - about the (actually indeterminate) matters that the words in which we have come to 'coast along' 'concern'. There clearly is a sense in which such 'resistance' is what we experience when we open BT. For those of us who have been around that text for a long time, let's attempt to recall what first encountering it is like. One finds there an examination of something called 'the Question of Being', of whose sense we are unsure and which Heidegger himself indeed tells us we have forgotten. This is followed by an analysis not of consciousness or its objects but of things called 'the Present-at-hand', 'the Ready-to-hand' and 'Dasein', the latter being the entity that understands the thing called 'Being', the sense of the question of which we have, of course, forgotten.

So Heidegger's descriptions do indeed resist assimilation as a set of 'results'. Results, after all, about what? Dasein? But what is that? It isn't the subjectivity, or consciousness. It's the 'understanding of Being'; but that 'understanding' isn't, for example, knowledge, and the concept of 'Being', Heidegger tells us, is 'the darkest of all' (BT 23 (3)), or instead one which we have ceased to realise has become 'dark' to us. Similarly, the present-at-hand sound as if they might be what we have come to call 'objects'. But we're told that our experience of the world as made up of such entities is somehow less than basic than that of the ready-to-hand. But what are they? Heidegger, of course, offers analyses of these perplexing concepts but not in terms in which we are any more 'at home'. Dasein, for example, is 'Being-in-the-world'; but 'the world' in question is not, say, everything that there is or the entirety of space; and

the ‘being-in’ in question is not a spatial relation; rather it is a form of ‘familiarity’ (BT 80 (54)) – but not a form that might be understood as a form of knowledge. And so on. In this way, BT’s description of our lives refuses to bottom out, as it were, through definition in terms of familiar concepts or as answers to familiar philosophical questions; his notion of ‘knowing as a mode of Being-in’, for example, ‘stands neither this side nor on the far side of idealism and realism, nor is it either one of the two positions’: ‘[i]nstead it stands *wholly outside of an orientation to them and their ways of formulating questions*’ (HCT 167).

But Heidegger’s descriptions do not merely resist – prohibit (deter, prevent) – they also indicate. Heidegger tells us that each of us is *Dasein* – identifying *Dasein* indicatively as ‘us’ - and that his discussion begins with a description of *our* everyday life, in which we encounter the ready-to-hand, examples of which, he tells us, are tools. So, as we continue to read, we attempt to see what it might be in our lives that these descriptions are pointing to, something we can do because Heidegger’s descriptions do not merely resist: they are also undeniably evocative.

In his recent introduction to Heidegger, Wrathall writes

Heidegger offers a phenomenological description of the entity that each of us is. In trying to understand his description, you should make constant reference to your own experience of who you are. (2005: 10)

The above vision suggests that this isn’t just what we should do, but what we *have* to do: Heidegger’s formulations don’t offer up any ready sense that might spare us the trouble of such ‘reference’. Wrathall tells us that we must ‘check [Heidegger’s] description against [our] own experience’ (p. 10); but according to the ‘formal indicative’ vision, we must turn to ‘our experience’ not merely to check that these formally indicative descriptions are correct but also in an effort to determine just what these descriptions might be saying. Indeed if that vision does have a bearing here, eliciting this kind of turning back to our experience may actually be the point of the exercise: not a necessary expedient if we are to understand claims we take Heidegger to be making, but instead the response that his writings are attempting to provoke. It is

not what we have to do if we want to understand him – to understand some set of claims we take him to be making - but instead what he wants us to do.

If themes from Heidegger's discussion of dialectic can be carried over here, then perhaps we can give Edwards just a little more credit as a recorder of the 'phenomenology' of reading Heidegger. That discussion suggests that Heidegger may want - not to sound esoteric but - to *be* esoteric, to make things difficult for us because we no longer see a difficulty we are evading. Heidegger's descriptions would then represent obstacles he deliberately places in our way but with a view to getting us to do something we don't even realise needs doing. Heidegger wants to induce in us a 'readiness' to 'look and see'. He needs to do so because 'most men do not possess' that 'readiness' and that which 'looking and seeing' reveals is 'not given immediately to man, but instead ... requires an overcoming of definite resistances', in the form of our 'coasting along', 'caught up', 'in words', without 'an original relation to the beings of which [we are] speaking'.<sup>28</sup> In this condition, we are unaware of this 'resistance'; we are victims of a forgetting 'part of the very sense' of which is 'to believe that [one] already knows', that we already are 'looking and seeing'. A different kind of '*techne*' – other than the 'infusion' of 'a definite stock of objective knowledge' – is required if we are to be driven out of this 'positive presumption of knowledge', 'a special kind of speaking', a distinctive kind of 'speech act'.

Moreover, our response to that 'act' will also need to take a special form. A possibility that our discussion suggests is that Heidegger's difficulty may not be – or merely be - the familiar difficulty that great philosophers pose of needing interpreters who will search for sense in their words and then pass on to the rest of us the 'results' they extract; instead the point of Heidegger's work may be to make us all interpreters, to bring about that search in all its readers and with it a realisation that the words in which we have come to 'coast' may be 'idle talk', without 'an original relation' to that which we take them to concern.

This touches also on our earlier discussion of how a formally indicative text is supposed to 'address the challenge' of a kind of 'transformation' to us, but can 'never

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<sup>28</sup> Cf. also PS 33 and 135-37

bring about this transformation' itself.<sup>29</sup> Considered in the abstract, the notion of a formal indication whose 'object [is] "emptily" meant' seems crazy: how can that be done – never mind 'decisively!' but at all? Thinking about our experience of BT might help with this now, as there is a sense in which we do experience Heidegger's remarks as empty. They are 'formal' or 'empty' in requiring us to ask ourselves what aspects of life they might connote: in addressing that question, we must 'look and see'. Our reaction to Heidegger's existential analytic reminds us of how PIA characterises 'formally indicative' 'philosophical definitions':

[T]he approach-situation in which the [philosophical] definition ... takes its approach is not one whereby the object presents itself fully and properly. On the contrary, it is precisely the decisive *departure-situation* for the actualizing movement in the direction of the full appropriation of the object. (PIA 27)

Earlier I suggested that a descent into 'lifeless', 'idle talk' cannot be expected to be alleviated by hearing yet more 'lifeless', 'idle' assertions. But we can perhaps see that as a half-truth now; and we also have a sense of how, in response to philosophical propositions, which are meant in an 'indeterminate emptiness', Heidegger's offering of 'formal' – 'empty' – 'indications' might help. The indeterminacy of the sense of the latter is apparent whereas that of the former is not, in that Heidegger's 'formal indications' resist understanding: 'a quite definite task for the understanding of [their] content' is apparent, whereas it is characteristic of our philosophically confused

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<sup>29</sup> Cf. also FCM 296, according to which formally indicative concepts 'point into a concretion of the individual Dasein in man in each case, yet never already bring this concretion along with them in their content'. Being indicative 'implies the following: the meaning-content of these concepts does not directly intend or express what they refer to, but only give an indication, a pointer to the fact that anyone who seeks to understand is called upon by this conceptual context to undertake a transformation of themselves into their Dasein' (FCM 297).

claims that no such task seems necessary at all.<sup>30</sup> We ‘presume’ to understand the ‘idle talk’ in which we ‘coast’ and which we believe describes ourselves and our world ‘without further ado’. With that established idiom, the need to ‘re-appropriate’ our ‘original access’ to what it reveals is hidden by the ‘presumption’ that is our ‘self-satisfied’ ‘adhering to what is idly spoken of’ and, as the next section will discuss, the ‘quite definite task’ of understanding Heidegger’s remarks may serve to question that very ‘presumed knowledge’.

## 7. ‘Construction’ and ‘Destruction’

The above discussion’s suggestion that inducing a looking back at our experience might be the point of Heidegger’s texts invites an obvious worry: isn’t that looking back merely a step to something further, namely, our formulation of a correct ontological theory? To use a rough and problematic term, isn’t Heidegger more of a ‘constructive’ philosopher than the above discussion suggests? Heidegger’s project in BT is to construct a ‘science of Being’ and to remedy our ‘lack’ of a ‘grammar’ that would be fit for Being (BT 63 (39)). Similarly, in the *Sophist* lectures, Heidegger claims that philosophy has two tasks: ‘on the one hand, of breaking through for the first time to the matters themselves (the positive task), and, on the other hand, of taking up at the same time the battle against idle talk’ (PS 11). Doesn’t my account, with its Wittgensteinian leanings, downplay any such ‘positive task’? Before addressing that question directly, it is noteworthy that Wittgenstein’s own work raises much the same question. Or put more negatively, attempting to settle the issue of the ‘destructive’ or ‘constructive’ character of Heidegger’s texts through analogy with Wittgenstein’s really may be trying to explain the obscure by reference to the equally obscure.

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<sup>30</sup> Cf. Dahlstrom on Heidegger’s philosophy ‘stand[ing] in conflict with the easy confidence that words in their customary usage are reliable’, that ‘we generally know what we are talking about’ (1994: 785) – and representing ‘a warning that genuine access to what [our words] point to is not at all common’ (2001: 249).

So, for Wittgenstein too, we must ask: what does ‘having been reminded’ look like? Do we simply no longer ask our old, confused questions? Baker, for example, came to champion an ‘*exclusively* therapeutic’ understanding of Wittgenstein’s work, for which ‘[i]n the absence of a particular person with a particular complaint, there is literally nothing constructive for the philosopher to do’ (Baker 2004: 152). Hacker has attacked this proposal for failing to recognize a ‘*positive* task’ that Wittgenstein’s work undertakes, that of the mapping of ‘logical geography’ (Hacker 2007: 100), the seeking of a ‘perspicuous representation’ (PI sec. 122) of the complex similarities and differences between the use of words around which our philosophical confusions arise. Such worries - over the ‘constructive’ or ‘destructive’ character of Wittgenstein’s work - can be found in many of its discussions: in, for example, Philips’ Rheesian advocacy of a ‘contemplative’ conception of philosophy (which insists that we do more than merely distinguish language-games),<sup>31</sup> and debates over whether the early Wittgenstein ‘resolutely’ rejected the ‘positive task’ of intimating ineffable metaphysical truths, as well as over quite how ‘purely destructive’ such a rejection would be.<sup>32</sup>

So these matters are complex and closer examination of Heidegger’s own texts only makes them more so. As I mentioned above, BT clearly sets itself the ‘positive task’ of understanding philosophy as a science; but that ambition is explicitly rejected at both the beginning and end of the decade in which BT was written, and specifically

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<sup>31</sup> Cf. Philips 1999: 5, 48, and 51.

<sup>32</sup> Cf., e.g., Goldfarb 2011. (I make my own contribution to such discussions in my 2006 and forthcoming-a.) We might also usefully here McDowell’s work; he rejects ‘constructive philosophy’ (1994: xxiii).and is often associated with a brand of ‘Wittgensteinian quietism’. Does a work like *Mind and World*, which expresses itself in the Kantian - and thoroughly un-Wittgensteinian - vocabulary of ‘spontaneity’ and ‘receptivity’, demonstrate that a work like BT – with its own Kantian leanings and intimations of a ‘new grammar’ – could also serve an ‘anti-constructive’ purpose? It would help if we were certain that McDowell succeeds in being ‘quietist’, and, of course, about what being ‘quietist’, ‘constructive’ and ‘destructive’ really mean here.

in texts where the notion of ‘formal indication’ is prominent.<sup>33</sup> The *Sophist* lectures’ own invocation of a ‘positive task’ for philosophy also needs to be seen in the context of their insistence that ‘[d]ialectic is not something like a higher level of what is known as thinking, in opposition to so-called mere intuition’ but a breaking through ‘what is merely said’ to a ‘genuine original intuition’ (PS 137); that suggests the ‘positive task’ is restoring us to the ‘genuine original intuition’ from which our ‘idle talk’ has distracted us, a restoration to an already possessed grasp of entities, rather than a further mysterious ‘phenomenological seeing’ or the ‘infusion’ of ‘a definite stock of objective knowledge’. If the ‘genuine original intuition’ is something which, on one level, we always already possess – just as ‘Being is never alien but always familiar, “ours”’ (MFL 147)) – then ‘the positive task’ and ‘the battle against idle talk’ truly will belong together, as two sides of the same coin; phenomenology’s ‘destructive’ work would not then represent merely a step towards a new ‘construction’, as PIE vividly insists:

Only *negations* arise from our problems, it is a constant nay saying. It would be a misunderstanding to now expect a big ‘yes’ in the end. The destruction is rather continued; it simply does not have a bad aftertaste. ... The critical destruction is entirely misunderstood if it is construed as a reckoning in the last act of which the new then begins as my own philosophy – I do not need my own philosophy and therefore do not search for one ... We do not philosophize in order to show that we need a philosophy but exactly to show that we do not need any. (PIE 131, 147)<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Cf., e.g., PIE 130, and FCM sec. 7. For further documentation, cf. n. 371 of my forthcoming-b. Also relevant here is the young Heidegger’s insistence that ‘[p]hilosophy renounces/abdicates [*verzichtet*] the “system”, the ultimate partitioning of the All into realms’ (GP 239, translation quoted from van Buren 1994: 135), and his repeated questioning of a philosophical ‘compulsion to universality’ (PRL 120), a ‘craving for generality’ (BB 17), one might say.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. also PS 7 on the possibility that ‘once an understanding of’ ‘the matters at hand’ ‘is gained, phenomenology may very well disappear’.

Heidegger's remark on the need for a new 'grammar' also must be read with care. One might take it that an 'old' grammar of 'subject', 'object' and 'knowledge' is to be supplanted by a 'new grammar' of 'Dasein', 'readiness-to-hand' and 'Being-in'; but *if* [a]ll philosophical concepts' – the latter included – 'are *formally indicative*' (FCM 293), things cannot be so straight-forward. One possibility that I suggest we consider is that Heidegger saw his reflections as revealing the true richness of concepts like 'subject', 'substance' and – perhaps most obviously - 'truth'. Heidegger's presentation of his 'new grammar' directs our attention back to the same life that our 'old grammar' concerns and, as we seek aspects of life that the former might indicate, we also become aware of the roots in that life of our 'old words'. How this will principally strike us – the philosophically confused - is as revealing how our grasp of those 'old words' has 'faded', replaced in our reflections by 'faded' metaphors and models; we become aware of how these continue to 'refer' us to life but only to certain aspects of it or, for example, to aspects whose contexts they do not bring to light. We come to recognize the 'birth certificates' (BT 44 (22)) of these now-'faded' conceptions in coming to recognize the aspects of life that sustain them, but also the partiality of the understanding that they express, along with the 'forgotten' work done in bringing us to think in these 'faded' terms by the tradition in which we have been raised as philosophers. Does this amount to a call to replace the 'grammar' of 'the subject' with that of 'Dasein'? Or a call to recognize the complex life that has always given our talk of 'subjectivity' its life, to recognize 'the subjectivity of the subject' (BT 45 (24))? If the latter, then one might propose, as Heidegger does in BT, that

the ultimate business of philosophy is to preserve the *force of the most elemental words* in which Dasein expresses itself, and to keep the common understanding from leveling them off to that unintelligibility which functions in turn as a source of pseudo-problems. (BT 262 (220))

## 8. Argument revisited

But the previous discussion also raises another worry. As the passage from BT 262 (220) puts it, in tracing the life that lies behind our ‘elemental words’, we see both how that rich life – their ‘force’ - is ‘levelled off’ and have diagnosed for us the pseudo-problems that that ‘levelling off’ creates. To return to a theme touched upon in Sec. 2, Heidegger’s diagnoses characteristically seem to show such thinking to have accommodated itself to that rich life through a *collage* of ‘faded’ concepts, which each echo aspects of that life but simplistically and, in their mutual inconsistency, paradoxically. For example, we envisage ‘the world’ as the ‘outside’ of we thinkers and as itself a (very large) object which we may or may not find ‘in’ such an ‘outside’,<sup>35</sup> and envisage ‘consciousness [as] similar to a box, where the ego is inside and reality is outside’ (WDR 163) but also of the ‘contents’ of that box as inherently ‘about’ what lies ‘outside’, as something ‘in which there still lurks a relational character’ (BT 267 (225)).<sup>36</sup> To borrow again from Heidegger’s discussion of dialectic, the reader is led to ‘see[] the inconsistency within himself, the inconsistency within his own comportment’: it is ‘shown to him that he presents the matter at issue sometimes in one way and then again in another way’ (PS 261). In the ‘indeterminate emptiness’ of our reflections – and to return to the remarks from PIE quoted above - ‘different meanings run confusedly through one another’, ‘a multiplicity of meaning-directions ... indicated’ (PIE 24).<sup>37</sup>

But it is overwhelmingly natural, I think, to see the kind of reflections that the previous paragraph discussed as a form of reasoning - a form of argument - and there

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<sup>35</sup> This is a theme in Minar 2001 (cf., e.g., p. 209) and Mulhall 2005 (cf., e.g., p. 97).

<sup>36</sup> Heidegger makes such a claim about ‘so-called fundamental concepts, e.g. “representation”’ (PIE 23) and my 2008 makes a case for endorsing this view of some of our talk of ‘representations’, drawing on an analysis of a passage from HCT. My forthcoming-b elaborates on this case.

<sup>37</sup> Heidegger makes this claim about ‘so-called fundamental concepts, e.g. “representation”’ (PIE 23) and my 2008 makes a case for endorsing this view of some of our talk of ‘representations’, drawing on an analysis of a passage from HCT.

is something simply incredible about the notion that one might understand Heidegger's texts without invoking those concepts.<sup>38</sup> That may seem to sit uncomfortably with the simple image of a pointing back to life, a 'formal' - 'empty' – indication; and earlier I presented a case for thinking that the conception of philosophical confusion that Sec. 2 presented marginalises argument. But that case needs to be treated with care. I have argued elsewhere that a way to understand what it is overwhelmingly natural to call the 'reasoning' that one finds in the *Tractatus* is as leading us through the problematic 'consequences' of our 'faded' philosophical talk: such reasoning disrupts our 'presumed knowledge' and draws attention to how, in such talk, 'a multiplicity of meaning-directions is indicated'.<sup>39</sup> Individual sentences may serve to 'elucidate' the 'implications' of such talk but the intent of the text as a whole is to provoke us out of our 'coasting' in that talk: it raises again the question of whether that talk has a determinate sense, calling for us to 'look and see' what sense that talk might have here. What the earlier argument actually attempted to show was that, given the conception of philosophical difficulty explored in this paper, attempts to establish 'positive' 'philosophical theses' of one's own, and through proof, would be missing the point. That remains the case. But that conception, which I have suggested may have inspired Heidegger's notion of 'formal indication', still has a place for argument.

The fact remains that it is unclear how the motif of 'formal indication' accommodates the previous paragraph's more nuanced view of what goes on in Heideggerian texts; and here I think we have to acknowledge that, even if – as I suspect - that motif gives us an interesting way of thinking about the work such texts aim to do, it is insufficient to generate a reading of Heidegger's texts all by itself, so to speak, any more than Wittgenstein's talk of 'assembling reminders' and

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<sup>38</sup> To take just one example of innumerably many that one might take, consider his argument that 'an entity can be touched by another entity only if by its very nature the latter entity has Being-in as its own kind of Being – only if with its Being-there [*Da-sein*], something like the world is already revealed to it, so that from out of that world another entity can manifest itself in touching' (BT 81 (55)).

<sup>39</sup> Cf. my 2006 and forthcoming-a.

constructing ‘perspicuous representations’ will – all by itself - generate a reading of his. The concept of ‘formal indication’ does not resolve for us, for example, whether such texts *simply* point, as it were, or might point *through*, for example, the kind of ‘destructive’ reasoning alluded to above. Might such argument – like that in TLP – serve to prompt the suspicion that one is merely ‘coasting in words’ or induce one to ‘look and see’?

This leads us to the most obvious gap left by our earlier discussion. *That* Heidegger’s descriptions resist – deter, prevent – is clear and *how* they do so is clear too: his terms are not defined through our terms and do not yield answers to our questions. *That* Heidegger’s descriptions are indicative – evocative – is also clear, I think, but *how* is much less so. As was mentioned earlier, the ‘formal indicative’ vision is sufficiently abstractly specified that many different forms of philosophical work might be seen as implementing it and the work of showing how Heidegger’s texts might do so remains to be done. So, for example, an obvious question that remains for our brief discussion of BT is: how can its ‘formal’ ‘pointing’ direct the search for sense that I suggested that work might be meant to induce? How do we follow its ‘empty’ ‘indications’? An answer may lie, at least in part, in what one might call the ‘literary qualities’ of Heidegger’s texts. I am thinking, for example, of the way in which he adapts words from ordinary usage and sets them to work in unprecedented ways in what is also clearly philosophical reflection. This includes his use of terms like ‘care’, ‘concern’, ‘conscience’, ‘guilt’, ‘projection’, ‘resolution’, indeed most of the terms that make up the fabric of Heidegger’s works, including ‘*Dasein*’ itself (whose character as a co-opted non-technical term is hidden from the Anglophone reader by the otherwise-quite-understandable decision to leave that word untranslated). Though such terms are ‘formalized’ by Heidegger (BT 328 (283)), they manifestly are meant to bring – in some way or other – some of their original resonances with them. These terms are not ‘thought up arbitrarily’ (BT 326 (281)), as if we might substitute an ‘x’ or a ‘y’ for ‘conscience’ or for ‘care’. So this is surely

one of the places where one might begin to think about how such texts might actually ‘indicate formally’.<sup>40</sup>

It is also here, I suspect, that we must begin to think about how such thinking might possess a form of rigour. Both before and after BT, we find Heidegger stressing that the rigour of philosophy is unlike that of science.<sup>41</sup> He repeatedly insists that formal indications must ‘decisively’ or ‘strictly determine[] the direction’ in which our gaze must be led; but at the same time, he acknowledges that here the danger of ‘groundless word-mysticism’ ‘can never be entirely circumvented’ (PIA 26, 93). So what kind of rigour can be achieved here? To what kind of ‘testing’ might such thinking be subject? It is tempting to leap straight to enticing conclusions such as that the discipline of this kind of philosopher is closer to that of the poet than the scientist.<sup>42</sup> But as this final section has suggested, things may not be so straightforward.

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The case I made above for taking seriously the idea that BT might be seen as ‘formally indicative’ is best seen as a case for thinking of the text as a whole in those terms, not so much individual sentences, such that one might expect all of these sentences to instantiate a single kind of ‘speech act’; there is an obvious oddity or artificiality in the latter expectation (not that I suppose Philipse thinks otherwise).<sup>40</sup> (Also relevant here is the possibility that some of Heidegger’s remarks might need to be understood in ‘reactive’ terms and treated in a way not dissimilar to that in which – according to some interpretations – the ‘ladder’ that the *Tractatus* provides ought to be treated (cf. Sec. 4.2.2 and 7.5 of my forthcoming-b).) So the presence of argument in such texts may tell us more about the ‘level’, so to speak, at which the concept of ‘formal indication’ has application, texts rather than sentences, for example, being ‘formally indicative’. Heidegger himself declares philosophical *concepts* to be ‘formally indicative’ (cf. FCM 293, quoted above). But that wouldn’t seem to entail that each sentence of a text in which such concepts are articulated needs to instantiate a single ‘speech act’.

<sup>41</sup> Cf., e.g., IPPW 93 and LH 235.

<sup>42</sup> Support for that might be found in BT 205 (162)’s characterisation of “poetical” discourse’ as a ‘disclosing of existence’.

Our discussion also raises one more obvious and interesting question: how might the issues discussed in this paper have worked themselves out in the later Wittgenstein's texts? For example, might his 'perverse' 'lack of concern' to spell out what we might think of as 'his claims' and the arguments that we assume are meant to support them reflect a misunderstanding on our part of the kind of work his writings are meant to accomplish? The later Wittgenstein's texts are not full of unfamiliar jargon or technicalities; their difficulty seems to lie more in understanding the *significance* of the various descriptions, dialogues, questions addressed to the reader, invitations to reflect on what one would say if ... or to imagine that ... Might such a mode of writing - with its many 'speech acts' - exemplify a '*techne*' quite other than the 'infusion' of 'objective knowledge', seeking to disorient those who 'coast along in words' and elicit in them a 'readiness' to 'look and see'?<sup>43</sup> The very peculiarity of Wittgenstein's texts encourages the kind of cautious reading that the previous questions – if apt – call for. My main concern here has been to suggest that we might profitably take the peculiarity – the apparent 'perversity' - of Heidegger's texts in the same spirit.

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Abbreviations are followed by page numbers except where indicated.

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<sup>43</sup> Cf. PI 129: 'The aspect of things that are most important for us are hidden because of their simplicity and familiarity. (One is unable to notice is something – because it is always before one's eyes.) The real foundations of his enquiry do not strike a man at all.'

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- EP – *Einleitung in die Philosophie*, Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann,  
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PI - *Philosophical Investigations*, ed. G. E. M. Anscombe and R. Rhees, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, Oxford: Blackwell, 1967.

PR - *Philosophical Remarks*, ed. R. Rhees, trans. R. Hargreaves and R. White, Oxford: Blackwell, 1975.

TLP - *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. C. K. Ogden, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1922. Another translation by D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1961) is also sometimes used in this book.

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