

Heidegger's *Ereignis* and Wittgenstein on the *Genesis* of Language

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Abstract

The paper argues that the orthodox readings of pgh. 608 of Wittgenstein's *Zettel* (hereafter Z608), which holds that Z608 suggests the possibility that language and thought may emerge out of physical chaos in the brain (connectionist processing, causal indeterminism, a pile of sawdust, etc.) *cannot* be correct. Among Wittgenstein's signature views are that the philosopher "must not advance any kind of theory" and that everything must be "open to view". Despite this, the orthodox readings not only attribute theories about hidden processes to Z608, but quite extreme one's at that. What the commentator *should* infer is that the kind of centre, chaos, and "arising" of language from chaos in Z608 must be of the sort that is already "open to view"—that is, a "phenomenological" reading, broadly construed. The paper argues that Heidegger's account of the *Ereignis* (the opening of the Open, or "primordial truth"), provides a far better model of Z608 than the orthodox neurological interpretation—illuminating both Heidegger and Wittgenstein in the process. Against this background, it is argued that the central point in Z608 is precisely that the centre of a language referenced in Z608 *cannot* be the neural centre. Just as Copernicus replaced the old centre of the universe, the sun, by a new centre, the earth, so too, the aim in Z608 is to replace the old view that language is centred in the brain with the new view, reflected on virtually every page of Wittgenstein's later philosophy, that language centres around the everyday arena of human behaviour which is "always before one's eyes". Z608 is not stating theories about the brain, but is proposing a new "Copernican" paradigm in the philosophies of language and mind, a paradigm which is also found in Heidegger's account of the *Ereignis*.

Keywords

Wittgenstein, Heidegger, *Ereignis*, The Open, Primordial Truth

1. Introduction

No supposition seems to be more natural than that there is no process in the brain correlated with associating

or with thinking; so that it would be impossible to read off thought processes from brain processes. I mean this: if I talk or write, there is, I assume, a system of impulses going out from my brain and correlated with my spoken or written thoughts. But why should the system continue further in the direction of the center? Why should this order not proceed, so to speak, out of chaos? The case would be like the following—certain kinds of plants multiply by seed, so that a seed always produces a plant of the same kind as that from which it was produced—but nothing in the seed corresponds to the plant which comes out of it—this can only be done from the history of the seed. So an organism might come into being out of something quite amorphous, as it were, causelessly; and there is no reason why this should not really hold for our thoughts, and hence for our talking and writing

Wittgenstein, *Zettel* (608)¹

The sound rings out in the resounding assembly call which, open to the Open, makes world appear in all things. The sounding of the voice is then... released... from the perspective of the physiological-physical explanation...

Heidegger, “The Nature of Language” (101)²

Most scholars understand the controversial paragraph 608 of *Zettel* (hereafter **Z608**) to claim that language and thought might arise out of physical chaos in the brain, some to suggest the possibility of a pile of sawdust in the neural cavity (McGinn, 1984), some to suggest causal indeterminacy in the brain (Scheer, 1991), some to suggest connectionist theories of neural processing (Davies, 1991; Mills, 1993), one as a critique of Köhler’s theory of electric brain-fields (Hark, 1995), etc.³. These commentators all agree that the center and chaos in **Z608** are the neural center and neural chaos (hereafter, the Neurophysiological Interpretation, or **NI**). But something is amiss. Wittgenstein holds that philosophers must not advance any kind of theory (**PI**, 109, 128). He also holds that the phenomena must already be in plain view (**PI**, 89). Yet **NI** sees **Z608**, not only advancing theories about hidden processes, but some quite extreme ones at that. Wittgenstein might be inconsistent, but surely a reading that does not so plainly contradict his *signature* views would be preferable.

Although many philosophers have noted parallels between Wittgenstein and Heidegger, the present paper argues that Heidegger’s account of his fundamental concept, the *Ereignis*, the opening of the Open (Sheehan, 2001: p. 5; Wheeler, 2011: § 3.1, 3.2.) provides a far better model of Wittgenstein’s point in **Z608**. The paper argues, first, that **Z608** is *not* making a sudden inexplicable venture into *verboten* neural theorizing, but is describing something akin to Heidegger’s *Ereignis*, and, second, that comparing Wittgenstein’s and Heidegger’s respective views illuminates them both.

Part I argues that **NI** imposes its own scientific notions of the center and chaos on Wittgenstein’s very different views in **Z608**. Part II argues that the key point of **Z608** is that the *genuine* center of language is *not* the neural center but, rather, the public (open) world in which, for Wittgenstein, language is at “home” (**BB**, 147; **PI**, 116; **CV**, 65; **Z**, 165, 231, 234). Part III sketches Heidegger’s notion of the center. Part IV sketches Heidegger’s notion of the emergence of order from chaos. Part V outlines the Heideggerian model of **Z608**. Part VI discusses several important differences between Wittgenstein’s and Heidegger’s views.

2. The Neurophysiological Interpretation of *Zettel* 608

Zettel 608-610... suggests that... our behavior could proceed from internal physical chaos, ... [But] it does

¹Wittgenstein’s works are abbreviated as follows: *Tractatus-logico-philosophicus* [**TLP**]; *Notebooks*, 1914-16 [**NB**]; *Blue and Brown Books* [**BB**]; *Philosophical Investigations* [**PI**]; *Zettel* [**Z**]; *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics* [**RFM**]; *On Certainty* [**OC**]; *Culture and Value* [**CV**]; *Last Writings of the Philosophy of Psychology*, v. 1. [**LW-1**]. References to **TLP** are by proposition number, to **NB**, **BB**, and **CV** by page number, to **PI**, **Z**, **OC**, and **LW-1**, unless indicated otherwise, by paragraph number, to **RFM**, by section and paragraph number.

²Heidegger’s works are abbreviated as follows: *What is Philosophy?* [**WIP**]; *Being and Time* [**BT**]; *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics* [**KPM**]; “Conversations on a Country Path” [**CCP**]; *What is Called Thinking?* [**WCT**]; *The Essence of Reasons* [**ER**]; *Phenomenological Interpretation of Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason* [**PIK**]; “On the Essence of Truth” [**OET**]; “The Thinker as Poet” [**TAP**]; “The Origin of the Work of Art” [**OWA**]; “What are Poets For?” [**WPF**]; “Building, Dwelling, Thinking” [**BDT**]; “Poetically Man Dwells” [**PMD**]; “Overcoming Metaphysics” [**OM**]; “The Turning” [**TT**]; “The Age of the World Picture” [**AWP**]; “The Word of Nietzsche” [**WON**]; “Letter on Humanism” [**LH**]; “The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking” [**EPTT**]; *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* [**FCM**]; *Nietzsche*, v. 1 [**H-N**, v. 1]; *Nietzsche*, v. 2 [**H-N**, v. 2]; *Nietzsche*, v. 3 [**H-N**, v. 3]; *Nietzsche*, v. 4. [**H-N**, v. 4]; “The Nature of Language” [**NOL**]; “The Way to Language” [**WTL**]; “Words” [**W**]; “Language in the Poem” [**LIP**]; *Contributions to Philosophy* [**CTP**]; *The Event* [**TE**].

³The exception is in McDonough (1989, 1991, 2004, 2013, 2014a and 2014b).

not... follow [from Wittgenstein's arguments] that someone really could have a head full of sawdust or a chaotic nervous system and yet understand words.

McGinn, *Wittgenstein on Meaning* (1984: pp. 12-13, 112-114)

I, L.W. ... am sure that my friend hasn't sawdust in his body or in his head... To have doubts about this would seem to me madness.

Wittgenstein, *On Certainty* (1972b: para. 281)

First, Z608 does *not* state that linguistic meaning (hereafter meaning_L) and mental content (hereafter content_M) may arise from chaos⁴. It only states that these may “*sozusagen*” (“so to speak”) arise from chaos. Nor does Z608 even explicitly specify that the chaos is *physical*. That is simply *assumed* by NI. Further, Z608 does *not*, later in the paragraph, say that an organism may arise out of nothing (“*nichts in dem Samen*”). It only suggests that the arising of meaning_L from chaos “would be like” the emergence of a plant from “nothing in the seed.” Z608 goes on to explain this image of order arising from nothing by *analogy* with the case in which an organism, “*sozusagen*,” arises “causelessly” out of something “amorphous.” That is, Z608 moves freely between these three images, order arising from chaos, from nothing, and from formlessness—which shows that Z608 is not using these images as precise scientific concepts. McGinn need have no fear that Wittgenstein thinks that normal thinking human heads might “actually” turn out to be full of sawdust.

NI also holds that Z608 undermines the ordinary view that there is a causal connection between neural-processes and linguistic behavior. In fact, Z608 *begins* by *endorsing* the existence of “a *System*” of impulses correlating brain processes with “spoken and written thoughts.” That there are such correlations is *not* even at issue in Z608 (McDonough, 1989: pp. 4-5). In keeping with Wittgenstein's well-known method of making philosophically illuminating comparisons (PI, 126), Z608 certainly does not challenge any scientific views. Indeed, since Z608 begins by *affirming* the existence of a “*System*” of impulses correlating the brain and physical behavior, NI's reading that Z608 denies accepted science is groundless. The real point of the paragraph lies in an entirely different direction.

The views that Z608 suggests indeterminism, connectionism, the specter of sawdust in the head, a critique of Köhler's theories about electric brain fields, etc., are *not* stated in the text. Since philosophy has been long dominated by the view that meaning_L is produced by a central neural engine (the Central Neural Engine Paradigm, or CNEP)⁵, NI assumes that Z608 speaks in the language of CNEP—even though Wittgenstein clearly rejects the relevance of such theories to his type of investigation (Malcolm, 1986: pp. 190-193).

In fact, Wittgenstein employs very different notions of chaos and the center elsewhere in his works. At NB (80) he refers to the will, “the bearer of ethics”, as “the center [*Zentrum*] of the world.” Additional modifications of his notion of the center occur in his transitional works (McDonough, 2004). At PI (108), Wittgenstein states that the axis of his investigation must be “rotated... around the fixed point [*Angelpunkt*] of our real need”—which he identifies with “ordinary life.” Anscombe translates “*Angelpunkt*” as *fixed-point*, and Hacker and Schulte translate it as “pivot”, but it can be translated as “center-point” (Traupman, 1991: p. 17)⁶. Similarly, RFM (III.15) identifies “the center-of-gravity of mathematics” with *action*. The one thing Wittgenstein *never* does is identify the center of meaning_L or content_M as the neural center. Nonetheless, that is the reading assumed by NI.

Wittgenstein also invokes the notion of chaos elsewhere. CV (65) states that the philosopher must learn to “feel at home” in “primeval chaos.” OC (613-614) states that attempting to doubt certain very fundamental things... would “plunge” human judgment into “chaos.” CV (65) refers to the “primeval” chaos in which the philosopher must learn to *dwell* . OC (613-614) refers a kind of “chaos” *in human behavior* . Wittgenstein also alludes to the chaos from which language arises when he describes “the great swarm [*ganze Gewimmel*] of human actions” against which action is judged (Z567). Z608 does *not* suggest that meaning_L arises out of neural chaos, but that it arises out of the chaotic *ganze Gewimmel* of human behavior in the *Angelpunkt* (center point) of our real need (where language is at *home*).

⁴For simplicity, the argument in the present argument is stated in terms of meaning_L, but analogous conclusions can be drawn for content_M.

⁵Central State Materialism is usually understood as a species of the identity theory of mind-brain (Schneider, 2009). However, Putnam (1981 pp. 81-82) points out that most philosophers assume there is at least a correspondence between mental states and brain states. CNEP is understood here more inclusively to include mere correspondence between mind and brain states. See McDonough (1989: pp. 13-15, 19-20).

⁶In fact, the word “center” traces to the Greek, *kentron*, the point of a compass around which a circle is drawn. See *Online Etymological Dictionary* (hereafter OED): URL: <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?search=center+point&searchmode=none>

Z608 does not propose any of **NI**'s theories about the brain. Rather, if Z608 is to be consistent with Wittgenstein's well-known views, it must *allude to a kind emergence of order from chaos that is "already in plain view"* (*PI*, 89), namely, the emergence of meaning_L from the *Ganze Gewimmel* of human activities at the "*Angelpunkt* of our real need." Wittgenstein's notion of chaos cannot, obviously, be unpacked in terms of scientific concepts, but, rather, by reference to Wittgenstein's core views that "in the flux of life" rigid concepts won't do, that all concepts are "elastic," and that even "the [very] concept of linguistic use... varies along with the concept of activity" (*LW-1*, 246, 340). What Z608 really suggests is that the use of a word, roughly, its meaning_L, arises, *sozusagen*, from the "chaos," the elastic, uses of words in the "infinite variations" (*CV*, 73) in the "flux of [human] life."

3. Towards the Centre

Heidegger's thinking, *Denken*, is a re-thinking, *Andenken*, a recalling, remembering, ..., and responding to an original call from the central living presence of the [B]eing of the world, ...

Hofstadter, Introduction, *Poetry, Language and Thought* (xviii)

We must learn to read.

Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, v. 3 (1991c, 47)

Given the longstanding dominance in the mainstream English-speaking philosophical tradition of **CNEP**, **NI** just assumes that the center referenced in Z608 is the neural center. Z608 does *tacitly* reference the neural center when it affirms that there is a system of neural impulses coming out of the brain and correlating with written and spoken sentences. That is, one can define the neural center as that level of neural organization which generates that system of impulses. But is that the same center mentioned later in Z608 ("further in the direction of the center")? In fact, the *key* point of Z608 is that these two centers *must* be distinguished. Consider the 2nd - 4th sentences in Z608 (numbered for convenience):

(S₁) There is, I assume, a system of impulses going out from my brain and correlated with my spoken or written thoughts. (S₂) But why should the *system* continue further in the direction of the center? (S₃) Why should this order not proceed, *sozusagen*, out of chaos.

S₁ refers to **CNEP**'s view that processes in the brain generate impulses that produce linguistic behavior. **NI** assumes **CNEP** when it takes the word "center" in S₂ to mean the neural center. Note, however, that S₁ specifies the direction of motion of those impulses is *from* the brain *towards* the spoken and written sentences in the public world. Since S₂, read naturally, asks why this system should proceed further *in that direction*, the center mentioned in S₂ has to be in the public world—and that is precisely the location of Wittgenstein's "*Angelpunkt* of our real need" (*PI*, 108). Indeed, the *primary* aim of Z608 is to replace the *old* view that meaning_L is centered in the brain with the *new* view that it is centered in the public "home" of human action.

Further, if, as **NI** correctly holds, the chaos is where the center is, and if the genuine center of meaning_L is the public center of human behavior, then the chaos out of which S₃ suggests meaning_L arises is the sort of "chaos" found in that public world. Indeed, since the first sentence of Z608 *endorses* the view that the brain produces an orderly neural "System" that correlates with linguistic utterances, why would anyone think that the chaos referenced in S₃ is neural chaos? Since Z608 affirms the existence of an orderly "System" correlating brain states and linguistic behavior, the natural reading is that meaning_L arises from a chaos that resides *somewhere else*—somewhere other than that orderly brain-language system. That is, the real point in Z608 is that meaning_L does not arise out of that orderly neural system that has just been acknowledged, but, rather, that it arises out the chaotic *Ganze Gewimmel* of human behavior at the center-point (*Angelpunkt*) of our real need.

Whereas **NI** reads Z608 in terms of its own **CNEP**, there are alternatives. Serafini (1993) remarks that Malcolm did not approve of his youthful "existentialist" reading of Wittgenstein, but it is not clear why Malcolm should have been so critical. Wittgenstein deeply admired Dostoevsky and Kierkegaard (*Monk*, 1990: pp. 136, 283, 310, 663, 490, etc.). He admits influence by Nietzsche (*Monk*, 1990: p. 108). He makes admiring remarks about Heidegger (*Monk*, 1990: p. 123; See also *CV*, 9, 59)⁷. He greatly admired Rilke, a poet associated with existentialism (*Monk*, 1990: p. 310). Even Augustine, who Wittgenstein "revered" (*Malcolm*, 2001: p. 59), is

⁷The fact that Heidegger distanced himself from existentialism (i.e., from Sartre) in *LH* is not relevant here.

often seen as anticipating religious existentialism (Paulo, 2006). The present claim is not that Wittgenstein was really an existentialist. It is that among his influences are a number of diverse “existentialist” writers and that Wittgenstein shares some of their *language* and *concerns* in a way that illuminates his aims in Z608. One often reads in existentialist works that man must find the true center of life, that meaning in life must arise out of the chaos, nothingness, irrationality, darkness, etc., of human existence (Barrett, 1958: pp. 51-52, 62, 72, 136, 150, 164, etc.). The present paper develops this case in respect to Heidegger’s works.

4. Heidegger’s Notions of the Center

[T]he stagnation and decline of philosophy... point[s] to having forgotten the center. Therefore, every philosophical renewal is an awakening in returning to the same point.

Heidegger, *Phenomenological Interpretation of Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason* (1997: p. 1)

If Nietzsche had not been a thinker, he would not have stood alone in the concealed center of beings as a lone watchman, ...

Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, v. 3 (1991c: p. 124)

In fact, Heidegger employs several related notions of the center that are crucial to his views. §4.1 sketches the notion of the center in several of his early works. §IV.2 discusses the notion of the center in several of his later works.

4.1. The Notion of the Center in *Being and Time*

[This common objection to **Being and Time**] makes sense only if one fails to understand... how, by elaborating the structure of the transcendence of Dasein, “man” comes into the center of the picture, so that his nothingness within the totality of being... become[s] a problem of the first priority. We [must] ask what pitfalls lurk in the kind of “anthropocentric standpoint” which merely attempts to show that the essence of Dasein (which stands in the center) is ecstatic or “excentric”...

Heidegger, *The Essence of Reasons* (1969: pp. 98-99 n59)

Heidegger only explicitly invokes the notion of the center a few times in **BT** itself. At H119 he refers to the center of experience and action, roughly, the psychological subject, but this notion of the center is already found in Scheler and others (Boelin, 1968: p. 87; see also Guignon, 1993b: p. 223). At **BT** H231 and H332 he states that the essential structures of Being-in-the-world center in disclosedness and that the ontological structure of *Dasein* “centers in the self-subsistence [*Selbständigkeit*] of existence [*Existenz*]” (See also **LH**, 209). In these passages Heidegger refers, not to the psychological subject, but to the center, *ontologically speaking*, of *Dasein*, in the first case, to *Dasein*’s disclosedness, in the second, to the “self-subsistence” of *Existenz*.

It may be useful, as a preliminary exercise, to ask oneself how one might read Z608 if the expression, “the center” in **S**₂ were read in these *ontological* senses. Since Z608 concerns the genesis of language, it would, in that case, be asking why anyone should think that neurophysiological accounts of language production take one towards the *ontological* center of language (to language understood in terms of its roots in *Dasein*’s Being). Since neurophysiological accounts abstract from such “ontological” considerations, Z608 would then be seen to be suggesting that such neurophysiological accounts cannot shed any light on what language essentially is.

Although *explicit* references to the center are few in **BT** itself, Heidegger is more explicit in his retrospective comments on **BT** in **ER** (see epigraph above). Note first, that though Heidegger there rejects a common objection to **BT**, he does not reject the idea that **BT** makes man the center (See also **AWP**, 151; **LH**, 268; **Brock**, 1968b: p. 120; **Langan**, 1971: p. 170; etc.). Heidegger’s objection is to those who “merely” make man the center without taking the next step—to recognize that by making man the center, **BT** makes *the nothingness of the center the fundamental problem*. Heidegger’s point is this: Let it be granted that man is “the center.” Since man is, *sozusagen*, nothingness, the center is nothingness, and this means that *Dasein* must be *ecstatic* or “excentric.” Since the “excentric” is, literally, that which is *off-center*, this means that the ontological function formerly assigned to a substantial center *must shift to the periphery* (off-center). Thus, *Dasein* turns out to be “centered,” not in some internal psychological “cabinet” (**BT**, H60-H62), such as the cranial cavity, but in the former periphery,

the shared public world. But this “excentric” character is just what Heidegger means by saying that *Dasein*’s Being is “Being-in-the-world.”⁸

In effect, Heidegger response to these critics of *BT* is this: *BT* does make man the center, but that’s not news. The news is that since this means there is nothingness at the center, one must re-conceptualize the center as *ecstatic* or “excentric,” which turns one’s understanding of Being upside down. It is this to which your criticism of *BT* is blind⁹.

The basic point for present purposes is that Heidegger’s key *BT* notion of the center pertains to *Dasein*’s ontological structure and has *nothing* to do with the neural center¹⁰.

4.2. The Notion of the Center in Heidegger’s Later Works

Being, which holds all beings in the balance... draws particular beings... towards itself as the center... In contrast with physical gravitation, ..., the force of gravity in [Rilke’s Sonnetts to *Orpheus*] is the center of all beings as a whole. That is why Rilke calls it “the unheard of center.”

Heidegger, *What Are Poets for?* (1971c: pp. 104, 140)

Since there are a plethora of remarks in Heidegger’s later works concerning his notion(s) of the center, it is useful to focus on his notion of the center in *WPF*. It is not possible to do justice to all of *WPF* here, but only to elucidate *WPF*’s notion of the center.

Heidegger’s aim in *WPF* is *not* to make a contribution to aesthetics *per se*, but to clarify the role of the poet in the present “destitute time” of technology, namely, to free man from bondage to the idols of the time and return man to the creative source of dwelling man (Hofstadter, 1971: p. xv). He finds Rilke’s poetry useful towards this end. Rilke sees Being as drawing all beings *towards itself as center* so that it can give them over to the venture in which they are ventured (see epigraph above). This “all-mediating” center lends “gravity” to ventured beings (*WPF*, 104). This is not the center of gravity of physics, but the “center of all beings as a whole,” which is why Rilke calls it the “unheard of center” (*WPF*, 105).

Heidegger uses the image of the physical center-of-gravity to symbolize a deeper metaphysical concept (*WPF*, 106; See also *BDT*, 156): “The gravity of the pure forces, the unheard of center, the pure draft, the whole draft, full Nature, Life, the venture—these are the same” (*WPF*, 105). This means that Heidegger implicitly refers to “the unheard of center” whenever he refers to any of these phenomena, Life, the pure draft, full Nature, etc.¹¹. The opposite of this “unheard of center” is technology: “Technology is the unconditional establishment, posed by man’s self-assertion... which prevails against the pure draft, by which the unheard of center draws all pure forces to itself” (*WPF*, 116).

Heidegger sees Rilke as distinguishing two opposite forces, one, the unheard of center, pulling man toward Life, and the other, technology, pulling man towards death. Employing the ancient cosmological language of a level of orbits in a spherical universe, Heidegger states that “to this widest circle [orbit] there corresponds as the strongest center, the ‘unheard of center’ of pure gravity” (*WPF*, 124). That is, Heidegger here presents a picture of Being as a *center of attraction* that *engenders order*—or meaning, broadly construed (see also Dreyfus, 1993: p. 313).

5. Heidegger and the Emergence of Order from Chaos

I know of no detailed discussion of Hesiod in Heidegger’s works, but suggest that *khaos* might be interpreted along the lines of the Timaeon *khōra*, the receptacle of “space,” namely, as the open region in which

⁸For an account of Heidegger’s hyphenated expressions see McDonough (1995).

⁹Consider an analogy: Imagine, if, after cementing his view that the sun, not the earth, is at the center of the universe, Copernicus were forced to admit that the sun is, in the sense relevant to his investigations, nothingness. Could he leave the rest of his system as it is—as if this were just another detail about the new center? For, if his new center is nothingness, what, *if anything*, performs the functions of the old center?

¹⁰In *KPM* (§ 26), Heidegger identifies the transcendental imagination as the “formative center” of ontological knowledge in Kant. See also Brock (1968a: p. 8). Given Kant’s importance to Heidegger, this notion of the schematizing center cannot fail to be of great importance, but this goes beyond the scope of the present paper. See also Heidegger’s references to the center in *FCM* (180, 187) and the editor’s note 39 to *WON* (103).

¹¹Heidegger stresses that his own notion of the open is very different in meaning from Rilke’s (*WPF*, 106-8).

all beings can first appear and be in being.

Krell, note to *H-N*, v. 2 (91-92)

The other main image in *Z608* (besides motion *towards* the center) is the image, tracing to the dawn of the western intellectual tradition, of the emergence of a cosmos from chaos¹². Heidegger employs similar cosmological imagery in various works, but most explicitly, in his discussions of Kant and Nietzsche. His discussion of Kant is briefly considered in § 5.1, followed by a more detailed discussion of Nietzsche's views in § 5.2.

5.1. Kant and the Emergence of Knowledge from Chaos

The consciousness of the objects... as it is conceived in Cohen's interpretation [of Kant] serves to guide this characterization: the active formation of a passively given "chaos" of sensations into a cosmos.

Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics* (1966a: **Appendix 2**, p. 181)¹³

[K]nowing as representing and bringing a world before us is basically "schematizing" chaos in accord with practical needs.

Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, v. 3 (1991c: p. 73)¹⁴

Heidegger criticizes Cohen's interpretation that Kant held that knowledge of the objects of mathematical physics is produced on analogy with the ancient view that the cosmos emerges out of chaos, remarking that "beginning with a chaos of sensations that are 'formed'" covers up the problem of original transcendence (*KPM*, 189). But Heidegger does not completely reject Cohen's views. His objection is that the Cohen's concept of chaos is not sufficiently primordial to facilitate an understanding of *original* transcendence. Referring to Kant's "increasing clarity" about the priority of practical reason, Heidegger writes, "[I]t is not reason itself, not its essence, that first develops out of the need to master chaos; reason is in itself already the perception of chaos" (*H-N*, v. 2, 88).

Cohen did not, Heidegger holds, understand chaos *primordially* enough. Chaos and reason are not, as Cohen thought, externally related. They are *internally* related. Heidegger's most detailed account of the emergence of order from chaos is in his discussion of Nietzsche.

5.2. Nietzsche's Metaphysical Account of the Emergence of Knowledge from Chaos

To become master of the chaos that one is; to compel one's chaos to become form: logical, simple, unequivocal; to become mathematics, law—that is the grand ambition here.

Nietzsche, *The Will to Power* (1968b: p. 842)¹⁵

[I]n Nietzsche's determination of the essence of knowledge... we are reminded of Kant. ... Knowing, understood as schematizing, is derived from the practical life-needs, and from chaos as the condition of the possibility... of those needs.

Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, v. 3 (1991c: p. 74)

Heidegger comments on the above passage from *The Will to Power* that Nietzsche's "mediation on art" is aesthetics because it focuses on "the state of creation and enjoyment" (*H-N*, v. 1, 129, 218-220). He sees Nietzsche as applying the creationist imagery of ancient cosmogony to his account of the *genesis* of artistic meaning (hereafter meaning_A). In application to man, these ancient cosmogony concepts acquire a new "existential" meaning, which means that one can characterize man (the microcosm) with these ontological concepts. Just as the ancient cosmogonists saw the cosmos arising out of primordial chaos, Nietzsche sees meaning_A arising out of the "chaos" of human life.

Meaning_A does not, however, arise haphazardly out of that chaos. Referring to Heidegger's discussion of "The Burden [*Schweregewicht*]," from Nietzsche's *Gay Science*, where Nietzsche identifies certain weighty thoughts as

¹²Heidegger holds that thinking went downhill after Heraclitus and Parmenides (*WIP*, 53).

¹³See McDonough (2011) and (2014b)! Similar imagery is also found in Merleau-Ponty (2012: pp. 20, 30).

¹⁴Note the linkage between Nietzsche and Kant's notion of schematism and note 10 above!

¹⁵See also Krell's (1991) note to *H-N*, v. 1 (129) and Nehamas (1987: p. 221)!

the burden of the true artist, Krell (*H-N*, v. 2, note to 21) remarks,

Nietzsche and Heidegger appear to hear in [the] word [*Schwergewicht*] the related term *Schwerpunkt* (center-of-gravity), and both are acutely aware of the *ambiguity* attached to matters of “great weight,” which may stabilize us or wear us down, but which will certainly deflect us from our former trajectory (See also *W*, 153 and *LEP*, 163).

What Nietzsche refers to as “the burden” is really a new “center-of-gravity” which, by its “great weight,” deflects one from one’s mundane trajectory in life towards a more “grand style” of meaning_A. It does this by drawing one *towards* it. Nietzsche’s new “center-of-gravity” is a thought—the thought of the eternal return of the same (*H-N*, v. 2, 147)¹⁶.

Heidegger asks whether such “fleeting things as thoughts” can be centers-of-gravity? Are not the centers-of-gravity proposed by Feuerbach (“man is what he eats”) and by French and English sociologists (the *mileau*, etc.), more believable centers-of-gravity for man? Heidegger answers that it is precisely thoughts that “that determine man even more than these other things (*H-N*, v. 2, 22; See *LH*, 194). Heidegger sees Nietzsche as attempting to replace the old views that human life centers round material and social causes with the view that it centers round certain kinds of weighty thoughts. He sees Nietzsche as attempting to do, *on a metaphysical level*, something like what Copernicus did on a physical level when he replaced the old view of the cosmic center with his new view about a new center for the cosmos: “The compelling question is whether it is possible to provide beings with a new center-of-gravity” (*H-N*, v. 2, 157)—one capable of “transfiguring” human life. Nihilism arises with the recognition that “a center of gravity is missing,” and this recognition puts “the doctrine of return at the center of the whole” (*H-N*, v. 2, 159). After the “death of God” (*Nietzsche*, 1968a: Preface), the “death” of the old theological center, humanity dissipates itself in the search for one new material or social center after another, so that the lack of a genuine spiritual center is not felt. That lack is only felt when an alternative spiritual center becomes visible. Nietzsche’s doctrine of the eternal return is designed to strengthen that felt lack of a genuine center. Further, his “metaphysical” concepts of the center and of the emergence of order from chaos are connected. It is by providing a new weighty center-of-gravity that man can be propelled to create meaning_A out of the chaos which surrounds and penetrates humankind.

One might object that in the present case, as in the earlier discussions of Rilke and Cohen, Heidegger is not espousing his own notions of chaos and the center, but Nietzsche’s. After all, Heidegger criticizes Nietzsche’s views as the culmination of Western metaphysics which must be transcended (*EPTT*, 375).

Although Heidegger criticizes Nietzsche’s notions of chaos and the center, he does not totally reject them¹⁷. As in his discussion of Cohen’s and Rilke’s views (§ 4.1-4.2), Heidegger believes Nietzsche has not grasped these concepts primordially enough (*H-N*, v. 3, 73-76). Dreyfus (1993: p. 213) too points out that Heidegger is attempting to find a new center for man. Second, Heidegger criticizes Nietzsche’s notion of chaos as the worst sort of “uninhibited ‘biological’ thinking” (*H-N*, v. 3, 80), but he does so because he identifies the *more primordial* notion of chaos with one of his own most basic notions,

Here [in Nietzsche], the guiding experience, along with a number of essential guiding concepts, are already in eclipse. Chaos, *khaos*, *khainō* means “to yawn”; it signifies something that opens wide or gapes. We conceive of *khaos* in most intimate connection with the original interpretation of the essence of *alētheia* as the self-opening abyss (*H-N*, v. 2, 91).

Nietzsche has forgotten the *primordial* notion of chaos, which Heidegger links to *alētheia* (primordial truth), the “self-opening abyss,” and, with it, *Dasein*’s Being¹⁸. The foundation is now prepared for the articulation of the Heideggerian model of *Zettel 608*.

6. A Heideggerian Model of *Zettel 608*

When the word is called the mouth’s flower and blossom, we hear the sound of language rising from the earth. ...[T]he sound rings out in the resounding assembly call, which, open to the Open, makes World appear in all things. The sounding of the voice is then ... released from the perspective of the physiologi-

¹⁶Nietzsche (1968b: p. 551, note 22) also has a notion of centers-of-force that initiate motion. It is because man’s world is fractured into a chaos of warring centers of force that a *new unifying center* is required. See also Nehamas (1987: p. 75)!

¹⁷See Krell (1991a: 230-231) and Stambaugh (1973: note to 84)!

¹⁸Recall Heidegger’s remark that Cohen is incorrect that reason and chaos are only linked *externally* (§ 4.1)! See also Haas (1996: p. 126)!

cal-physical explanation...

Heidegger, “The Nature of Language” (1971f: p. 101)

Scholar: Ἀγγιβασίη

Scientist: What does it mean?

Scholar: [It] translates as “going toward.”

Heidegger, “Conversations on a Country Path” (1966b: p. 88)

Whereas **NI** reads **Z608** as a comment on the neurological *causes* of language, Heidegger begins his investigation *within* Wittgenstein’s *Angelpunkt* of our real need, with entities “which show themselves in our concern with the environment,” e.g., the “hammering with a hammer” (**BT**, H67-69). Wittgenstein (**PI**, 11, 14; **OC**, 351) even uses Heidegger’s example of the use of a hammer in a comparison with the use of words. In his later works, Heidegger focuses on poetry, works of art, the ventures of life, etc., all of which are, as Wittgenstein requires, “open to view” (**BB**, 6; **PI**, 92, 126). Not only is Heidegger’s phenomenological approach closer to Wittgenstein’s method than **NI**’s concern with neural mechanisms, but, with **Z608**, Heidegger rejects neurophysiological accounts of language production in favor of an account that emphasizes the *origins* of language (**WTL**, 101, 121-122; **CCP**, 82). Further, both Wittgenstein (**PI**, 7; **CV**, 31) and Heidegger (**H-N**, v. 3, 42; etc.) emphasize the intimate interdependence of language and practice (See **CCP**, 78-79 and Sheehan, 1993: p. 81)¹⁹.

More specifically, the interconnected images from **Z608**, motion *towards* the center, and the emergence of meaning from chaos or nothing, are present, and used as interrelated concepts, in Heidegger. The references to the center and the emergence of order from chaos in **BT**, **ER**, and **KPM** show that Heidegger employed these ideas from the beginning. His discussion of Rilke’s notion of the “unheard of center” that draws beings *towards* itself illustrates that this notion of the center is certainly unheard of by the proponents of **NI**, all of which assume, without reflection, that the center referenced in **Z608** is the neural center.

Third, just as **Z608** portrays the genesis of language, Heidegger is concerned with origins, of language, of works of art, of knowledge, etc. (**CCH**, 84-85). But Heidegger is specifically concerned with the *primordial* and *primeval* origins of language, truth, etc. (**BT**, H219, 231, 331; **OET**, 129, 137; **H-N**, v. 1, 181; **H-N**, v. 3, 165; **H-N**, v. 4, 20; **W**, 155; Hofstadter, 1971: p. xvii). Wittgenstein too routinely compares linguistic phenomena to primitive and primeval phenomena (**BB**, 17, 65; **PI**, 2, 5, 7, 146, pp. 200, 218; **Z**, 541; **CV**, 65; Monk, 1990: pp. 240, 290). Indeed, this is an important part of the point of Wittgenstein’s notion of a language game (**PI**, 7; Rhees, 1965: p. ix).

Consider, first, how one might read **S₁-S₃** employing Rilke’s notion of the center,

(**S₁**) There is, I assume, a system of impulses going out from my brain and correlated with my spoken or written thoughts. (**S₂**) But why should the *system* continue further in the direction of the center? (**S₃**) Why should this order not proceed, *sozusagen*, out of chaos.

Since Rilke, like Heidegger and Wittgenstein, has no interest in the scientific details of the neurophysiological processes that underlie language, it would be natural for him to infer that Wittgenstein’s *affirmation* in **S₁** that there is a “*System*” of impulses correlating brain states with behavior is simply making explicit that **Z608** has *nothing to do with the denial of that underlying neural system*. Since Rilke has a very different, more “spiritual” concept of the center, he would likely see **S₂** as asking why anyone would think that the aforementioned neural system takes one any closer *towards* that “unheard of [spiritual] center.” That is, he would likely see **S₂** as asking, with some consternation, why on earth would anyone think that a mere material (neural) system that correlates brain states with linguistic behavior (a system which Wittgenstein, like everyone else, admits to exist) illuminates the Being of language? Thus, Rilke would likely see **Z608** as making the point that if one wants to understand meaning_L where it is at “home” (**PI**, 116), then facts about that admitted neural system are irrelevant.

Unfortunately, Heidegger’s discussion of Rilke sheds no direct light on the other main image in **Z608**, the emergence of order from chaos. It is only in Heidegger’s Interpretation of Nietzsche (hereafter, **HIN**) that one gets a picture of *all* the key notions in **Z608** in their interrelation. How might one read **Z608** in the light of **HIN**?

First, **HIN** would likely agree with Rilke that since **S₁** simply states that since Wittgenstein is affirming, not contesting, the existence of that language-enabling neural system, Wittgenstein’s point in **Z608** must lie else-

¹⁹Fell (1992) points out correctly that one can overdo Heidegger’s emphasis on praxis.

where. Second, since Nietzsche's most important notion of the center for present purposes is the notion of a weighty thought that is able to *unify* that chaos by drawing beings *towards* it, **HIN** would likely see **S₂** (why must the system of neural impulses continue further in the direction of the center?), as asking, why would anyone think that a mere material system of neural impulses would take one any closer to the genuine *unifying center* of language? That is, **HIN** would likely see the point in **S₂** to be that if one wants to understand meaning_L in terms of its role in a unified language, facts about that neural system are, as they were for Rilke, simply irrelevant.

The key insights, however, are obtained when one combines the preceding points with **HIN**'s reading of **S₃**, the question why meaning_L cannot arise out of chaos? Recall, by way of contrast, that Augustine and Aquinas (following upon Plato) held that the order in the world must reflect a *prior* Divine order. Since Nietzsche's concept of chaos is, roughly, a cosmological notion applied to the chaos of "bodying life" (**H-N**, v. 3, 80), **HIN** would likely see **S₃** as asking why, after the "death of God", one must hold, as Augustine and Aquinas had held, *that order can only arise out of a prior order?* Why, rather, cannot the order of meaning_L arise out of the chaos of "bodying life" rather than out of some prior sublime order?

Referring to the fact that living beings need to "live" and "to be", Heidegger remarks, "[T]he horizon is not a wall that cuts man off... [It] always stands within... a seeing through to something possible that can arise [only] out of what becomes, ...hence, out of chaos" (**H-N**, v. 3, 86-87).

Indeed, the need for a unifying center to bring order from chaos is implicit in the reference to the need for a horizon. Since a horizon is a "bounding circle" surrounding the living being (at the center)²⁰, Heidegger's point is that since the living being requires order, it requires a horizon, a unifying center, that enables it to "erect itself and stand in that chaos" (**H-N**, v. 3, 86).

Since Heidegger himself understands chaos most primordially as "the self-opening abyss" that is closely connected to "the original interpretation of the essence of *alētheia*" (See § 4.2), one is sorely mistaken if one is, parochially, thinking of chaos as causal indeterminism, connectionist neural processing, Köhler's electric brain fields, or a pile of sawdust in the head. On Heidegger's view, chaos is, rather, "intimately" related to his fundamental notion of *alētheia* (primordial truth)—Heidegger's most basic theme as far back as **BT**. For Heidegger, chaos, primordially understood, is really the self-opening abyss, the self-opening nothingness, which means, roughly, that it is the abyss that opens into the Open within which beings can be.

Furthermore, since the Open is the "there" in "Being-there," which, in turn, is closely connected with Heidegger's center (§ 3.1), this suggests a novel model of the connection between the center and the chaos in **Z608**. Specifically, since Heidegger's point in **H-N**, v. 2 (p. 91) is that *the "chaos" self-opens into the Open, the clearing, the center in which beings can be*, the ordered world, on this view, does not emerge from chaos *at* the center. Rather, *the "chaos" self-opens into the Open center, the clearing, within which beings can be*.

Speaking of Heidegger's Open, Guignon (1993a: p. 13) writes, "[W]hat is most primordial is neither humans nor objects, but rather the "clearing" in which specific forms of human existence along with particular forms of equipmental context emerge-into-presence in their reciprocal interdependence".

Under "specific forms of human existence" one can include meaning_L. The proponents of **NI**, resolutely presupposing their own scientific paradigms, simply assume that **Z608** suggests that the order of meaning_L emerges from chaos *at* the (neural) center. However, **HIN** suggests a very different interpretation of Wittgenstein's expression "further in the direction of the center" from **Z608**—specifically, that **S₃** is really asking why the genuine center of meaning_L, the Open, *should not itself arise from the chaos, the self-opening abyss?* On this reading, **Z608**'s expression, to go "further in the direction of the center," is to go *towards* the Open within which beings can be (See § 2). Thus, on this reading, **S₃** is asking: why cannot "the *Angelpunkt* (center point) of our real need," the genuine "center" of meaning_L, *itself arise out of the chaos of human behavior?* **Z608** actually presents a picture, stripped of Heidegger's ontological language, of the emergence, *sozusagen*, of the centered (on man) cosmos of meaning_L, the Open "world" of meaning_L, out of the chaotic *Ganze Gewimmel* of human behavior ("bodying life"). **Z608** is a picture of the existential cosmogony of meaning_L implicit in Heidegger's *Ereignis*. But is there really any license for reading (something like) Heidegger's *Ereignis* into Wittgenstein?

First, the *Ereignis*, like **Z608**, is concerned with *origins* of language (Sheehan, 1993: p. 90). Second, just as **Z608** presents a *dynamic* picture of meaning_L production, the *Ereignis* is a dynamic picture of an "appropriating event" whereby things come to show themselves through language (**TE**, 125, 302, 309; Guignon, 1993: p. 33). Third, the *Ereignis* concerns the opening of the Open (within which beings can be) and **Z608** concerns the

²⁰OED: URL: http://etymonline.com/index.php?allowed_in_frame=0&search=horizon&searchmode=none See also **CCP** (63, 65).

movement *towards* the center (“the *Angelpunkt* of our real need”), which *is, sozusagen*, the open center wherein beings can be described, asserted to exist, desired, etc. But does Wittgenstein even have an *explicit* concept of an open? Does he ever even talk this way?

In fact, Wittgenstein stresses that “everything” must be “open to view” (*PI*, 126). One of the most telling passages, linking the notions of the center and the open, is *RFM* (V.12), “In this field, one can ask all sorts of things which, while they belong to the topic [*Sache*], still do not lead through its center [*Mitte*]. A particular series of questions leads through the center and out into the open [*Freie*]”²¹.

One must move *toward* (and through) the center to get into the open, the free [*Freie*]. Monk points out that this corresponds to one of Wittgenstein’s most fundamental *life ideals*, Wittgenstein’s ideal of “primordial life, wild life striving to erupt into the open”—even though he rarely felt himself to live up to it—is a key to understanding the purpose of his work and the direction of his life (Monk, 1990: pp. 240, 490; See also *CV*, 38).

That is, insofar as one is concerned with the sorts of philosophical issues which Wittgenstein addresses, the Open *is* “the *Angelpunkt* of our real need,” the public world in which human beings, *sozusagen*, “live, move, and have [their] being” (Rorty, 1993: p. 340)²². For principled reasons (See § 6), Wittgenstein does not employ Heidegger’s ontological language to describe the emergence of the Open, but the two pictures are significantly similar²³. Indeed, it is striking that for Heidegger too the Open is understood as the region of the *Freie* (*OET*, 303; *CTP*, 413; etc; Schalow, 2001: p. 261).

7. The Limits of the Heideggerian Model of *Zettel 608*

Language is the house of Being. In this house man dwells.

Heidegger, “Letter on Humanism” (1977f: pp. 193, 199, 213)²⁴

What we are destroying is houses of cards and . . . clearing up the ground of language on which they stand.

Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (1958: p. 118)

Although there is a great similarity between certain of Heidegger’s views and those in *Z608*, there are also stark differences—even with regard to the views claimed to be similar in the preceding sections. Several key differences are discussed here.

Let it be assumed that *Z608* is a figurative description of the *Ereignis*, the emergence of the Open, the “center-of-gravity” (*RFM*, III.15) of a language, within which beings can be present. But Heidegger claims, not merely that the *Ereignis* is a primordial opening, but that it is an opening of primordial *truth* (Haugeland, 2013: pp. 17-18), and though Wittgenstein does refer to an open realm of the free he does *not* characterize it in terms of primordial *truth*. The reasons for this difference are profound.

From his earliest writings, Wittgenstein holds that, strictly speaking, there are no philosophical propositions (*TLP*, 6.53-6.54). He retains this view, in modified form, in his later philosophy (*PI*, 128). This is why, when asked to give an explanation of meaning_L, he replies that he “can adduce only exterior facts about language” (*PI*, 120). One can describe *facts* about human instincts, the natural history of man, etc., but *it is in principle impossible to describe “the opening of the Open.”* The point in *PI* (120) is that any explanation he would give is necessarily given from *within* the Open, and, therefore, cannot go outside the Open to describe its genesis. Whereas Heidegger takes it as among his primary tasks to describe the opening of the Open, Wittgenstein holds that this is *simply beyond the limits of language*.

This is why *Z608* does not claim that meaning_L may arise out of chaos or nothingness, but only that it may, “*sozusagen*,” do so. Because Wittgenstein sees this so clearly, he is, in attempting to achieve philosophical illumination about the genesis of language (of the Open), limited to making certain kinds of *comparisons* from *within* the open. In *Z608* he *compares* the production of language to the genesis of the ancient cosmos. This comparison is useful because it helps to liberate one from the causal-scientific paradigm (*PI*, p. 193; *CV*, 37;

²¹“*Frei*” can be translated as free, open, and “*ins Freie*” into “into the open” (*GED*, 99).

²²The original is from *Acts 17:28* of the Christian Bible.

²³Rorty (1992: p. 220) might deny that the later Heidegger uses ontological language, holding that the ontic-ontological distinction tends to be replaced by that between the non-primordial and the primordial. However, the implication remains in the later distinction that the more primordial phenomena disclose something ontologically fundamental. The language of events, emergence, openings, etc., *is* ontological language whether one wants to admit it or not. See, for example, Schrag (1968: pp. 118-125 and note 7)!

²⁴See also *WTL* (135).

Z610). But Wittgenstein does not *literally* believe that meaning_L emerges out of chaos (either in the cranium or elsewhere). There is and can, for Wittgenstein, be no *theory* of the emergence of meaning_L, let alone a theory of the emergence of primordial truth²⁵. For Wittgenstein, the best that one can do us provide a “quiet weighing of linguistic facts” (Z447)—and that is precisely what he does in Z608 when he *compares* the genesis of language with the genesis of a cosmos from “chaos”.

Although Heidegger too is not stating *theories* in the ordinary sense of the word, neither can his method can be mistaken for a quiet weighing of linguistic facts. Heidegger does philosophy in the grand style of Heraclitis, Parmenides, Hegel, etc. As such, he often refers to *Dasein*’s destiny (*BT*, H56, H384-386; *TAP*, 5; *WPF*, 93-94, 142; *WCT*, 84, 121, 166; *W*, 155; *LIP*, 196-197 etc.), the destiny of Being (*LH*, 208, 210-211), etc. Wittgenstein, by contrast, from his earliest work, believes that one *must* pass over such matters in silence (*TLP*, 7). Thus, Wittgenstein disparages philosophical views that the world *must* be a certain way: “‘Of, course, that’s how it must be!’ It is as though you have understood the creator’s purpose. You have grasped the system” (*CV*, 26).

Note that Wittgenstein here employs creation imagery, as he does in Z608, but he disparages *this* use of creation stories because it lacks the crucial qualifier: “*sozusagen*.” Whereas Heidegger is concerned with “the history of Being,” Wittgenstein has a much more limited conception of philosophy: “Working in philosophy—like work in architecture—is more a working on oneself... On one’s way of seeing things” (*CV*, 16). Wittgenstein pursues the more humble task of attempting to “arrive at the notions of common sense” (*CV*, 44).

Wittgenstein does *not*, therefore, make *substantive* suggestions about the ultimate center (the purpose, the goal) of *Dasein*’s existence. It is foreign to Wittgenstein to declare, on the basis of some “philosophical” view, that certain ethnic groups stand in the center of human history²⁶. By contrast, Heidegger has no problem declaring that the fate of the earth depends on the fate of Europe and that the “historical *Dasein*” of the German *Volk* lies at the “center” [*Mitte*] of the West (*IM*, 41, 44, 52). Heidegger here, giving the notion of the center a political interpretation (See also *WCT*, 29, 38), links the “center” of the West, the German *Volk*, with the destiny of all humankind—a destiny which somehow derives from Being itself: “Being’s poem, just begun, is man” (*TAP*, 4). The contrast could not be clearer. Whereas Heidegger is concerned with disclosing “the house of Being,” Wittgenstein is only concerned with knocking down the “houses of cards” that obstruct common sense (see epigraph above).

Since Heidegger is prepared, even eager, to make substantive comments on *Dasein*’s destiny, he explicitly interprets the center in those substantive terms. Commenting on Nietzsche’s view that a living being “must ... come to stand in the chaos,” Heidegger writes,

For all being intent on constancy is fundamentally a constant setting before oneself of something *aimed* at; it is the stake driven in the middle of the target, “purposes,” the purpose (*H-N*, v. 3, 100).

Krell (notes to *H-N*, v. 3, 100) comments, “*Der Zweck*, ‘purpose,’ derives from the Middle High German *zwec*, a wooden peg or plug placed as the ‘bull’s eye’ at the center of a target. From the fifteenth century onward it is equated with the word *das Zeil*, something ‘aimed at’, the target, end, or aim”.

Since Heidegger holds that *Dasein*’s concepts of the physical world are parasitic on a concept of “a context of involvements directed towards accomplishing things (Guignon, 1993: p. 11), i.e., purposes, and if these purposes can be referred to higher purposes, and those to yet higher ones, until one reaches some ultimate *zwec*, an ultimate *center* of human striving, then all of *Dasein*’s concepts, including, presumably, those of physics, biology, race, morality, etc., are derivative from and parasitic on that single overarching *zwec*: “When thought’s courage stems from the bidding of Being, then destiny’s language thrives” (*TAP*, 5)²⁷.

Whereas Heidegger employs the language of cosmogony in order to conceptualize *Dasein*’s Being, Wittgenstein employs such language and imagery only as *objects of comparison*, as *similes* (*CV*, 19), in order to achieve the more modest goal of *conceptual* clarity. The major differences between Wittgenstein and Heidegger, which exist side by side with the striking similarities, derive from their very different notions of the philosopher and what they can hope to accomplish, and these derive from *their very different views about the limits of language*. To be sure, Heidegger does acknowledge the limits of language, “[W]e human beings remain committed to and

²⁵See McDonough (2006: Chap’s 3, 4 & § 10.1) for an account of Heidegger’s emergentism!

²⁶The present author considers it likely that Wittgenstein would regard the very idea as repugnant—perhaps akin to a sin of pride. See *CV*, 26) and Malcolm (1970: p. 60) on the significance of Wittgenstein’s choice of Nestor’s remark as a motto for *PI*!

²⁷See also *WTL*, 133; *LIP*, 196-8; *TT*, 37! If, however, one believes that *Dasein*’s destiny derives from Being, it is easy to (mis)conceptualize peoples, races, genders, etc., as Heidegger does in *IM*, in accord with one’s view of that destiny. See Krell (1991a: pp. xx-xxiv).

within the being of language, and can never step out of it and look at it from somewhere else” (*WTL*, 134).

However, as the author of *TLP* eventually realized, it is one thing to acknowledge the limits of language; it is quite something else to remain consistent with that insight (See *TLP*, 6.54 and Matar, 2009: § 2.4). Thus, admitting that “we can’t really describe what we have named”, Heidegger’s scholar in *CCP* (67), which many take to represent Heidegger himself, nonetheless concludes: “Nevertheless, it lets itself be named, and being named, it can be thought about.”²⁸

The present paper does *not* claim that Wittgenstein and Heidegger have precisely the same notions of the center, the open, the arising of order from chaos, etc. The differences between the two are too great for such a claim. The claims are rather that there is a remarkable analogy between their respective views that enable one to give an illuminating Heideggerian model of Z608 (one far closer to Wittgenstein’s aim in Z608 than the *impossible NI*), and that Heidegger’s and Wittgenstein’s relevant passages are both sufficiently similar, *and sufficiently different*, to facilitate a desirable “fruitful cross pollination” between the two traditions (Braver, 2012: p. 2). The breadth of Heidegger’s poetic vision and encyclopedic knowledge of the history of philosophy and the relative analytical clarity and attention to detail in Wittgenstein’s methodology complement each other such that each can help to illuminate the other.

Part of this illumination comes out in the criticisms each would make of the other. If Heidegger were permitted one criticism of Wittgenstein’s picture in Z608 it would likely be that even if the “happening” of primordial truth is “beyond the limits of language”, one has no choice but to attempt, by whatever means available, to “disclose” the emergence of the Open. He might add that in his later works he abandons his early “ontological” terminology and begins to emphasize the importance of poetic language for thinking: “All reflective thinking is poetry and all poetry... is a kind of thinking” (*WTL*, 136; See also Geiman, 2001: p. 181 and Langan, 1971: pp. 107-129).

If Wittgenstein were permitted just one critique of Heidegger’s account of the *Ereignis*, it would likely be that Heidegger too has been seduced by language. For even though Heidegger acknowledges the limits of language, he continues to violate those limits because “[I]n so far as people think they can see the limits of human understanding, they believe of course that they can see beyond these” (*CV*, 15). Specifically, Wittgenstein might well say that Heidegger’s description of the opening of an Open, a “world” in which beings can be present, is simply a mythological way of referring to the “world” of meaning_L. For is it not, in ordinary commonsense terms, by virtue of one’s participation in the “world” meaning_L that beings are “present” to human beings?

Which is correct? Rorty (1993: p. 353) thinks he knows: “Heideggerese is only Heidegger’s gift to us, not Being’s gift to Heidegger.” Heideggerese is only one more language game, a very interesting one, but not a gift from Being to humankind. However, Wittgenstein’s quasi-Kantian answer (see Kant, 1996: Avii), that Reason has an intrinsic tendency to overstep its limits and demand answers to questions it cannot answer, suggests an intriguing possibility, that the opposition between a more sober and modest tradition (of the sort one finds in some Anglo-American philosophers) and a more speculative and daring tradition (of the sort one finds in certain Continental philosophers), each of whom may have a tendency to hold the other in some contempt, might reflect a fundamental dichotomy in the human mind. Could it be that these two very different ways of attempting to say something very similar, Heidegger’s account of the *Ereignis* and Wittgenstein’s Z608, reflect two fundamentally different but *complimentary* traits of the human mind, one more “Continental” and poetic, the other more “analytic” and scientifically sensitive, that arise in dealing with the simultaneous necessity, and impossibility, of saying what cannot be said²⁹?

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²⁸The teacher in that conversation, raises the specter of *dialetheias*, according to which some contradictions are true, and adds that “we both were, and yet were not,” outside that which regions (*CCP*, 72, 75). For an account of *dialetheias* see Priest (2009: § 2.2)!

²⁹See note 28 above.

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