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The Convergent Conceptions of Being in Mainstream Analytic and Postmodern Continental Philosophy

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Abstract

There is ultimately a very close convergence between the conceptions of being in widely recurrent elements of both mainstream Anglo-American philosophy and mainstream postmodern Continental philosophy. One characteristic idea often drawn upon in Anglo-American or analytic philosophy is that we establish what has meaning (at all or as such) and so what we can say about what is, by making evident the limits of sense or what simply cannot be meant. A characteristic idea in Continental philosophy of being is that being emerges through contrast and interplay with what it is not, with what has no being at all and so is beyond sense. The two traditions consequently approach and conceive being in significantly related ways, either through the lack of meaning that establishes the defining boundaries of what is, or through what is without being and beyond sense. As a result, what the Continental tradition gets at with "the meaning of being as such and in general," and how it gets at it, has much in common with what the Anglo-American tradition gets at, and how it gets at it, by establishing "what can be meaningfully said."

Keywords: analytic philosophy, Anglo-American philosophy, being, Continental philosophy

"There are then no questions left, and this itself is the answer. . . . There are, indeed, things that cannot be put into words. They *make themselves manifest*."

Wittgenstein (1961, 73, nos. 6.52, 6.522)

"As Saying, the nature of language is the appropriating showing which disregards precisely itself, in order to free that which is shown, to its authentic appearance. . . . Silence corresponds to . . . the stillness of appropriating-showing Saying."

Heidegger (1971, 131)

In the postmodern Continental tradition of philosophy, a prominent strand of the mainstream positions is that the idea of being as such and in general is, in a critically re-considered form, meaningful and fundamental. In contrast, in the Anglo-American analytic tradition of philosophy, a prominent strand of the mainstream positions is that we cannot sensibly or meaningfully talk about—we simply cannot attach a meaning to—such a notion in general. Instead, we can only talk about localized senses of being as such, senses that need have nothing in common with all the indefinite variety of other senses occurring in other contexts of thought and practice. These localized senses of being are variously couched in terms of "essence" or of what is "internally related to" or "belongs to the concept of" the matter at issue. I aim to show, however, that there is ultimately a very close convergence between the two conceptions of being, and that in these apparently conflicting strands both traditions can often be taken to be expressing exactly what the Continental tradition is getting at with "the meaning of being as such

and in general" or, equivalently, what the Anglo-American tradition is getting at by delineating the limits and so the content of "what can be intelligibly said."

While the convergence I shall discuss applies to both Anglo-American and Continental traditions in general, I shall focus mainly on Wittgenstein and Heidegger. Although they are certainly not otherwise representative of most of the standpoints in their general traditions, and Wittgenstein in particular is largely marginal to much contemporary Anglo-American philosophy, it is helpful to focus on them in exploring this topic for two reasons. First, as I shall show, within their respective general traditions there is a widely found and substantial overlap with their formulations of the particular issues I shall discuss here. This overlap is partly a result of the extensive early influence of these two thinkers, and partly of independent developments of thought in each tradition that have arrived at related insights. When I discuss Wittgenstein, I shall give a variety of examples of his overlap with other Anglo-American thinkers in the relevant respects. I shall give fewer and briefer examples of the analogous overlap of Heidegger with other Continental philosophers, since his relevance is already widely acknowledged in that tradition, even in many cases where philosophers are strongly opposed to fundamental features of his thinking. The aspects of his thinking that I shall discuss are his exploration of the ontological significance of non-being and of silence, and these or related themes are respected and centrally relied on by a very wide variety of Continental thinkers. These philosophers include, for instance, Maurice Blanchot, Gilles Deleuze, Jean-Luc Nancy, and Giorgio Agamben. The second reason it is appropriate to focus on Wittgenstein, in particular, is that he is one of the very few philosophers to take as an

explicit theme the strategy of working with the issue of "what cannot be sensibly said," which is my focus here.

One major obstacle to seeing any convergence between the two traditions is that they rely on very different vocabularies and strategies of approach to allowing insights to emerge. These terminological and procedural differences make it seem as though it is clear that these traditions have no common conception of being, and often even as though *neither* side is discussing being at all. I shall try to show that these differences in vocabulary and approach nonetheless embody a convergence in their conceptions of being. One important effect of these differences is that, while discussions of ontology are common in the Anglo-American tradition, Heideggerians typically see that kind of discussion as begging (or forgetting) the question of the sense or meaning of being itself. They see it, instead, as conceiving being only as the being *of* some particular being or range of beings, while presupposing various unquestioned conceptions of being itself or in general. I shall try to show that this is often only apparently the case, and that in Wittgenstein's work often explicitly, and in the widespread practice of analytic philosophers mostly implicitly, the sense or meaning of being itself is exactly what is at issue and what is explored.

It is quite possible that many or most analytic philosophers themselves would not think of or express what they are doing as involving a concern for the meaning of being itself. As I shall try to show, however, in both traditions the thinking of being is indirect and paradoxical, proceeding via what cannot directly be said and even what ultimately cannot be said at all. Consequently it would not be surprising from the perspective of either framework if the way in which philosophers, in exploring being, directly articulate

and think about what they are doing does not accurately match what they are in fact doing. What is more, for the same reason, it would not be surprising even if one way of exploring being is precisely *by* not directly trying to do so, and consequently if it is accurately expressed as not doing so! In other words, it would be understandable if philosophers in *both* traditions were often misled about the real relation, in contrast with the directly expressed relation, between what they and their counterparts are thinking and saying about what they are doing and what they are actually doing.

I would suggest that the version of this mistake on the part of many postmodern Continental philosophers is that when they are talking about being itself and in general they think they are not often also (appropriately and necessarily) talking about clearly and definitively established particular being, about which there is no paradox and nothing further to be said. As I shall discuss, that this paradoxical approach includes non-paradoxical elements is part of its character as a paradox. Roughly, I am suggesting that analytic thinkers tend to overlook the role of logical paradox in their approach, while continental thinkers tend to overlook its paradoxically necessary inclusion of straightforward logical simplicity (they recognize the role of paradox, but tend to see the paradox itself non-paradoxically).

The intelligibility of this paradox of proceeding on the basis of reference to what cannot be said directly or even what cannot be said at all requires some comment, and I shall discuss it in the first section below.

My discussion will proceed as follows. In the first section, I shall offer a weak and strong version of the paper's thesis, and in that context discuss the paradox of proceeding by means of reference to what cannot be said. In the second section, I shall

outline a similarity between the relevant strands of the two traditions consisting in their shared differences with classical or traditional conceptions of being. In the third section I shall discuss the relevant Anglo-American approach to being with a view to its points of contact with the relevant Continental approach. I shall focus centrally on Wittgenstein but shall give a variety of examples of Anglo-American philosophizing that will show that he is representative with respect to the conception of being at issue. In the fourth section, I shall discuss the relevant Continental position, focusing centrally on Heidegger and noting the points of convergence with the Anglo-American conception. In the brief fifth section, I shall discuss another dimension of convergence implicit in the previous discussion. In the equally brief concluding section, I shall offer some reflections on the implications of this convergence in the conception of being for the relations between the two traditions of philosophy.

1. A Strong and Weak Version of the Thesis

There is a strong and a weak version of this paper's thesis. The weak version is that the convergence of conceptions of being between the two traditions simply exists, and leaves open whether this shared conception is legitimate or even intelligible. The primary aim of this paper is to defend the weak thesis. If this thesis is accepted, it does have significant consequences. The reader who rejects the relevant conception of being in one school must then equally reject it in her/his own, or, if s/he regards the conception in her own tradition as legitimate, s/he must equally respect the conception in the other tradition. In other words, the debate (or lack of debate) would need to shift from conflict between the two traditions. It would have to shift, for example, to more or less parallel conflicts

between conceptions of being or of its treatment within each tradition. It would also have to shift to the need to develop new perspectives on what one's own approach is doing, since what is essentially the same thing is equally embodied in what seems intuitively to be a deeply conflicting approach.

The strong version of the thesis is that this converged-upon conception of being is both intelligible and legitimate. While this is not the primary thesis of the paper, I believe it is right, and have defended it in detail elsewhere (see, for example, Barris 2003, 2006, 2008, 2009). As I have noted, however, this shared conception involves the paradox of proceeding on the basis of reference to what cannot be said. Since this procedure immediately seems incoherently self-contradictory, it will be helpful to give a brief account of why it might not be so.[1] I shall therefore try to show in the rest of this section that, while this paradox is in fact self-contradictory, it is at least not incoherently so, or (perhaps more irritatingly) that it is not entirely incoherently so. There is an extensive and growing literature on the admissibility of self-contradiction in both formal and informal contexts, or, in other words, on its not automatically or simply entailing incoherence, so this should give me some provisional warrant for the sense of these formulations.[2]

First, as I shall discuss in more detail in the main body of the paper, it is arguable that it is the commitment to making sense itself that requires that we move beyond the limits of sense. It is arguable, for example, that if we rely on the idea of sense, we need to give an account of that idea itself; otherwise everything that rests on it is ultimately based on unexamined dogma. But we cannot do so by taking the constraints of our idea of sense for granted. These are precisely what we need to account for, and doing so in their own terms is viciously circular. Consequently, making sense itself requires us to move beyond

the limits of sense and so of what can be meaningfully said. Versions and analogues of this argument have been made in both traditions (for example, Nagel 1979; Derrida 1981b, 6).

I grant that this is a highly controversial kind of argument. Kant is perhaps the most famous of a long line of philosophers who have denied its legitimacy. My aim here is only to show that the door is not yet closed on it, and that as a result it is at least arguable that the self-contradictory reference to what is beyond sense is itself grounded in the working of sense. If that is so, then some kinds of self-contradiction involved in referring to what is beyond sense or meaning are not simply incoherent, but are required by the working of sense or, equivalently in this context, of coherence itself.

Second (and as, again, I shall argue in more detail in the main body of the paper), while it is true that a discussion that relies on reference to what is unsayable will turn out in the end to be wholly unsayable and so nonsense, this is also true of statements about the results of that process. In other words, although references to what cannot be said cancel themselves into nonsense, so do statements *that* they cancel themselves into nonsense. As Hilary Putnam notes, "if we agree that it is *unintelligible* to say, 'We sometimes succeed in comparing our language and thought with reality as it is in itself,' then we should realize that it is also unintelligible to say 'It is *impossible* to stand outside and compare our thought and the world.' . . . [I]n this case to say that it is impossible to do '*p*'. . . involves a '*p*' which is unintelligible" (1994, 299). Similarly, Cora Diamond argues that, "The very idea of the philosophical perspective from which we consider as sayable *or* as unsayable necessities that underlie ordinary being . . . : that very perspective itself is the illusion" (1991, 197).

Diamond is representative of a recent literature on Wittgenstein that takes this self-cancellation of sense in a very different direction from my own proposal here, as instead leading us to see the ultimate problems of accounting for sense as never really having arisen at all, so that there is no paradox (see, for example, Conant 1993; Crary and Read 2000). But I want to add two further considerations to those of that literature.

The first consideration is that, as I have already noted, it is arguable that the process of making sense itself requires us to undertake this discussion that results in our recognition that this same discussion is really nonsense. In other words, this process of discussion and argument is not simply dismissible as all nonsense, since it is rooted in the constraints of sense itself. Now, if the reader will bear with me for a moment, what we come to recognize is that it *is* entirely nonsense; but this is required by the constraints of sense itself. This is a self-contradiction, but it is a self-contradiction of the arguably valid kind embodied in the Liar's Paradox.[3] It is arguable that it is a valid expression of the working of logic or sense, and that we therefore cannot dismiss the reasoning that leads to it, but simply have to live with it.

Among other things, this contradictory co-existence of sense and nonsense helps to explain why the literature of which Diamond is representative needs to exist: presumably even in that view *something* that makes sense is happening in this discussion of what cannot be discussed.

The second consideration is that whether any particular apparent statement and so the discussion that refers to it are in fact outside the bounds of sense is not self-evidently given from the start, but needs to be *established*. In each case it must first be established that the statement or statements in question are nonsense, and only then does the sense of

the discussion definitively turn out to cancel itself. There is therefore a process that follows a certain order or sequence of different phases, by which the fact of this nonsense, or, perhaps better, this "emerging as nonsense," is articulated. It is not, then, simply that none of it can be said, but that, because we need to establish that it cannot be said, up to a certain point we do have something to say, or, better, something to entertain or conceive the possibility of saying. Only at that point does it turn out that this was a mistaken view of what we were doing, and that the whole discourse is not conceivable after all. But we do not reach that point without the phase in which the discussion has conceivable sense.

Diamond argues that the self-cancellation of a discussion that proceeds with reference to what is beyond sense also cancels itself even with respect to being regarded as nonsense: it leaves nothing to be said at all. In the light of these additional considerations, however, I propose that this making nonsense even of the discussion's own making nonsense (or this self-cancellation even of its own self-cancellation) instead leaves some kind of room for sense and even for the original sense of the terms and connections of the discussion.

At the start of this section, I qualified the self-contradiction this paradox involves as at least "not entirely incoherent." I do not think this paradox can be expressed—or occur—completely without elements or moments of incoherence. But I also think that we cannot successfully deny the re-emergence in it of some kind of coherent sense. That is, the paradox cannot be expressed or occur entirely without coherence, either. How we conceive the precise ways in which its incoherence and coherence emerge in relation to

each other, or the nature of their co-existence, is another matter. But that both exist is, I think, clearly arguable.

As I shall discuss below, what does fully resolve the paradox is that at a certain point it shifts itself into complete irrelevance, and in that way does become entirely meaningless. But as long as the paradox and the issues of being that produce it are at issue, as long as they still play a role, I believe that elements or moments of incoherence cannot be completely eliminated from the account that role requires—and elements of coherence cannot be either.

Although an account of precisely how this relation of sense and nonsense works, and of what kind of sense it is exactly that is retained, is beyond the scope of this paper, the more detailed discussion in the following sections should offer the beginnings of some possible answers to these questions.

2. Shared Differences from the Classical Tradition

Both the Anglo-American and the postmodern Continental traditions regard the question of being as requiring treatment in very different ways from those characteristic of the mainstream Western tradition preceding the twentieth century. They do both focus on many of the dimensions traditionally belonging to the issue of being as such, but they also reject various equally traditional dimensions of that issue as not properly cogent or meaningful. As a result of this alteration of the issue's context, the retained dimensions of the topic of being are drastically transformed in much of their immediate content, and also in their relations to each other and to the particular existing beings whose being they help to articulate.[4]

One way of identifying this transformation is that both contemporary traditions do not regard being as a special kind of thing or entity. Instead, they both think of being as distinguished from any kind of existing thing, in that it is or accounts for *what it is to be* a thing, or to exist as a thing, at all. Differently expressed, both traditions regard the nature of the existence of particular things, including the immediate fact or given of that existence or that being "there" (of what might equally be described as "presence"), as among the realities that need to be accounted for. Consequently, in both traditions, the immediate or given existence or presence of things is a derivative dimension of reality that needs to be accounted for by something deeper or in some sense prior. And this deeper source or reality therefore necessarily involves what is not, or is not simply, either a thing or even, more subtly, its existence or presence.

The Heideggerian standpoint, for example, stresses that what exists or has presence can only emerge in the first place if there is something for it to contrast with. The only contrast with "what is," however, is "what is not," or "nothing." As a result, what accounts for existence (or for the meaning that existence has), and therefore what constitutes or delivers the being of existence, involves "the nothing." And in the relevant Anglo-American tradition, one way of accounting for a thing's existence as the thing it is, is in terms of the role the thing plays in a form of life, the place it has among a great variety of kinds of action and institution. This kind of "role" and "place" within a system of multifarious activities and categories of things, although it occurs with reference to existing things, is not itself an existing thing, not something that is "present."

A very visible separation of ultimate (or "most serious") reality from immediately given existence or presence appears in Anglo-American work like Raimond Gaita's,

where what "reality" gets at is divorced from what "ontology" traditionally gets at altogether. So, for example,

> If someone were to say that I should . . . declare whether I believe evil to be a reality or whether I do not, then I would say . . . [t]here cannot be an independent metaphysical inquiry into the 'reality' of good and evil which would underwrite or undermine the most serious of our ways of speaking. I would say: now you may see why someone should speak of the reality of evil, and now you may see why the same person might say that Good is the only reality. We are likely to misunderstand . . . if we try to press him into acknowledging that he is contradicting himself. It would be better, at least in ethics, to banish the word 'ontology'. (2004, 190)

On the other hand, as I have noted, in both traditions what in some sense does not involve existence (or what is at least partially "not there" or not the kind of thing that is simply "present") is taken to *account* for what exists or is present, and to do so in the sense of *constituting* it (making it what it is) or being its *being.* As a result, what does not involve existence is not simply fundamentally contrasted with existence or presence, but is also essential or internal to it. In both traditions there is consequently an inescapable logical paradox at the basis of thought. This kind of paradox is ubiquitously evident in Heidegger and many later Continental thinkers, and is famously explicit in much of Wittgenstein's work, both early and late, for example in the form of his treating his own statements as therapeutic nonsense. The epigraphs to this paper illustrate the respective versions of this kind of paradox. I shall discuss the presence and nature of this kind of paradox further in both connections below.

One result of this shared difference from the classical tradition is that both contemporary traditions have very different vocabularies from that older tradition for expressing the issue of being. In fact, each contemporary tradition has a great variety of these different vocabularies. In the Anglo-American tradition, there are, for example, non-reductive and other materialisms, internal and other realisms, nominalism, the extensional range of variables, and so on. In the Continental tradition, there are enownment, *différance*, singularity, and many more. These many different vocabularies for being make it even harder to see the convergence between the traditions.

Another result of their shared difference from the classical tradition is that, as I shall try to make clear below, both schools of thought also often at least partially *show* or *enact* their insights into these issues in the form of types of strategies or performance, rather than simply or exclusively treating them as propositional contents that can be expressed in declarative statements or engaged with in straightforward arguments. Here too, the two schools employ a variety of very different types of strategies from each other, and this adds to the difficulty in seeing the convergence between them.

3. Characteristic Elements of Anglo-American Philosophy of Being

The relevant strand of the mainstream analytic positions has come about partly through the influence of Wittgensteinian arguments and those of "ordinary language" philosophy, and partly through equivalents of those arguments in other movements of thought like, for example, pragmatism. These arguments converge on and work with the idea that our attempts to identify being as such, in general and across all contexts, fail to achieve sense for the words they are using.[5] This kind of argument is only one among many

argumentative resources in this or any philosophical tradition (it is even only one among many resources for Wittgenstein). But it is a recurrent and pervasive resource in the Anglo-American tradition, and the way it is most typically taken up involves a definite, positive conception of being.

As I shall illustrate shortly, Wittgenstein is widely representative in insisting that "we are under the illusion that what is sublime, what is essential, about our investigation consists in its grasping *one* comprehensive essence" (1967, 79e, no. 444). To get past this illusion, "When philosophers use a word—'knowledge,' 'being,' 'object' . . . —and try to grasp the *essence* of the thing, one must always ask oneself: is the word ever actually used in this way in the language game which is its original home?" The results of this kind of question are "the uncovering of one or another piece of plain nonsense" produced by disregarding "the limits of language" (1958, 48e, nos. 116, 119). As Nicholas Gier comments, for Wittgenstein, establishing the ultimate nature of the color red, for example, "reaches its end in the shiny bright red of the football uniform, the woolly red of the carpet, and the rustic red of fall leaves. Like Heidegger, Wittgenstein recognizes the limits of the 'hermeneutical circle,' that fact and essence are inextricably bound in *Lebensformen* [forms of life]" (1981, 109, insertion added).

This does not eliminate the idea of the being as such, or the essence, of things and events in particular types of context. As Wittgenstein also insists, "*Essence* [*Wesen*] is expressed by grammar" (1958, 116e, no. 371), and "Philosophy as the custodian of grammar can in fact grasp the essence of the world, . . . in the rules for . . . language which exclude nonsensical combinations of signs" (1975, 85). And it is certainly arguable within the Anglo-American context at large that we have use for expressions like, for

example, “caring for someone for who they are” in contrast with caring about them for the sake of some specific quality or role they have.

Instead of eliminating the idea of being as such, then, these arguments show that there is nothing meaningful to say about the being of things beyond the specific contexts in which a particular issue or enquiry about a thing’s being arises. *Within* a particular context, on the other hand, the meanings of any relevant questions are decided by the limitations of the context. (As Staten [1984] notes, both Wittgenstein and Derrida show that “context” itself has a meaning whose limits cannot simply be settled [e.g., 123]. As I argue in general, however, this concern too comes to cancel itself: its meaning in turn is also not simply and consistently settled.) Consequently, the criteria or standards are given for pursuing those questions as far as they will go while still having any meaning. That is, the means are given for establishing definitive answers to those questions or for establishing definitively that they have no answers. (This last is also a definite answer: it is coming to know that there is no answer, in contrast with not knowing what the answer is, or whether or not there is an answer.) As Wittgenstein comments, “If a question can be framed at all, it is also *possible* to answer it” (1961, 73, no. 6.5).

This kind of argument sets out to *demonstrate* that the meanings of questions are limited to the relevant contexts. It is not that we just come to the point of not thinking anything about “being across all contexts,” but that because we have shown the limits beyond which sense fails, we *have reason* not to, we have *established* and so *know* that this is the right thing to do. Putting this together with the idea that we can find definitive answers within particular contexts, then, we can justifiably say that in a particular context we grasp what is involved in the very meaning of a thing—that is, what is involved in the

thing's simply being that thing, or in its essence—and that we grasp this without qualification, because no relevant questions beyond that context are meaningful. In other words, the notion of essence or being here gets at the same thing as what the alternative tradition means by "being as such" and by "*absolute* being."

This result is not yet the same as what the Continental tradition means by the "question of the *meaning* of being as such," or being in general in its own right, in contrast with particular beings. But, in this and the next section, I aim to show that the process or strategy by which this strand of the Anglo-American tradition establishes being as such in each case is part of the result in which it concludes, and that the combination of process and result *is* an engagement with what the Continental tradition means by the question of the meaning of being as such and in general.

Wittgenstein himself sometimes says more or less explicitly that we can talk about what absolutely is. "'Put it here'—indicating the place with one's finger—that is giving an *absolute* spatial position" (1967, 123e, no. 713). Further, as he points out very influentially in *On Certainty* (1969), there are some beliefs that our knowing necessarily relies on (not the same beliefs at all times or in all contexts, and so not a traditional "foundation"), which we therefore do not and cannot know, since any knowing *presupposes* them: but where we cannot know, we also cannot doubt. Instead, these beliefs simply "hold fast" for us. For example, he writes, "I should like to say: Moore does not *know* what he asserts he knows, but it stands fast for him, as also for me; regarding it as absolutely solid is part of our *method* of doubt and enquiry" (22e, no. 151). Even "the game of doubting itself presupposes certainty" (18e, no. 115).

This absoluteness and certainty occur within and on the basis of a limited context of sense. Wittgenstein argues that "the *truth* of certain empirical propositions belongs to our frame of reference" (12e, no. 83), and not to those propositions outside of their actual context:

> all confirmation and disconfirmation of a hypothesis takes place already within a system. And this system is not a more or less arbitrary and doubtful point of departure for all our arguments: no, it belongs to the essence [*Wesen*] of what we call an argument. The system is not so much the point of departure, as the element in which arguments have their life. (16e, no. 105)

In fact, even the notion of being in general, across contexts, can have a sense here, since the fact that one can arrive at this kind of recognition of being as such in a particular context is one that applies to all particular contexts. *What* is referred to as being as such in each of those contexts is unique to that context and occasion of enquiry; but *that there is* the being as such of something in each context, and *what it means to refer to* that something itself as such, is the same for all contexts. That there really is an essence or being as such (in contrast with, say, only a conceptual confusion about the subject of the enquiry) in each case, and precisely what is meant by this, would still have to be newly and uniquely established in each particular case; but *this need and process* are also part of what is the same in each case.[6]

The strategy of establishing what positively is, via the route of establishing the limits beyond which sense stops being made in considering the topic at issue, is recurrent throughout Anglo-American philosophy. I shall now give a variety of brief examples to illustrate the common presence of this strategy.

Although Peter Winch is a neo-Wittgensteinian philosopher, he offers a helpful first example because, among other things, he illustrates the wildly misleading character of the relevant vocabularies in this context. Winch argues for the fundamental importance of epistemology to philosophical enquiry. What he means by "epistemology," however, is not an account of knowledge and how we get it, but "the question regarding the nature and intelligibility of reality" (2008, 17). The philosophical concern with "the elucidation of a concept," Winch writes, is "designed to throw light on the question how far reality is intelligible" (10-11). And "whereas the scientist investigates . . . *particular* real things and processes, the philosopher is concerned with the nature of reality as such and in general" (8). These concerns are exactly what Heidegger refers to as asking the question of being. At the start of *Being and Time* (1962), Heidegger sets out his aim as to "raise anew *the question of the meaning [Sinn] of Being,*" and later in the book insists that we can only adequately ask the question "What does it signify that Being 'is'? . . . if the meaning of Being and the full scope of the understanding of Being have in general been clarified. Only then can one also analyse primordially what belongs to the concept of a science *of Being as such*"(1, 272).

With respect to the way in which the sense of things is positively established through reference to the limits of sense and intelligible enquiry, Winch notes that "the elucidation of a concept [which, we have seen, is designed to clarify the intelligibility of reality] is, to a large extent, the clearing up of linguistic confusions" (2008, 10, insertion added). That is, it consists in establishing where our talk about an issue has violated its own meanings and so its intelligibility, in order to show perspicuously (to borrow one of Wittgenstein's favored terms) what by contrast is essential to the sense of the issue.

Heidegger makes a related suggestion, writing in his later period that "what is obvious in the genuine sense is only what by itself precludes further inquiry as impossible, in such a way that thereby clarity reigns concerning the intelligibility of the obviousness" (1994, 32).

Donald Davidson, as part of the discussion in his well-known essay rejecting the idea of "conceptual schemes" that shape or organize the world for us, argues as follows: "We cannot attach a clear meaning to the notion of organizing a single object (the world, nature etc.) unless that object is understood to contain or consist in other objects. . . . If you are told not to organize the shoes and shirts, but the closet itself, you would be bewildered" (1984, 192). The ultimate result of this argument is that, since we cannot make sense of the idea of something like a "framework" that organizes the single object that is the world itself for us and so mediates our relation to it, the only intelligible idea we are left with is that we are in "unmediated touch with the familiar objects whose antics make our sentences and opinions true or false" (198). The strategy of this part of his discussion, then, is to show positively that something is a logically necessary (or essential) feature of our relation to the objects in the world around us partly by establishing the limits beyond which "we cannot attach a clear meaning" to certain notions that have played a part in the discussion of the issue, in this case to "conceptual framework" in relation to "the world in general." (In fact, in the end, he shows that *neither* concept has meaning in the relevant contexts, leaving as meaningful only concepts that raise a very different type of question about the issues and so are resolved by a very different type of answer.)

Similarly, Robert Brandom, in arguing against the idea that knowledge can be a matter of the reliability of a person's beliefs without her ever having to have reasons justifying those beliefs, aims to show positively that justification is a logically necessary (or essential) part of knowledge by establishing that the relevant concepts lose their meaning if we take it otherwise. "A community precluded from giving reasons for beliefs cannot so much as have the concept of reliability—nor, accordingly (by anyone's lights), of knowledge" ("for the very notion of . . . is unintelligible apart from . . ") (2000, 107).

W. V. O. Quine argues for the legitimacy of the translation of any language into the terms of our own, as follows: "If I conclude that you share my sort of conceptual scheme, I am not adding a supplementary conjecture so much as spurning unfathomable distinctions" (1969, 5). Putting his argument very approximately, because whatever we may mean by the objects to which our or anyone's language refers is always already couched precisely in our language, there *is* nothing to "reference to objects" beyond what is said in our language. We have no access to objects or even to any concept of them outside of the ways we have been taught to speak about them. Consequently what it is appropriate for us to mean by the objects to which another's language refers is not decided by anything outside our language—even the other's language only plays a role to the extent to which ours allows us to translate it, since that is the only extent to which we can regard it as having any meaning at all. In Quine's words, "the arbitrariness of reading our objectifications into the heathen speech reflects not so much the inscrutability of the heathen mind, as that there is nothing [outside the references or "objectifications" of our own language's "reading"] to scrute" (5, insertion added). Quine's strategy is the same I have discussed: something positive is established about the nature (or the logical

character or essential reality) of something—in this case about the self-contained nature of meaning and language, what he expresses elsewhere in phrases like our "web of belief"—by showing what it would be "unfathomable" or unintelligible to say in that connection.

As a final example, Putnam (1999) argues against Jaegwon Kim's idea that psychologists can study "basic bodily movements" independently of characterizing various features of those movements' surroundings. Putnam argues that in this context it is only in relation to such surrounding features that bodily movements can be identified as, and so can be said to be, the specific movements they are. He makes his point by establishing in some detail "that it only *looks* as if a clear sense has been given to 'basic bodily movement' in *this* context. . . . Echoing Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* (6.53), we might say that Kim has 'given no meaning to certain signs in his propositions'" (128). In keeping with my earlier characterization of Anglo-American philosophy of being in its contrast with the Continental version, Putnam explicitly clarifies that, while he has shown something about the nature of bodily movements here, he has only done so in a very specific and limited context. But he has, nevertheless, shown this something by pursuing the same strategy of exhibiting the limits of sense through which essence or being is demonstrated in all of these examples.

I now return from these examples to the main line of my discussion. It is true that the result of this kind of enquiry is an insight into the particular being *of something*, rather than an insight into the meaning of being itself, in its own right. But, as I briefly suggested above, the *process* of this enquiry involves an engagement with the meaning of being as such or in its own right, and therefore in a sense related to the Continental sense

of "the meaning of being." To clarify: as I have discussed, the process of enquiry consists in an exploration of essence or being in the form of an exploration of the boundaries of relevant meaning, and this centrally includes what the sense of "essential" (or "logically internal") itself might amount to—that is, what "being" itself might mean—in the relevant case. And the whole of this exploration is renewed on each occasion of enquiry, in what is a process of the same kind in each case. That is, this process of enquiry always and inherently consists partly in an exploration of the meaning of being itself. And it does so in a way that is consistent across particular contexts.

It is true that in each case this strategy explores the sense of being only in the terms meaningful for the particular context. But it is nonetheless the meaning of being as such that is being explored in that circumstantially meaningful way. After all, any articulation of anything in its own right and in general, Heidegger's or otherwise, is couched in a particular historical language, in response to particular historical concerns and forms of question. But this does not mean that there are no genuine concepts of anything considered in its own right and in general. Exploring general questions within a necessarily given context of particular articulations and concerns is what it *means* genuinely to explore general questions.

In fact, I suggest, one specific insight into being as such that the use of this context-oriented strategy enacts and so shows is precisely the double-sided recognition both that the sense of being as such is fundamentally different in different contexts or occasions of enquiry into it, and yet that this occurs in such a way that this essential variation is, paradoxically, part of what *constitutes* it as the single, consistent meaning of "being as such."[7] On the one side of this paradox, what it means to talk about being

depends (as is the case with every meaning according to the basic Anglo-American strategy I have been discussing) on the context of the particular discussion. This meaning consequently shifts fundamentally from context to context. But this is only one side of the story. As I noted in the first section of this paper, the principle that a term like "being in general," applied independently of contexts, has no sense is a principle that ultimately turns back on itself as a comment about a cross-contextual term, and so cancels itself and restores some kind of sense to the general term. Consequently, this fundamental shift of meaning across contexts involves what I discussed as the kind of self-contradiction we can hold without incoherence (or at least without complete and definitive incoherence): it both does and does not deprive the common term of all meaning.

It remains true that this shift in the sense of being from context to context is part of what is inherent in and so always relevantly at issue about the meaning of being as such and in general, and this is why our grasp of it needs constantly to be renewed on each occasion it becomes relevant. Further (the continuing self-canceling action of the contradiction), it is not sufficient to phrase even *this* insight in the form of this kind of stable, descriptive "thesis." *This* description too occurs in a particular context, in response to a specific kind of concern or question, and its sense may not obtain in a different context of enquiry.

In addition, as I shall now try to show, this constantly and uncertainly shifting process ("uncertainly" because, as I have argued, as a cross-contextually conceived process its own meaning even as "shifting" ultimately cancels itself) that addresses being as such cannot simply be detached from the result in which it concludes, the result of the settled, particular being *of* something. The lack of sense that the process establishes

beyond the relevant context cannot simply be determined and then dismissed as no longer relevant. (The "simply" in the last sentence is important: once a lack of sense is established, it certainly can and must be dismissed as no longer relevant; but, as I have discussed, because of its radically self-canceling character, there is *also* another and crucial sense in which it cannot be so dismissed.) In other words, the process that constitutes this philosophy's engagement with being as such and in general is an integral and permanent part even of this philosophy's insights into the being of particular somethings. This is so for at least two reasons.

First, and less importantly, because meaning is bound up with specific, concrete contexts and occasions of enquiry, and each occasion of discussing a meaning involves a context that is to some extent new—even when one reports someone else's argument, the live issues in that reporting context are to some extent different—the meaninglessness of these questions needs to be argued or shown newly in each and every individual case. (In connection with the compatibility of a dimension of difference even with the content of what is apparently simply repeated, see, for example, Wittgenstein's [1958] comment on the lack of parallel between self-identity and identity between separate instances: "But isn't *the same* at least the same? . . . And how am I to apply what the *one* thing shews me to the case of two things?" [84e, no. 215]. This possible dimension of difference even in repetition is recognized and its importance stressed in much of continental philosophy too. Derrida, for instance, writes of a repeatable sign that, because it is built into each of its instances that it can be repeated as one and the same sign elsewhere, the sign "is not exhausted in the present of its inscription" [1982, 317], with the result that "the very iterability [of signs, and so of stable meanings] which constitutes their identity never

permits them to be a unity of self-identity" [318, insertion added].) In other words, insight into being as such *always, on every relevant occasion,* involves establishing the lack of sense of certain types of question. In the Anglo-American framework, then, insight into being as such is not simply a separable result of establishing lack of sense, henceforth simply to be referred to and relied upon, but *always freshly involves* a phase consisting in the process of engaging with what lacks sense.

Second, and more importantly, in this framework insight into being also involves an *ongoing dimension* of lack of sense (and so of the engagement with being as such that produces this lack of sense). As I have noted, although when we ask questions about or have insight into the being as such of something we are asking about or looking into the thing in a particular or specific respect, it is still its reality in general, its reality *as such,* that we are asking about. Consequently, the other side of the contradiction also applies: because questions and insights are given their meaning only in specific, concrete contexts, we are engaging in an enquiry that will itself turn out to lack any relevant sense. (Again, because this outcome occurs as part of a self-canceling process, in which the incoherence too will be canceled, it does not consistently or without anomaly mean that the enquiry is without relevant sense. As I argued in the first section, it will turn out to be without sense only ultimately, when, in due course, this is established; until then, its sense cannot be dismissed. Further, not only will it cancel its own sense only ultimately, but it will also do so *on the basis of* its own sense, in the arguably valid manner of the Liar's Paradox.)

This ongoing dimension of lack of sense is reflected in one typical kind of conclusion that follows this sort of enquiry, that the real problem is the mistaken belief

that the apparent problem is intelligible, so that the real solution consists in recognizing the meaninglessness of the original questions and so in no longer pursuing them. It follows that, as long as we are still involving ourselves *in any way* with questions about being as such—even in thinking about their resolutions as already established—we are *still* engaging in what lacks sense. We only stop doing that when we recognize that *the whole process of inquiring* into being as such is meaningless, when we forget about the issue of being as such altogether, so that asking about or having insight into being as such is no longer what is relevantly going on at all.[8]

Extending the first reason above, it is crucial in connection with this ongoing lack of sense, too, that we can only come to the recognition that the whole process is meaningless by *establishing* that the relevant questions about being as such are meaningless and that this establishing can only be done freshly in each context. That it is necessary to *re-establish* the meaninglessness of these questions on each occasion they arise means that one has to continue to re-engage the issue of being in itself and in general that produces this meaninglessness. This is true even with respect to having established this meaninglessness and so apparently being done with it in a *particular* context. It is not possible to rely in an ongoing way even on a particular result as already established in this kind of case, and so as an issue one no longer needs to enter into. First, if we think of it as a given result on which one can continue to rely, we are conceiving of it as *now independent* of any particular context: we now rely on it in contexts which are not the context in which that result was established. The current contexts are different at least in that the result now exists as one of their features. (In fact, as I have implicitly suggested, even when we regard the general principle that all genuinely conceivable

issues are essentially dependent on context as a principle that is established and reliable in the new contexts we encounter, we are illegitimately treating *that* issue as being independent of context.)

Second, in thinking of a result in this kind of case as given and enduring, we are referring to *it* as the topic that is meaningless, as *that which* is meaningless, or as the informative subject of the predicate "meaningless." That is, in order to think or state that there is something particular established as meaningless, we are treating it as having a meaning, as *something* (specifiable, that can have been established, and therefore with content). As Diamond expresses this point, "We are so convinced that we understand what we are trying to say that we see only the two possibilities: *it* is sayable, *it* is not sayable. But Wittgenstein's aim is to allow us to see that there is no 'it'" about which to say anything at all, including to accept or reject it as meaningful (1991, 198).

If we take the establishing of meaninglessness simply as a given result, then, in both this respect and the one I discussed in the preceding paragraph we have abandoned the insights on which we were supposedly basing our thinking. Instead, this kind of lack of sense and the process of engaging with being in general that produces it are an ongoing dimension of all enquiry into being in all its phases.

As a result of this inescapability of engaging in an ongoing way with meaninglessness when concerning ourselves with questions of being, Wittgenstein famously comments:

> My propositions serve as elucidations in the following way: anyone who understands me eventually recognizes them as nonsensical, when he has used them—as steps—to climb up beyond them. (He must, so to speak, throw away the

> ladder after he has climbed up it.) He must transcend these propositions, and then he will see the world aright. (1961, 74, no. 6.54)

Similarly, in his later work, he writes, "My aim is: to teach you to pass from a piece of disguised nonsense to something that is patent nonsense" (1958, 133e, no. 464).

Because of this kind of paradox, Wittgenstein insisted in his early work that the deepest considerations cannot be said but can only be shown or, in a sense, performed. Although mainstream Anglo-American philosophy does not typically identify with the Wittgenstein of that period (or with much of his work of any period), the approach through establishing failure of sense that I have described nonetheless characterizes elements of a great deal of recent and contemporary Anglo-American philosophy.[9] Given this approach to sense through lack of sense, then, Anglo-American philosophy of being, like a variety of other traditions of thought, is not always accurately described as treating issues concerning being only or even primarily through what this kind of philosophy directly says, that is, in the form of propositional contents that can be expressed in declarative statements or engaged with in straightforward arguments. It is often more accurately described as undertaking its engagement with these issues partly by looking back at its own process in approaching the issues and attending to the sense and undermining of sense that this process displays. That is, Anglo-American philosophy of being often partly *enacts* or performs its engagement with issues of being. I shall discuss this idea of enactment a little more fully towards the end of my discussion of Continental philosophy in the next section.

4. Characteristic Elements of Continental Philosophy of Being

As I mentioned above, I shall take Heidegger's very influential philosophy of being as my main example in discussing the Continental conception of being. Although many Continental philosophers have pursued paths opposed to Heidegger's, the aspects of his thinking that I shall discuss are his exploration of the ontological significance of non-being and of silence, and these or related themes are respected and centrally relied on by a very wide variety of Continental philosophers, including many who otherwise reject fundamental dimensions of Heidegger's thinking. These thinkers include, for instance, Maurice Blanchot, Gilles Deleuze, Jean-Luc Nancy, and Giorgio Agamben. I shall discuss other examples in this and the following section.

I have already mentioned that, for Heidegger, the notion of being involves and is structured by what it traditionally excludes, the notion of nothing. One way of explaining this is that nothingness, as what is not included within being, is what offers the contrast with being against which it can emerge in its distinctiveness. As a result, nothingness occurs as something like the context or horizon of being. Through the contrast of nothingness with

> beings as a whole . . . it manifests these beings in their full but heretofore concealed strangeness as what is radically other—with respect to the nothing. In the clear night of the nothing of anxiety the original openness of beings as such arises: that they are beings—and not nothing. . . . The essence of the . . . nothing lies in this, that it brings Da-sein [human existence] for the first time before beings as such. (1998b, 90, insertion added)

One can already see here that the idea that nothingness discloses being in its ultimate character of being as such converges with the idea that what something is as such (or its being) is established by the lack of meaning of anything relevant beyond its context.

I also mentioned another way of thinking about the role of nothingness. Given that being as such accounts for or is the deeper reality of the existence or presence of the things whose being it is (it is, after all, those thing's *being*), it cannot be limited to having the nature of existence or presence, otherwise it could not account for existence or presence or be a more fundamental version of it. That is, it must involve what is not existence or presence. In addition, absence is a reality, since it can, for example, affect us, or explain a change of functioning. Absence therefore in some sense has being. Consequently, being in general must also be the being of absence, and for that reason too cannot be limited to the characteristics of presence. As a result, while beings in the everyday sense—in Heidegger's terminology, beings as *ontic*—are characterized by simply being present (or existing) or simply being absent (or not existing), being as such—being in the *ontological* sense—is no more present than absent, or it involves presence and absence (or existence and non-existence) *jointly* and as dimensions of one and the same deeper reality.

Heidegger argues, at least in his middle work, that if we think this through consistently, it emerges that the ultimate "level" is not really the ontological level (of being itself or being as such) in contrast with the ontic level (of particular beings). Because being is the being *of* beings, each of the two levels is part of what the other *is*: they cannot ultimately be separated. The being of beings cannot be separated from those beings *in their being* (!). As a result, the most basic reality is really the *interplay between*

the two levels, what Heidegger calls the "ontic-ontological difference" or just the "ontological difference" (see, for example, 1998a, 105, note c and text). Nonetheless, because what is at issue here is the most basic reality, talking about the interplay between the ontic and the ontological is in fact another way of talking about what the notion of being, of the ontological level, ultimately gets at. That is, it is still, after all, a conception of being, but as this interplay between itself and a dimension of things that is not itself. (This shift of meanings is an example of the self-undermining of sense that is inherent in inquiry into being, as this inquiry is understood, I have argued, in these two contemporary traditions.)

While Heidegger recognizes that this is the case, he regards the interplay across the ontic-ontological distinction as the *right* or at least less misleading way of talking about being, so that it is another way of talking about it that has consequences for how one *can* rightly talk about it. Nevertheless, he expresses this change (or, rather, his translators sensitively register his nuances of expression) as a matter of "thinking the 'distinction' as beyng itself," an (archaic German) term through which he gives both a resonance with the traditional word "being" and a change of language to signal the consequences of the change of conception (1998a, 105, note c).

Understanding being as the ontic-ontological difference connects with understanding it as a contrast and interplay with "the nothing," in that both interpret being as a relation to what it is not. Heidegger writes of these two dimensions of his thinking about being that, "The nothing" that is "the 'not' of beings" and "the ontological difference" that is "the 'not' between beings and being . . . are indeed not identical, yet

they are the Same in the sense of belonging together in the essential prevailing of the being of beings" (1998a, 97).[10]

As in the Anglo-American approach to being or essence, then, establishing what being positively is, is inextricably bound up with what being is not. And this, again as in the Anglo-American case, is not something that can ever simply be recognized as already established and so as something one no longer needs to enter into. It is *inherent* in being as such that it involves what it is not, so that, as long as one engages with the issue of being, one can only do so by engaging with what it is not. Further, because what it is not is inherent in what it is, engaging with it is to engage in an ongoing violation of its own sense.

Again, then, Heidegger's work is structurally very like the Anglo-American approach to being or essence via the lack of sense of what is beyond it or, equivalently, via what is beyond sense. They both positively establish being, or ultimate sense and so what can ultimately be said about what is, through what is not it; through, as it were, by-passing it. And they both engage in an ongoing failure of sense in doing so.

To elaborate on this last point, because being inherently involves what it is not, our statements about being are caught up in the logic of articulating a topic that is not the same as itself. Consequently, as I discussed in connection with the Anglo-American framework, our statements in this framework too cannot function simply as declarative statements or straightforward arguments that express and relate propositional contents. Instead, they can only function as parts of an ongoing process in which their own meaning shifts as it is undermined, a shifting and undermining that are themselves in some ways equivocal and in some ways unequivocal. As a result, they can only express

their content by also presenting and attending to the process in which they partly consist. In other words, they need partly to enact or perform their engagement with the issues of being, in the form of types of strategies whose presentation of their results consists partly in showing their own functioning rather than only in saying things in the ordinary sense. As Heidegger writes of language, for example, "the essential being of language is Saying as Showing," so that "the being of language" is "the structure of a show in which are joined the speakers and their speaking." And he points out that "the more clearly language shows itself in its own character . . . the more significant does the way to language [the activity or performance of approaching language, in a way that is guided by and therefore occurs within language] become for language itself" (1971, 123, 121, 113, insertion added).

The necessary role of this kind of enactment or strategic activity in enabling and presenting insight is also expressed in other Continental thinkers in the widespread language of, for example, "deployment of concepts" or the term "strategy" itself. Michel Foucault, for instance, argues that to grasp the functions of concepts (or "knowledge" or "discourse") we often need to look not just at their straightforward contents but at what the relevant concepts *do,* at what effects they have. While these effects are distinct from and often in conflict with their immediate contents, they are nonetheless produced in virtue of those same contents and are therefore in an important sense also part of them. For example, Foucault writes that "it is in discourse that knowledge and power are joined together," so that "we must conceive discourse . . . as a multiplicity of discursive elements that can come into play in various strategies . . . discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling block, a point of

resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy" (1978, 100-101). And Jacques Derrida writes, for example, that his kind of thinking involves not "a concept but rather . . . a process of textual labor and a different sort of articulation" (1981a, 6). One name he gives to this process is "dissemination," and he points out that "the question of the here and now is explicitly enacted in dissemination" (7).

5. Self-Canceling Sense as a Resource in Both Traditions

In discussing Wittgenstein, I noted that establishing the meaninglessness of questions outside a specific relevant context justifies our positive insights into what is definitively—because no longer subject to meaningful questions—essential to the sense of what is *within* that context. And as I discussed in connection with Wittgenstein's "ladder" and again in connection with Continental philosophy of being, the same excursion into senselessness also necessitates and structures the kind of recourse to performative strategy present in both traditions. Combining these two points, it follows that the kind of paradox, self-contradiction, or nonsense that necessitates that type of performative strategy also makes its success possible. The whole investigation or performative process cancels itself, by ultimately establishing itself as to be set aside *as* nonsense, and in this way both eliminates its own elements of failure of sense and unqualifiedly justifies the resulting sense. That is, it justifies the resulting sense with respect to its essence, or even absolutely. Recognition that this logical paradox and the strategy it necessitates are self-canceling in this way is another dimension of the convergence between the two traditions with respect to thinking about being. I have just noted it in connection with Wittgenstein, and we can see the same thing in Heidegger in

his epigraph to this essay: “As Saying, the nature of language is the appropriating showing which disregards precisely itself, in order to free that which is shown, to its authentic appearance. . . . Silence corresponds to . . . the stillness of appropriating-showing Saying” (1971, 131).

Reliance on this approach-structuring and self-canceling contradiction is, of course, by no means limited to Heidegger in the Continental tradition or to Wittgenstein in the Anglo-American framework. On the Continental side, Karl Jaspers, for example, notes of his own method that “we have used words and concepts which had their original meaning for definite things in the world; now however they are used to go beyond the limits and are not to be understood in their original sense . . . [T]ranscending thought . . . in its form of thinking the unthinkable . . . always seems to be canceling itself@ (1997, 111-112). Similarly, Derrida describes the topic of his thought as a “movement of the trace that implies both its mark and its erasure” (1981a, 5), and notes that, “I try to write the question: (what is) meaning to say? Therefore it is necessary . . . that writing literally mean nothing [otherwise it relies on and so prejudges what meaning involves]. . . . To risk meaning nothing is . . . to enter into the play of *différance*” (1981b, 14, insertion added).

On the Anglo-American side, every “conceptual analysis” or “conceptual investigation” that depends on establishing a failure to assign meanings outside of a certain delineated context implicitly relies on the same paradox. Sometimes it is explicit. John Wisdom, for example, writes, “The trouble is that concepts, without which we do not connect one thing with another, are apt to become a network which confines our minds. We need to be at once like someone who has seen much and forgotten nothing,

and also like one who is seeing everything for the first time" (1970, 137-138). Although for some decades Anglo-American philosophy has not primarily been conceptual analysis, but more a combination of philosophy of language, mind, and action, we have seen that analogues of this Wittgensteinian and "ordinary language" kind of analysis are nonetheless a standard resource whose value Anglo-American philosophers typically recognize and on which they readily draw.[11]

6. Conclusion

To note this convergence between the two traditions is not to say that they are essentially doing the same thing, that they are essentially asking and answering the same questions. I would suggest that not even two individual philosophical frameworks within a given tradition do that. Because philosophical frameworks characteristically involve a specific and distinctive account of reality in general, including of the nature of sense itself, they are by nature incommensurable. That is, they constitute the sense of the "same" terms differently in their different contexts of assumptions, values, and guiding procedures. As Henry Johnstone, for example, argues, because a philosophical standpoint involves a conception of reality in general, "each position claims possession of the only universe of discourse in which comparison can be made at all" (1978, 48). For the same reason, "a philosophical position always is, or implies, a decision as to what is to count as facts or evidence" (55), so that "nothing his antagonist submits as evidence can possibly be evidence for anything except [the philosopher's] own view" (114, insertion added).[12] The two contemporary traditions I have discussed are certainly no more similar than any two of the divergent philosophies within them.

On the other hand, they are no more *different* than any two individual philosophies within them. Given that individual philosophies are incommensurable, they are already as different as different can get. But, if the reader will bear with me for a moment, they are nonetheless, as philosophies, still in a different sense doing the same kind of thing as each other in giving a global account of things. The same is true of the two traditions. The same paradox holds here that I have been discussing in connection with the thinking of being. On this view of the nature of a philosophical position, the term "philosophy" is used across different contexts (as describing different philosophical standpoints) on which its meaning entirely depends and each of which gives it a meaning unavailable in the other contexts; but it has the same meaning *in and as* freshly re-constituting that meaning in the context of each distinctive standpoint. Given some fairly standard views about the fundamental kind of enquiry that distinguishes philosophy, this similarity of structure between the study of the nature of being and the study of the nature of philosophy is not surprising.

In short, there is no more (or less) distinction between the two traditions *as philosophy* than there is between the particular standpoints within them. There are sociological distinctions between groups of people who are devoted to particular histories, styles, and strategies of approach and engagement with philosophical issues.[13] And there may be sociological and psychological reasons why their adherents regard these distinctions as philosophically more significant than the differences between particular philosophical standpoints. But while these distinctions do have the same degree and kind of philosophical significance as differences between individual philosophical frameworks—perhaps, for example, different styles, strategies, and formulations are each

uniquely philosophically illuminating and also each correspondingly limited by the specificity of the perspectives they open up—they have no further relevance to the philosophical validity and value of the two traditions than that.

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Notes

[1] I would like to thank the journal's anonymous reader for suggesting that I give an account of why this paradox does not simply result in incoherence. This, together with several other valuable suggestions s/he made, has helped to improve the paper considerably. I would also like to express my appreciation of her/his impressive fair-mindedness in giving a careful hearing to themes that were clearly very uncongenial to her/his own philosophical sensibilities.

[2] On the formal admissibility of contradictions, see, for example, Bremer (2005); Priest (2001). For discussion on both sides of the debate, see, for example, Priest, Beall, and Armour-Garb (2004). On the legitimacy of contradiction in non-formal contexts, see, for example, Johnstone (1978, 45); Priest (2002). Livingston (2011) gives a detailed, particularly helpful account both of the formal legitimacy of logical inconsistency and its relevance to informal concerns. He does so in the course of demonstrating that this same insight is developed (or its grounds at least thoroughly prepared) centrally, although only taken up by a minority of philosophers, in both the analytic and continental traditions.

[3] On the validity of this kind of paradox, see, for example, Sainsbury (1995), chapter 6.

[4] Staten (1984) sets out some of these shared differences in a superb and thorough account of the close parallels between Wittgenstein and Derrida. Staten also suggests the kind of self-cancellation of paradox that I discuss: "Deconstruction, in order to remain deconstruction, must be recursively applied to itself" (27). But he does not, I believe, think the consequences of this self-cancellation through fully, so that in his account there are never contexts in which truth is fully settled (e.g., 123).

[5] This kind of argument was put forward throughout the nineteenth century by many European (Continental!) logicians, including Brentano (see, for example, Smith 1995). I am not sure how direct the influence of that phase of its history was on its prominence in the twentieth century.

[6] Ortega Y Gasset, for example, stresses the constant character of being in general and as such as both absolutely and yet uniquely constituted within the particular context of each separate human life (2002, 74).

[7] This formulation intersects substantially with Heidegger's conception of, for example, different "epochs of Being," which are globally and systematically different from each other and yet "the Same." This is also how he understands the relation between different philosophies.

[8] "For the clarity that we are aiming at is indeed *complete* clarity. But this simply means that the philosophical problems should *completely* disappear" (1958, 51e, no. 133).

[9] As I suggested in my introductory comments, one result of this indirection in the operation of sense is that the philosophers in question are often engaging in philosophy of being even though they believe they are doing anything but. The indirection of this approach to being is subtle enough to explain why much of its functioning can escape its practitioners.

[10] It may be useful to compare this reference to "the Same" with my comment on "the Same" in note 7 and its text.

[11] For a detailed discussion of the role of this paradox in the work of Donald Davidson and Richard Rorty, for example, see Barris (2006).

[12] For other versions of this view of philosophical frameworks, see, for example, Collingwood 1940; Hall 1960; Lyotard 1988.

[13] See, for example, Preston (2007), who argues that analytic philosophy even on its own "has a nature, of course, but it is that of a social group rather than a philosophical group" (159). As "a thing of practices under an accepted paradigm," the thesis, for example, that analytic philosophy was unified by analysis of language "was really just window-dressing for the movement" (153). Preston rejects, however, the kind of incommensurability between philosophical standpoints for which I argue here (171, n. 4).