

HEARING SILENCE, SPEAKING ANIRVACANIYA^{1*}

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“Silence is impossible. That is why we desire it”

Maurice Blanchot (Blanchot 1986:11)

We all know that oxymorons like the ones in the title of this essay are a literary device to enter into the realm of the “non-literal” by juxtaposing contradictory terms. But we hardly realize that what is taken to be just a literary device could actually be an invitation to “see through” the union of contradictory terms and to engage with the enigma or the mystery that the alleged union generates. Instead of a reasoned resolution of the enigmatic experience using the tools of logic, one may as well try to engage with an enigma by way of preserving and respecting its beauty. There is indeed something beautiful about what the enigmatic experience generates. Therefore, we will try to respond to the oxymora in the title of this essay i.e., “*hearing silence*” and “*speaking anirvacaniya*”, (“speaking the unspeakable”) not by theorizing on oxymorons, i.e., figures of speech but by engaging phenomenologically with the spaces they open up.

Let us ask: How do we encounter silence; given that it is not experienced the way we normally experience colours, sounds, tastes, and touch with our sense organs? Silence is neither imagined nor inferred using our faculties of imagination and reason and yet we ‘experience’ it directly, authentically and genuinely. We ‘hear’ the silence. This paradox, or better, a mystery; an enigma, calls for creative engagement with paradox rather than its dissolution. Living with a paradox or an enigma or a mystery need not be all that uncomfortable. In fact, the mystery of silence is due precisely because we take silence² as just the *absence*³ of sound⁴ a kind of void, a sheer passivity and then wonder how we experience it.⁵ Using Nyāya terminology of *abhāva* (non-existence) we may describe the absence of sound as *dhvnyabhāva* (i.e. *abhāva* of *dhvani*). To the question “what is silence?” the natural answer seems to be that “silence is absence of sound”. Put in this way, the problem of experiencing

silence is a philosophical problem of accounting for non-existence or absence; and in this case, of accounting for the non-existence or absence of sound. In Indian tradition *Naiyāyika*-s have dealt with the problem of *abhāva*, i.e. the problem of non-existence or of non-existing state, or the absence, by recognizing four types of absences, i.e. prior non-existence (*prāgbhāva*), posterior non-existence or destruction, (*dhvaṅsābhāva*), constant or absolute non-existence (*atyantābhāva*) and non-existence through difference (*anyonyābhāva*). If silence is absence (non-existence) of sound then it makes sense to say that silence is *prior* or *posterior*, before or after the presence of sound. This can be schematized as [s¹ S s²]. It is not difficult to evoke different images of this flow of absence *and* presence of sound *and* silence with the assumption of time. So at time t¹ there is prior silence which is absence of sound (in Nyāya terminology this will be *prāg-dhvnyabhāva*), at time t² there is sound (*dhvani*) which comes into existence by destroying (replacing, filling) the existing prior silence and at time t³ again there is silence which comes into existence by destroying the existing sound (in Nyāya terminology this will be *dhvaṅsa-dhvnyabhāva*). The twin issue involved here is to capture the nature of silence as absence of sound, the sound that comes into existence, and the relation between the two.

It will be interesting to know whether the presence of sound makes any difference to the preceding silence (*prāg-dhvnyābhāva*) except saying that the preceding silence is filled with sound, or is overcome or even destroyed. What one would like to know is whether there is any *qualitative* difference between two silences; i.e., two *abhāva*-s, i.e., s¹ and s² ruptured by the intermediate sound 'S'. In what relevant features s² is or could be different from s¹? This is not to suggest that s¹ and s² are two *types* of silences, or that there are two types of *abhāva*-s but to suggest that they are or could be two *aspects* of the same silence or the two aspects of the same *abhāva*. We might verbalize this insight by saying that we are exposed to the same silence under two aspects i.e. the silence *before* and silence *after* the sound. We do talk about silence *before* the storm and silence *after* the storm and we do not mean the same when we say so. We believe that there is a *qualitative* difference between the two silences and this difference is expressed variously by invoking different images. For example, the silence before the storm could be full of anxiety, fear of the unknown, breath-holding, and the moment of everything coming to a standstill, while the silence after the storm may be full of relief, exhaustion, consolidation, frustration,

and so on. As compared to the first two types of *abhāva*-s, i.e., prior non-existence (*prāgbhāva*) and posterior non-existence (*dhvaṅsābhāva*), understanding the phenomenon of silence as absolute absence (*atyantābhāva*) and absence through difference (*anyonyābhāva*) are much more complex cases. Though in ordinary language we talk of absolute silence, it is not clear as to what would be the absolute silence as the absolute non-existence; the *atyantābhāva*. This is not to suggest that we do not have expressions in ordinary language to express the idea of absolute silence (i.e., absolute non-existence of sound) but the question is how to articulate the philosophical notion of absolute silence given the kind of beings that we are.

Can we say that the same silence resumes when the sound stops? This gives an impression that the silence is all-pervading and sound is intermittent; that the Universe is 'filled' with the all-pervading silence (which is not a mere absence of sound) which is interrupted by the recurrent bits of sound at the regular intervals of time rhythmically. To conceptualize and to visualize this form of all pervading silence is indeed difficult. What goes nearest to this visualization is what science fiction movies show: the space-crafts travelling through the darkness in the infinity of the outer space. The whole series of science fiction movies dealing with the theme of the *Aliens* or the TV serials like *The Star Trek* depicting a voyage to unknown planets away from the Earth in terms of light years show that there is no sound up there, the darkness and the cold of the inter terrestrial space is filled with dead silence. For this the scientific explanation is that since there is no air in the outer space, there is nothing that sound can travel through. No one can hear your scream!

As a counter to the idea that the Universe is filled with the all pervading silence, Indian metaphysicians offer the whole philosophy of sound by employing the notions of the *āhata-nāda* (*āhata* = struck, beaten, and hence the sound (*nāda*) produced by striking a chord or by beating a drum etc.) and the *anāhata-nāda* (*anāhata* = unbeaten, unwounded, intact, and hence the sound (*nāda*) which is continuous, intact, eternal). Within this framework, the further distinction is drawn between four manifestations of sound, i.e., *parā*, *paśyanti*, *madhyamā*, and *vaikharī*. Of these, the first, i.e. *parā* is transcendental, inaudible to the outer senses, and is *avyakta*, the unmanifest, and is a continuous flow of consciousness. The remaining three, i.e. *paśyanti* (seen but not heard) *madhyamā* (the middle, a stage before the actual articulation of the word), and *vaikharī* (the

fourth and the final stage of sound, the articulation of the word) are more and more available to the external sense organs. Based on these notions the whole system of Nāda-Yoga creatively engages with the phenomenon of sound (*nāda*) and offers the metaphysical notion of the *Nāda-Brahma* around which the Indian tradition of music has evolved.

In ordinary language we say somewhat circularly that silence is absence of sound and sound is absence of silence. Beneath this circularity we seem to imply that the presence of one *causes* the absence of the other and vice versa. But we can as well say that the presence of one *explains* the absence of the other and vice versa. So we seem to be talking about two different things, i.e. causation and explanation and wondering whether the relationship between silence and sound is that of causation or of explanation. But these two are different types of relations and we need to distinguish them clearly. Consider the sentence: (A) “A constant exposure to maximum volume was responsible for his hearing loss.” The sentence does not tell us whether the relation between (i) “A constant exposure to maximum volume” and (ii) “was responsible for his hearing loss” is the relation of causality or of explanation. But consider these two sentences: (B) “His sudden exposure to maximum volume was responsible for his hearing loss” AND (C) “That his sudden exposure to maximum volume was responsible for his hearing loss.” In (B) “His sudden exposure to maximum volume” is an event in nature but in (C) it is not. In (C) it is the *fact* that a certain event (of his ‘sudden exposure’) has occurred at a certain point of time. In ordinary language we do not draw this distinction since there is no need to do so. But in philosophy this distinction should matter.

Causality is a natural relation that obtains between events, states of affairs, or things which are natural, extra-linguistic and extensional. So the relation that holds between these is also natural, extra-linguistic and extensional. We may say that silence being a state of affair and sound being an event the relation between them is natural, non-linguistic and extensional. But the relation of explanation on the other hand is linguistic, non-natural, and intentional. It holds between facts, truths, or propositions. So when it is said that “That his sudden exposure to maximum volume was responsible for his hearing loss” the relation that is asserted is between two facts and hence intentional. The same point can be made by distinguishing between two kinds of causes, i.e. *productive causes* and *explanatory causes*. (Mackie 1974: 265) The question then

is: whether we take silence/sound as productive or explanatory causes?

An interesting (and troublesome) way to imagine the relationship between silence and sound would be on the analogy of Newtonian space which was considered to be absolute. For a long time it was thought that space is like a container in which objects are placed at various distances. Similarly, one can imagine that silence is absolute; it is like a backdrop against which sounds come into being. But the analogy breaks down the moment we realize that space is the function of relative positions at which objects are placed. Likewise we might say that there is no absolute silence, it is relative to sounds with time intervals.

Not-hearing the sound is different from hearing silence. Not-hearing *simpliciter* like *not-doing simpliciter* is inaction, a failure, or even an inability as in the case of a deaf person, whereas hearing silence is a successful and positive experience of silence. This is analogous to the difference between ‘forbearance’ and ‘not-doing *simpliciter*.’ One forbears doing something intentionally whereas ‘not-hearing *simpliciter*’ is not intentional. A deaf person does not intentionally choose or decide “not-hear”. But to forbear doing something, e.g. forbear to hear the high decibel sound is an intentional act with a purpose of safety in mind. Hearing silence is analogous to ‘seeing darkness’- “A blind man cannot see the darkness of a cave. His sighted companions can.” (Sorensen 2010)⁶

We are exposed to silence in many different ways - philosophically, psychologically, normatively, or in the setting of the everyday and the pop-culture. Poets and wordsmiths constantly try giving captive images of silence trying to go beyond the limitations of language. One such image is that of hearing the ‘sound of silence’ in a song sung by Simon and Garfunkel. This is a 1964 song in the realm of popular culture of the folk-rock or protest music. It is written by a song-writer and a singer Paul Simon in 1964 and was sung by Simon and Garfunkel duo. It was assigned an unstated political context by stating that it was written soon after the 1963 assassination of John F. Kennedy and that it was taken to be an anti-war song, a statement on the Vietnam War. The latter myth became popular because the Vietnam War was on when the song was gaining popularity. But as Simon himself clarified that the song was an expression of a “youthful alienation”, “a post-adolescent angst” - a cry that “nobody is listening to me, nobody is listening to anybody”.⁷ Though the phrase “sound of silence” is an oxymoron, a figure of speech, the imagery that the song invokes has multiple layers of

meaning. The central theme of the song, if the notion of “the central theme” makes any sense, is sound, speech, and communication (i.e. conversation). The song does not pretend to give any message. In fact, Paul Simon has no message to give, but he wants to *talk* to you. The song is about the world in which people are talking without speaking, people are hearing without listening, and people are singing songs which their voices never share. Clearly this is a powerful evocation of metropolitan city-world which, despite sophisticated communication technology, is strangely devoid of communication and through it the conversation. The more and more technology pushes people towards each other more and more they withdraw into silence, into their own worlds which are marked by the boundaries of privacy. The citizens of the metropolitan city-world are wrapped in protective silence, the silence of “not-getting involved” in anything other than privacy of one’s own individual world. With the erasure of *Speaking* and *Hearing*; discourse or conversation, the vital force of living, is killed. The words in the song “*Hear my words that I might teach you, ...take my arms that I might reach you*” is a plea for conversation and not the protest against its failure. (Williams 2002: 11-2) Silence marks the absence of sound, a failure of conversation, a failure of reaching out to the other. This failure is the failing not of yours or mine, his or hers, but of the community to overcome the collapse of conversation and hence “No one dare disturb the sound of silence”. “Silence like a cancer grows” when no one dares it.

Silence enters in our consciousness in many different ways. The experience of silence has qualitative aspect. Silence is often associated with stillness, quietude, tranquility, and calm with which we often characterize silence but these are also supposed to be the qualities of mind. Silence is also a forbearance of or self-control over speech—a *Mauna*. That almost all religious traditions of the world accord sanctity and normative status to silence is evident when silence is ‘observed’ as a *vow*, (a *retreat*, or a *mauna-vrata*). Silence can be subjected to *norms* of obligation in special contexts like court room deliberations, examination or seminar halls which are spaces of “hearing’ the “other”. Silence can also be a norm to be observed as a mark of respect to the dead.⁸ Silence can be *used* as a convenient devise, an escape route, a mark of disapproval or a dislike. Silence can be a virtue, a strength of mind, the mark of mature mind in the setting of “being together” or “being with the other”. Silence can be a matter of preference, a matter of value. Silence can be an expression of respect to the elders. One may prefer being silent

than speak and doing so in a certain situation could even be considered as appropriate (*uchit*). But silence can have an existential dimension, for example, a sense of utter helplessness, a sense of repentance, shame, and despair as in the case of the *mauna* of Pāndava-s in a situation like the one wherein the Pāndava-s, after losing all their fortunes in the game of dice sat quietly and witnessed helplessly the disrobing of Draupadi in the royal court of the Kaurava-s. (*Paancho pati baithe maun, kaun gat hoiee*)

We take silence as a state of affair when we describe it as ‘pin-drop silence’. Silence is often associated with the two opposite faces of night i.e. darkness and the moonlight, both equally mysterious, in which we encounter the night. ‘The dead silence’, ‘the absolute calm’-the *nirava shāntatā* of the night is an invitation to turn the senses inward. Silence is essentially inward looking. Metaphorically though, we attribute *agency* to silence; we say ‘silence speaks for itself’, ‘silence *speaks* in volume’, ‘this silence is *killing* me’, ‘this silence *frightens* me’, ‘I am *humbled* by this silence’, and “this silence is *engulfing*’. There are many other ways in which silence exerts its agency. Attributing agency would be the first step towards the positive and creative encounter with silence, making *it* encounter with *us*.

Sound and silence as phenomena are available to technological manipulation in film making and television. But there is a difference between the way they are manipulated in both these media. Whereas the television as audio-visual medium requires that every visual on the TV screen is to be filled with sound; silence is of critical importance in film making both for the directors and music composers. We are so conditioned to see an image on TV with sound that one gets disturbed if one finds TV suddenly going mute even for a minute. But as opposed to TV, a film making can afford to completely sever sound from the visual. Film making is perhaps the best example of how technology creatively engages with silence. Hitchcock’s famous nerve-wrecking scenes in almost all his suspense thrillers derive their chill from thoughtfully and creatively structured silence and sound (i.e. music score sequence).⁹ Hitchcock is the master of withholding sound from the viewer to arouse curiosity and creating tension through both ambient noises and silence. By manipulation of the soundtrack he pushes silence forward. Silence in a Hitchcock film represents the realism of traumatic events, as well as their secrecy from the public world. Contrary to convention, he uses silence without music to heighten moments of tension.¹⁰ Silent murder scenes are a hallmark of Hitchcock’s manipulation

of auditory participation of viewers' involvement in a movie. In *The Rope* (1948) two persons strangle to death a former classmate, in *Strangers on a Train* (1951) a girl is strangled in an amusement park; in *Psycho* (1960) a woman is murdered while taking shower in bathroom, and in *Torn Curtain* (1966) a man is burned in an oven; in all these we find murders taking place in silence without music score. Silence renders the viewers through the characters in the scene helpless and the mute witnesses of the murder. It is so ironical that a desperate scream loudly signals the murder but those who are nearby the murder scene still fail to 'hear' it. Hitchcock dramatizes, intensifies, and accentuates this irony through silence. Through silence Hitchcock gives a paralyzing shock to the viewers by creating the feeling that the time has stopped. In *The Birds* (1963) there is no murder scene but there is horrifying terror all through. There is no killer in singular, killers are in thousands, and they are birds, they are crows, unprovoked, but suddenly they attack humans and kill them. Unlike the other crime stories, *The Birds* problematizes theories of explanation of crime e.g. murder, since unlike humans, we cannot attribute emotions or intentionality to birds. All that we have is the curious or the mysterious behavior of thousands of birds which unsettles the sense of security of the characters forcing them to be in the state of horror and utter helplessness. The occult is also at play here since no familiar explanations are available. The last scene of the movie, i.e., attack of birds arouses suspense in the blackness of silence until the sudden attack takes place. Silence is the most powerful device in such scenes which epitomize Hitchcock's handling of suspense crime and horror.

Philosophers' engagement with silence is through explicating the relationship between language, thought, and reality. In this engagement the idea of transgression, of crossing the boundary becomes important. In their own ways, Buddha and Wittgenstein stress this idea. The idea of silence also figures very prominently in Heidegger's reflection on discourse in which the notions of 'hearing' and 'silence' are pivotal. Kant reads silence as the "universal quiet of nature" in which one grasps the knowledge of the immortal soul without describing it. It seems that philosophers' reflections stress the organic relation between speech and silence.

In an important sense silence is cognate of the 'ineffable'. As in the case of silence, it is not rewarding to characterize the 'ineffable' negatively just because one falls short of adequate or proper expressions to express what one wants to express in language. One needs to dwell upon the *mode* of the ineffable. Poets often struggle

to find out words and expressions which would adequately, effectively, or even powerfully express what they want to express. The “ineffability” of thoughts or emotions in poetry is based on the non-availability of adequate words and expressions and hence this ineffability is empirical and contingent. It points to the limitation or the partiality of words which can be overcome. Sometimes poets coin new words altogether to express their feelings and moods. But the ‘ineffable’ as understood by philosophers is not restricted to the empirical limitation of language. Suppose we overcome the empirical limitations of language, suppose the language becomes absolutely perfect in the sense that it leaves nothing unexpressed, or that it covers everything that is expressible in to the words of that language, then should we think that the category of ‘ineffable’ would disappear? The idea of perfect language, more precisely, the idea of logically perfect language was once toyed by Russell which was made up of only the syntax or the syntactical structures but did not have vocabulary. (Russell 1972: 25) To the extent that language had no vocabulary it was free from the problem of the ineffable. But only when one has the notion of the ‘expressible’ or ‘speakingable’ does one have the notion of the ‘unspeakable’ or ‘ineffable’. Here we may wonder whether the *anirvacaniya* (the ‘ineffable’) and silence collapse into one another. Is silence metaphysic of sound and of speech? What is the ontology of silence? How do we engage with silence and the ‘ineffable’? These questions, philosophical as they are, should free us from characterizing silence and the ‘ineffable’ negatively as the mere *absences* though in day-to-day life we do characterize silence and the ‘ineffable’ in this way. But when one is doing philosophy, what matters are concepts more than the words used in everyday language. Thus, ‘silence’ and ‘ineffable’ present themselves as philosophical concepts to ponder over.

In Indian tradition Advaita Vedāntins employ two fertile notions i.e., the *sat-asat-vilakṣana* (‘is’ and ‘is not’ mode of being taken together is unusual, extraordinary) and therefore *anirvacaniya* (unspeakable). In Advaita metaphysics *māyā* (the world of veridical experience, the *prapañca*, which is treated as cosmic illusion) is declared to be neither *sat* (‘is’ or being) nor *asat* (‘is not’ or non-being). This is explained by rope-serpent (*rajjuśarṣa*) analogy. The snake (which is seen in place of rope) and the rope (appearing as serpent) are neither real nor unreal. We cannot take the serpent to be real, nor can we take it as unreal. Without being either we take the serpent to be both real and unreal. This in effect means that there is no definition possible of *sat* (being of the serpent);

there is no definition possible of *asat* (non-being of the serpent). There is also no definition possible of *sat* and *asat* taken together (being and non-being of the serpent) because that will involve contradiction. So on every count there is no definition, or a definite knowledge possible of the experience of the *sat* (being of the serpent) and *asat* (non-being of the serpent). This is *vilakṣana*, i.e., a peculiarly distinctive situation, something unusual, something extra ordinary because it limits the speech. Going further, the Advaitin's argue that even the reality of the rope as assumed by the common sense in contrast to the illusionaryness or the unreality of the snake in its place is also an illusion due to *adhyāsa* (superimposition). Just as the snake is superimposed on rope, the rope (the not-self, an object) itself is a superimposition on the self. This is what *māya* does. Therefore, for an Advaitin, *māya* i.e., superimposition, an illusion; whether cosmic or ordinary, is *vilakṣana* (distinct from everything that can be defined or described cogently) and hence *anirvacaniya*, the 'ineffable' i.e., beyond the realm of describable and speakable. Illusion is uncanny and limits the speech; this limit is transcendental and not empirical. When we encounter an illusion we are caught up in an endless cancellation of unreal by the real and vice versa. The phenomenon characterized by this eternal and mutual cancellation of its simultaneous existence and non-existence is *vilakṣana*, i.e. uncanny, mysterious, uncomfortably strange, and wired. Because it is *vilakṣana*, because it is uncanny, it is *anirvacaniya* (the ineffable, un-speakable, the limit of speech). This *anirvacaniyatā* (ineffability) is the horizon of silence.

As the Advaitin's talk about *prapañca* (the phenomenal reality) they also talk about *Brahman* (the transcendental reality). As the illusion (*māya*) is *anirvacaniya* (ineffable) Brahman too is said to be *anirvacaniya*. The question therefore is in what sense both the phenomenal and the transcendental reality is *anirvacaniya*? Advaitin's believe that Brahman is *anirvacaniya* for it is the presupposition of speech. Brahman is prior to speech. And this is why, speech 'falls short' of giving any description of Brahman. Brahman is the foundation of everything that is nameable and speakable but is itself beyond all naming and description. The *anirvacaniyatva* of Brahman is foundational, whereas the *anirvacaniyatva* of *māya* is linguistic.

Wittgenstein too talks about silence when he says, "Whereof one cannot speak thereof one must be silent."¹¹ (Wittgenstein 1922) However, there is a difference between Advaitin's and Wittgenstein's take on

silence though both of them are talking about it through the category of the ineffable. Whereas the Advaitin is talking about silence through the ineffability of the world of veridical experience which they take to be an illusion due to ignorance or false knowledge, i.e. *adhyāsa* or *avidyā*, Wittgenstein is talking about silence through the ineffability of *propositions*¹² made within a particular structure of language which is used for a certain purpose, i.e. the purpose of *description of facts*¹³ and nothing else. Wittgenstein in his *Tractatus Logico Philosophicus* employs certain pivotal concepts (i.e. ‘simple’, ‘complex’, ‘name’, ‘proposition’, and ‘fact’) in terms of which he engages with the logic of language and the structure of the world. By logic of language what is meant are the preconditions of determining the legitimacy of propositions, i.e., whether a given proposition can be *expressed* in the particular *structure* of language that Wittgenstein is outlining. The logic of language sets the *limit* of language internally and hence the limit of language is not its *contingent limitation* but the limit of language is its transcendental possibility of expressing propositions having sense. The limit of language is the limit of expressibility, i.e. *what can be said* (i.e. a legitimate expression, a proposition with sense) and *what cannot be said* (an illegitimate expression, a proposition without sense, or a *non-sensical* proposition). But the notion of ‘expressible’ (i.e. what can be expressed) is internally related to the notion of what is “thinkable” (i.e. what can be thought). Therefore, the limits of language, one might argue, are also the limits of what *can* and what *cannot* be *thought*.¹⁴ In fact this is one of the standard readings of Wittgenstein. But as has been argued (Golay 2007: 41) Wittgenstein is not attempting to do this, i.e. he is not attempting to draw a line between what can be thought *per se* and what cannot be thought *per se*. Because to draw the line between the *per se* ‘thinkable’ and *per se* ‘unthinkable’ one will have to first think the unthinkable and this is impossible. What Wittgenstein is attempting is to “draw the boundary or the *limit* within the domain of what can be thought *alone*.” (Golay 2007: 41) Thus, what is expressible and what is inexpressible (through a proposition) are both *within* the domain of thought or thinkable. The Wittgensteinian limit does not demarcate what is expressible and what is not expressible *as such* but between what is legitimate (i.e. logically permissible) and what is illegitimate (i.e. logically not permissible) *within* the domain of thought. Wittgensteinian precept “*Whereof one cannot speak thereof one must remain silent*” locates silence not in the thick-black region of unthinkable, the non-thought, or in the twilight zone of the

inexpressible *as such* but locates it in the region of thinkable, in the region of thought itself. Wittgenstein's precept cannot be read as "whereof one cannot *think* per se or whereof one cannot *express* per se thereof one must remain silent. The '*whereof*' and the '*thereof*' in Wittgensteinian injunction is the domain of illegitimate thoughts or the domain of inexpressible *within* the domain of the thinkable or within the domain of language itself. We encounter or "pass over into" silence (*mauna*) if we transgress the limit which is implicit in the structure of language.

Heidegger's engagement with silence is manifest through three of his profoundest insights, i.e. "Authentic silence is possible only in genuine discourse" (Heidegger 1996: 154), "Conscience speaks solely and constantly in the mode of silence" (Heidegger 1996: 252) and "The call speaks in the uncanny mode of *silence*." (Heidegger 1996: 252) These three profound statements sum up how discourse through silence is ontological or existential for Heidegger. Clearly Heidegger is making silence as integral to discourse from the point of view of Da-sein's authentic life. If the standardized, informative, descriptive language-game constitutes the authentic life of Da-sein then Da-sein has to be existentially or ontologically engaged with it. The 'talk' (i.e. discourse) cannot be a "talk for talk's sake" or a talk at cross-purposes, or the *Gerede* which are all the inauthentic modes of discourse.

Although the profound statements cited above bear on discourse and the Being, (i.e. Da-sein), the former stresses the notion of 'discourse' in the context of Da-sein's 'being with the other', whereas the latter two statements stress the notion of 'the call' (of conscience) in the context of Da-sein's potentiality-of-being-a-self.¹⁵ What Heidegger is saying is that Da-sein's being-with-others could very well be inauthentic if Da-sein is merely a member of the crowd for which discourse is no more than information or curiosity or *Gerede*. For Da-sein this discourse is alienating, i.e. it alienates Da-sein from itself or from what is its own. This inauthenticity can be overcome leading to the authenticity of Discourse via a search for something that belongs to Da-sein. Invocation of this belongingness to Da-sein is what conscience tries to achieve through silence. Thus, an authentic being-with others is possible through the voicing of Being through conscience. But what if the call is the call of Da-sein's Being which is in principle public and sharable but only in the authentic mode? But Da-sein's capacity towards being-a-self or self-hood is one of acknowledging its relationship to Being hence the silence is

also an act of listening to the voice of Being or the existential or ontological dimension.

Da-sein's 'being-in-the-world' and 'being-with-one-another' becomes intelligible only in and through Discourse. In this double constitution, i.e. in the constitution of Da-sein and in the constitution of discourse, 'hearing' and 'keeping silent' are the only possibilities in which the "existentiality of existence first becomes completely clear." (Heidegger 1996: 252) To make sense of 'hearing' and 'keeping silent' we must know 'what is spoken' as such, or 'what is said as such', through which discourse communicates. But one should also note that the 'what' here is not totally determinate. The call does not refer to anything specific- it is nothing! Its not just one kind of meaning but rather the possibility of many meanings which is opened up by understanding. The elements or the building blocks of this communication are "sharing of being attuned together" and of the "understanding of being-with". The attunement and understanding stress precisely that communication for Heidegger is not from the 'inside' of one subject to the 'inside' of another subject but through the Being-with-others (*mitda-sein*) which is manifest in 'attunement-with' and 'understanding-with'. The connection of discourse with understanding and intelligibility is through "hearing". Hearing is constitutive of discourse. Hearing transcends the primary and authentic 'being-open' of Da-sein (the form of "listening to...") to 'being-with' the other. Heidegger stresses that Da-sein hears *because* it understands. Since understanding is receptivity Heidegger emphasizes on listening. The question here is that of primacy of speaking or of listening. Heidegger wishes to de-emphasize the speaking part as primary. The Da-sein is not a Cartesian subject who begins to speak from scratch. Rather as a being-in-the-world or being-there, Da-sein's existence is inextricably linked to that of the mode of Being that surrounds and constitutes. Intrinsic to the notion to 'hearing', i.e. Da-sein's 'being-with-others' is the notion of 'keeping silent'. Silence is the possibility of understanding. Heidegger says that "In talking with one another the person who is silent can "let something be understood," that is, he can develop understanding more authentically..." (Heidegger, 1996, 154) But silence, i.e. keeping silent is not dumbness or inability to speak and understand. These are inauthentic silences possible only in pseudo discourse. A silence is genuine when in a discourse it is the ground of authentic and rich disclosedness of Da-sein, i.e. the disclosedness of Da-sein in the form of 'saying something' in the midst of 'being-with-one-another'.

But in being-with-one-another the Da-sein is lost in the ‘they’ from which the authentic potentiality-of-being of Da-sein has to be recovered and attested by Da-sein itself. This attestation has to be grounded in Da-sein itself. This attestation comes from the ‘voice of conscience’. This voice of conscience has to be thematized existentially and not psychologically, biologically, or even theologically. Thus delineated, conscience is pure “call”. It discloses ‘something’ to understand. This formal characteristic of conscience reveals that conscience as a call is a mode of discourse. In fact, Heidegger explicitly states that “Calling is a mode of *discourse*.” (Heidegger 1996: 249) The call of conscience *summons* Da-sein to its “ownmost potentiality-of-being-a-self” and to this summons corresponds a possible *hearing* of conscience. This hearing is actually a recovery of Da-sein’s failure to hear itself, a recovery of the loss of Da-sein into the publicness of the ‘they’. Listening to the ‘they-self’ must be interrupted by the hearing to itself. But what does the Da-sein, the one who is summoned, hear when the call is issued? Nothing! Because the call (of conscience) does not *say* anything, nor does it make Da-sein to converse with itself. The call of conscience is un-uttered and yet it is not obscure and indefinite. Conscience “*speaks solely and constantly in the mode of silence.*”

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NOTES

1. I am grateful to Professors Nirmalya Chakravarti and Kanchana Mahadevan for helping me formulate some of the ideas pertaining to Advaita Vedānta and Heidegger in a clearer manner.
2. The Sanskrit equivalents of 'silence' are 'nihśabda', 'mauna', 'tūshnin', 'śabdaprayogarāhityam', 'stabdhi' each one having specific context of its use.
3. The Sanskrit equivalent of 'absence' is 'abhāva'.
4. The Sanskrit equivalents of 'sound' are 'dhvani', 'nāda', 'ninād', 'rava', 'ārava', 'saṅrava'.
5. The enigma of 'hearing silence' is also due to the universally accepted inseparable relation between 'hearing' and 'sound' implying that only sounds can be heard. Sound is taken as tautological accusative of the verb "to hear". (Warnock 1953: 36)
6. On the other hand Plato's Cave men are not blind; they 'see' the shadows but without realizing that what they see are only shadows. If we substitute darkness for shadows then Plato's cave men are "seeing darkness" without realizing that it is darkness. Confusing shadows for reality and confusing darkness for light would both be the forms of ignorance and Plato will be the 'sighted' companion!
7. (<http://www.songfacts.com/detail.php>)
8. The gesture of silence towards the dead can become profound by associating silence with darkness. In Poland the death of Pope John II was commemorated on the evening of April 8, 2005 by switching off the lights in homes throughout the nation to reinforce five minutes of silence. (Sorensen 2010: 15)
9. Alfred Hitchcock: *The Rope* (1948) *Strangers on a Train* (1951), *Psycho* (1960), *The Birds* (1963) *Torn Curtain* (1966)
10. (Bays: *Sound*)
11. This translation is by Ogden and Ramsey but D.F. Pears and B.F. M. McGuinness translate the sentence as "What we cannot speak about we must pass over into silence."
12. A proposition is a combination of names. A simple (atomic) proposition is a combination of simple names. A complex proposition is a truth function of simple propositions.
13. An atomic fact is a combination of simple objects.
14. But these limits of thought are not epistemological the way Kant has thought about them.
15. Kant expresses this idea differently. He reads 'call' as "the immortal spirit's hidden faculty" and says "In the universal silence of nature and in the calm of the senses the immortal spirit's hidden faculty of knowledge speaks an ineffable language and gives undeveloped concepts which are indeed felt but do not let themselves be described." (Kant 1981:196)