INDEXICALISM AND PARADOX[1]

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ABSTRACT: I consider the longstanding connection, already mooted by Aristotle, between the project of metaphysics as the general science of "being qua being" and the apparently more specific structure of a *metaphysics of possibility* that is structured essentially by the force and dominance of the principle of non-contradiction. I reconstruct, from the alternative position of what Hilan Bensusan terms "indexicalism," an antinomic structure of indexicality plausibly underlying at a basic level the paradoxical results of several significant arguments in the history of Western philosophy that bear (on their face) contradictory or antinomic conclusions and suggest that these arguments are collectively sufficient to show that there cannot be an indexicalist "metaphysics of modality." The antinomic arguments nevertheless bear, I argue in dialogue with Bensusan, Levinas, and Derrida, an important critical significance if directed, from an indexicalist standpoint, against the anthropogenic violence characteristic of the humanist thinking of metaphysical possibility and the extractive dominance over non-human others that this thinking enables and promulgates.

KEYWORDS: Indexicalism; Bensusan; Levinas; Derrida

I

In a lost work, the *Protrepticus*, Aristotle is said to have argued by disjunction for the unavoidability of philosophical inquiry:

> Indeed, as Aristotle says in the *Protrepticus* he wrote down, in which he exhorts the youth to do philosophy - he says this: if you should do philosophy, you should do philosophy, and if you should not do philosophy, then you should do philosophy. Therefore in every case you should do philosophy. For if philosophy exists, then

> positively we are obliged to do philosophy, since it truly exists. But if it does not truly exist, even so we are obliged to investigate how it is that philosophy does not truly exist. But by investigating we would be doing philosophy, since to investigate is the cause of philosophy.

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Elias, *Prolegomena to Philosophy*, p. 3, lines 17-23 (ed. Busse)[2]

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In the reported passage, Aristotle makes an indexical appeal in the second person. One way we might understand the argument is this: i) if philosophy has a positive subject matter ("if philosophy exists"), then "you" must undertake the investigation of this subject matter; but ii) if it does not, this very lack of a positive subject matter is itself a worthy and indeed necessary topic of investigation. For you are then obliged to investigate just this lack, and to do so is itself, already, to do philosophy. So, either way, you (or rather, "we" – here he appears to switch to the collective first person, or waver between the two kinds of address, by way of the implicit inclusion of the "you" in the "we" of the community of inquirers, in which Aristotle includes himself) cannot avoid doing philosophy.

On the argument, philosophical inquiry would thus be both inevitable and indeed obligatory, its pursuit required at the outset, as soon as we have any kind of reflective or critical question at all. For as soon as we have any sort of question about a subject matter, whether that subject matter exists or not, we are obliged to move, in inquiry, in the direction of the *cause* or *principle* of this existence or non-existence. In so doing (we can readily imagine Aristotle arguing) we are proceeding toward the maximum generality that characterizes philosophy as such. The movement toward totality that is characteristic of "metaphysics" or of the "science of being *qua* being" has thus already started; we cannot stop short, once the movement has begun, of establishing the being or the non-being of what is, as such and as a whole. Whatever its results, we can recognize at the end of this movement, indeed, the same generality that Aristotle identifies in *Metaphysics*, book IV, as that characteristic of that science which does not depend on the specification of any particular subject matter (as the "special sciences" do) but rather investigates the maximally *general* subject matter that precedes them. Even

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[2] "Elias" is the attributed name of an author of commentaries on Aristotle and Porphyry, probably emerging from the school of Olympiodorus in Alexandria in the late 6th century CE. See: https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/elias/. There are several available reconstructions, from extant fragments, of the *Protrepticus*. For one of these, with discussion and variant attested versions of the argument, see: http://www.protrepticus.info/protr2017x20.pdf.

if this maximally general subject matter does not exist, the generality of the inquiry, and the knowledge corresponding to it will *still* be possible. Indeed, it will be necessary: for, as Aristotle says, inquiry into the reason for the nonexistence of the totality itself implies this inquiry, or requires it as its end.

The argument functions as a kind of double bind. Whether or not there is a topic for it – whether or not there is any such thing as being in general and as such – metaphysics will be possible. Indeed, thinking will, in and of itself, be metaphysical: it will be directed, and assured in its direction, toward the maximal generality of whatever there is, or is not. In this way, the argument works as a kind of mechanism for converting any critique of metaphysics into metaphysics itself. Or – we might say – for converting any reflective doubt or critical consideration of the *possibility* of metaphysics into proof of just *that* possibility itself. Metaphysics, given the structure Aristotle argues for here, thus can immunize itself against its own possible impossibility. It can do so as long as it can comprehend both this possibility, and this impossibility, in the purportedly neutral medium of its inquiry, and its procedure towards greater generality. But since, as is abundantly clear elsewhere in Aristotle's corpus, there is no metaphysics that is not a metaphysics of possibility – since modality is the very medium in which metaphysics functions – the argument will have, in the context of Aristotle's overall project, the function of establishing (or purporting to establish) the (coherent thinking of the) being of *possibility* always already in advance. It will be assured, always in advance, that is, that the thinking that thinks the possibilities of things as such and in general is itself always possible, indeed always necessary as soon as we ask the first question – about anything – at all.

Let us ask whether we may come to have reason to doubt both this assurance and this possibility. We can begin to do so by noting that both are *themselves* crucially preconditioned, within Aristotle's protreptic argument, by his implicit appeal to the *exclusiveness* and *exhaustiveness* of the alternatives to which he appeals – those of either the *existence* or the *nonexistence* of a proper subject matter for philosophy, and thus by the coherence of the general idea of inquiry as applicable to *either*. But what is it that, in Aristotle's thought, licenses, in turn, the assumption of this mutual exclusiveness and exhaustiveness? The answer is not far to seek: it is the *logical* principle which Aristotle cites, in the *Metaphysics,* as the first principle

of all inquiry, and also its most general and firmest: the law of non-contradiction, according to which it is impossible for a thing both to bear and to lack any property, at the same time and in the same respect – or perhaps that it is impossible for us to *think* that that to be the case.[3] The arguments for this, if they are successful, function to establish a privileged connection between inconsistency and impossibility: whatever is inconsistent is simply impossible, and an inquiry with inconsistent results is no inquiry at all. Or, at any rate, such an inquiry would be one that cannot be considered *complete*, cannot have reached its end of establishing univocal truth.[4]

In this way, Aristotle's protreptic argument functions first by appearing to assume the neutral *possibility* of both of its alternatives as well as the indifferent applicability of rational inquiry to both. But any claim this procedure might have to be conclusive relies on the prior force, and assumption of the principle of noncontradiction and its disjunctive application across the *whole* "space" of possibilities that the two alternatives – those of either a proper subject matter for metaphysics, or its nonexistence – together embody.

What if, though, we come to have reason to think that neither of these alternatives are *by themselves* logically coherent? That is, what if we come to have reason to believe that it is not coherent to suppose that there *is* such a thing as the totality of entities as such and as a whole, *or* that there is *no such* totality? Then the reason for the difficulty of metaphysics, supposing its proper object not to exist, cannot be transformed into a positive argument for the investigation of the reason or "cause" for this nonexistence, for this difficulty is no longer grounded just in the (coherent) *absence* of its subject matter – its *contingently* failing to be there, as it were. Rather, the reason for this difficulty is revealed as the ultimate incoherence – that is, inconsistency – of supposing it either to be there, or not to be. With this, then, metaphysics can no longer immunize itself against its own possible impossibility and the protreptic "double bind" argument for the *necessity* of positive philosophy as the investigation into the maximally general is, rather, transformed into an aporia.

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[3] *Metaphysics* 1005b9-33.

[4] Of course, the claim of the exhaustiveness of the two alternatives requires not (just) the principle of noncontradiction, but the (closely related, for Aristotle) principle of excluded middle, which he also appears to assert at 1011b23.

I will now argue that this – namely, that neither the assumption of the existence nor that of the nonexistence of a proper, and properly general, subject matter of metaphysics can be held consistently in general -- is indeed what we *should* suppose; and this for what I think are ultimately *logical* reasons rather than "metaphysical" ones. To see why, we may consider a form of argument that has a broad philosophical provenance, since Zeno – and descendants in Plato's *Parmenides,* Kant, Russell and Deleuze, among others.[5] The arguments I have in mind offer, in each case, an antinomy or paradox that takes the form of what we may call a "double *reductio*." That is, with respect to a targeted object, what is shown is that *both* the assumption of its existence *and* the assumption of its nonexistence lead to contradiction.[6] Consider, for example, the radically aporetic conclusion of the dialectical exercise (or "second part") of the *Parmenides*, which is directed toward the successive consideration of the consequences of the various hypotheses of the existence or nonexistence of the one (or "Unity") in relation to the (all the) "others":

> Let us say then say this – and also that, as it seems, whether one is or is not, it and the others both are and are not, and both appear and do not appear all things in all ways, both in relation to themselves and in relation to each other. (*Parmenides* 166c)

The paradoxical consequence results on *either* the assumption of the one's existence or its nonexistence. Or consider Russell's paradox in its "predicative" (rather than set-theoretical) version: just as the argumentation shows the incoherence, on standard assumptions, of allowing any predicate φ to fall under its own scope, as $\varphi(\varphi)$, so it similarly and by the same token shows (on these assumptions) it to be equally absurd to suppose that (pseudo-)sentence's negation,

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[5] The Zenoian arguments that I have in mind are not primarily the ones about time and motion but rather those which are, on the level of the previous problems of "the one and the many" or of "likeness and unlikeness" plausibly their conceptual basis; these are the problems that are all but explicitly in view in the (dialogue) *Parmenides'* dialectical exercise or second part. The Kantian arguments I have in mind are specifically the cosmological antinomies in the first *Critique*. For the relevant arguments in Deleuze – which establish, this time, the paradoxical character of sense as an always-presupposed substratum to the possibilities of expression, indication, and representation in the sentence, see the opening sections of *The Logic of Sense.*

[6] And hence – it is standardly assumed – to absurdity; the assumption that contradictions must be absurdities is evidently justified, however, only if we reject dialetheism (i.e., the view that there can be true contradictions).

~φ(φ), to hold.[7]

To see how this kind of argument may be considered to bear on metaphysics and its possibility, let us consider Kant's antinomies, each of which considers the implications of supposing there to exist, or not to exist, *a limit to a series of phenomena* of a given kind. Since, on either assumption, contradictions result, the solution that Kant generally recommends is to hold that the totality of phenomena itself does not exist: from Kant's transcendental idealist position, the world is not an existence in itself, but only a noumenal appearance that is constructed through the synthetic activity of a transcendental subjectivity.[8] A solution of this form – that is, an overall anti-realist and constructivist one – is motivated by a desire to maintain consistency *overall*, but (as Hegel in fact notes) it does not succeed in this respect, since the same antinomies of totality simply arise once more if we now consider the *expanded* totality consisting in the phenomenal *along with* its supposed noumenal conditions.[9] Rather, we may extract the general form of argument and, bracketing Kant's specifically transcendental idealist resolution, note the paradoxical form of the conclusion that it shares with the other historical examples: that it is incoherent because contradictory to suppose the relevant conditioning totality *either* to exist, or not to exist.

Now, logically or structurally speaking, what is the ground for the arising of this conclusion in each case? For Kant, the antinomic structure witnesses

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[7] Compare also Ryle from his analysis of Plato's *Parmenides*: "Russell's proof that, in his code-symbolism, ϕ cannot be a value of x in the propositional function ϕx is only another exercise in the same genre as Plato's proof that 'Unity' cannot go into the gap in the sentence-frame '. . . exists' or ' . . . does not exist'." (Ryle 1939, p. 313.)

[8] More precisely, the first two ("mathematical") antinomies get the negative solution of the nonexistence of the world as a ("completed") series of phenomena while the second two ("dynamical") ones get the "positive" solutions of the compatibility of noumenal freedom with deterministic causality in the phenomenal realm and of the possibility of an unconditionally necessary being. I will pass over these differences in the following, however, since they are irrelevant to the implications of the actual paradoxical argumentation itself.

[9] Thus Hegel in the *Science of Logic* (21.180-181, p. 158): "Kant's conception of the antinomies is that they 'are not sophistic artifices but contradictions reason must run up against.' This last is a Kantian expression, and the view expressed is an important one. 'As it gains insight into the natural illusion of the antinomies, reason is indeed no longer duped by it but is still deceived.' – The critical solution, namely through the so-called transcendental ideality of the world of perception, has no other result than to make the so-called conflict into something *subjective* wherein, of course, the same illusion still persists just as undispelled as before." (Despite this, however, Hegel goes on in the next sentence to offer a "true" solution whereby both sides of the antinomy are seen as "one-sided" and the resolution is seen as consisting in the "sublation" of "both determinations" into a unitary higher concept).

irreducible forms of reason; for Plato it is a matter of the coherence of the *logos* and hence of the "power of discourse" itself; for Russell it is the generality of (set-theoretical) logic which is capable of constructing in thought and language whatever unities can coherently exist at all.[10] But alongside these abstract logical determinations, I want also to suggest here (though I will not argue for it in full rigor) that the antinomic structure that is generated by the consideration of the structure of the relevant totalities, in each case, may be seen as premised – and essentially so – upon the reality of *irreducibly indexical phenomena* in each case. Thus, for instance, Kant's first antinomy asks about the total series of conditions preceding a present *now*, Russell's paradox asks about the structure of a set of all sets not containing *themselves*, and so on. In each case it is the question of the relationship of an indexically present element to the totality of *all* the elements to which it is constitutively related that generates the relevant antinomical structure. And it is then the reality and pervasiveness of the indexical that, most directly, guarantees that the antinomy *cannot* be resolved from a putatively or stipulatively non-indexical position, outside the relevant totality in each case.

Let us see how this works in (what I am taking to be once more) the representative example of Kant's four antinomies. In general, the argument for the *antithesis* is, in each case, predicated on the possibility for reason, with respect to a *given* phenomenon or moment, always being able to ask intelligibly about the condition for that phenomenon. Thus, supposing any putative limit to the total series of phenomena or moments in question, reason can always ask about what precedes or conditions this limit itself.[11] The *thesis* is, by contrast, generally predicated on the thought that, for a *given* conditioned to exist, so must the *totality* of its conditions.[12] Kant generally supposes, moreover, that such a totality cannot be infinite, since it is impossible for an infinite series *already* to have taken place. Thus, for example, in the part of the first antinomy that concerns the question of the beginning of the world in time, the antithesis argues that, supposing a temporal beginning of the world, it must be possible to inquire into what precedes

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[10] It should also be noted, perhaps, that on this understanding, none of the antinomic arguments, in themselves, depend on or yield "correlationist" premises or conclusions.

[11] This can be construed as an application of the principle of sufficient reason.

[12] Structurally, I here follow Priest's reconstruction of the antinomies as (essentially) inclosure contradictions in *Beyond the Limits of Thought* (Priest 2002, pp. 87-98).

this beginning, and the answer cannot coherently be "nothing." The thesis argues that for any given moment, however, there must be a backward temporal series of its conditions, and this series cannot extend backwards to infinity.[13] So there must after all be a first temporal moment of the world.

How should we understand the general conditions for possibility of the antinomic arguments, and on what movement or operation of thinking are both sides predicated? We can begin by asking how both arguments begin. In both cases, more or less explicitly, the argument begins with the presence of a *given* moment. This "given" is, I would like to suggest, in both the cases of the antithesis and thesis, ineliminable. Specifically, it expresses an ineliminable appeal to the *indexical*, most typically the indexical moment of a present "now". Here, "any given" moment does not just mean any "arbitrary" moment: rather it means something like the moment that is *actually present,* that which (taking "moment" in a non-temporal sense) is *here,* that which is (now) *occurring.* Thus, in the case of the thesis, we begin with the present moment, and ask about the *totality* of *its* conditions. The force of the argument is that these conditions *must exist* – i.e. must have elapsed – as a totality *in order for* the present now to occur. But as the present now *does* occur, it follows that the *whole* series of its temporal conditions *must have* occurred; in which case it cannot (Kant argues) be infinite.[14] And similarly for the antithesis. The antithesis argument depends on the thought that, for *any* given moment, we can ask about *its* conditions, and then about the conditions for these conditions, and so on; so the series of actually existing conditions must – contrary to the thesis argument – be infinite. At each step of the argument, we are considering that there must be a real and sufficient reason for what occurs. For the argument to make sense, though, it has to start with something that *does* occur, and must *have* conditions: it must be intelligible, in other words, to suppose that, starting with a *present* moment, we can always continue the backward inquiry.

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[13] Here and more generally in the thesis arguments, there is an appeal to the principle that an infinite regress of reasons cannot be explanatory.

[14] This indexical appeal to the occurrence of the present moment is evidently essential to the whole force of the thesis argument. For there is nothing contradictory or even problematic about an arbitrary element in an infinite series being *preceded* by the totality of that series: for example, in the (two-way) infinite series of the positive and negative natural numbers, 0 is preceded by an infinite number of negatives. However, what gives the thesis argument force is exactly the thought that there *is* an occurrent temporal moment that is conditioned by the totality of its antecedents.

We can, perhaps, generalize. Both the antithesis and the thesis witness distinctive kinds of movements of thought, or operations, both grounded *irreducibly* in the presence of an indexical "now" or "here" or "this" and in the possibility of an essentially indexical gesture – a pointing *away* from this presence to an (also essentially indexical) "then" or "there" or "that." In the antithesis of the first antinomy, for example, we point away from the given present ("this") to its immediately precedent moment ("that"). In the thesis, we come back to the present ("this") to consider its relationship to the *totality* of the precedent moments ("that"s) which surround or precede it, and must determine it. We here, in other words, consider the totality of the conditions of the present, of the "I", "here", or "now" itself; and we can suppose this totality to exist – and indeed, if we are to apply the reason at all we *must* suppose it to exist – just because the present moment itself does. In this moment of reflection, I see myself necessarily, here and now, as conditioned by others: by the others in general, or at least those whom I can understand to surround me and only through which I gain any positive characterization I might be able to give to myself.[15]

Now it might be thought that this kind of consideration, and the appeal to something like the principle of sufficient reason that accompanies it, are themselves appeals to a *totality* in a sense which we must consider, on indexicalist grounds, objectionable. In fact, I do not think this is so. There is, by all means, an appeal to a totality; but the relevant totality is not (and cannot be) the totality of everything that there is or all that is the case. It is rather just the totality of the conditions for the *present* moment, the here and now in which I (here and now) do find myself. In general terms, we ought to distinguish a view of totality, even of a totality of which I am a part, from a "view from nowhere". There is no evident or immediate contradiction in my having a conception of the totality of the territory I am within, even though I am inside it; similarly, taking a view of the whole of which I am part does not require that I locate myself (*per impossible,* as it may be) outside of it.

It appears that the double indexical movement is itself irreducible, and is

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[15] What is the alternative to this? We might just refuse to consider the existence of the totality of conditions. But then we are faced with seeing ourselves as *unconditioned*; and hence our existence as arbitrary and perfectly spontaneous. Critical thought recoils at this; its resistance is marked from the very first moment of its questioning with respect to the present.

irreducibly part of what we will be tempted to term (from within a "metaphysical" attitude or project of theorizing) the structure of any "now", "here," or "this" in general. It is also contradictory, and thereby witnesses how the structure of antinomy is already itself "there" in the structure of the various indexicals themselves.[16]   If it is sufficient to generate the antinomic arguments, as I have argued, then this also suffices to clarify that the basic positional source of the antinomical structure is *not* the taking of a position "beyond the totality" or (In the case of the world) a "view from nowhere". Rather – although there is crucially a moment in the argument for the thesis where we have to consider the *totality* of conditions for a given (present) conditioned – the issue of the totality in fact appears *from within* the indexical, and not from an imagined or fantasied position outside it. [17]

In this way, familiar antinomies about totality are recognizably premised on the ineliminability of indexicals, in the sense considered above. And *one* familiar use of such a paradox is for *reductio* of totalities: given the claimed existence of a totality X, we show that, on the assumption of the existence of X, contradiction will result, so we argue that X cannot exist. But as we have seen, since the reductio argument is indeed a "double" one, it works similarly to refute, from the present, the *nonexistence* of X in each case: whether we suppose the totality of conditions to exist *or we suppose it not to exist*, either way the contradiction will arise, as soon as we assume that the *present, indexical element* does exist. This implication, and the real form of the problem, is perhaps obscured in the Kantian context by Kant's own recommended solution of transcendental idealism, which indeed *does* require an "outside" position from which it is possible to view the relevant totalities, or from which they could be viewed *if* they existed. However, since, as we have seen, this "solution" just replicates once more the underlying structure, it is irrelevant to this structure of the antinomy itself. From what I have suggested is the *irreducibly indexical* perspective of the antinomical structure, we have reason to believe that it is not consistently possible either for the "totality" to exist or not

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[16] For a more detailed argument attempting to show this in the case of the temporal "now", see (what I called) the "kairological paradox of passage" in Livingston (2017a), chapter 6.

[17] This is why Kant's argument for transcendental idealism on the basis of the antinomies – which requires us to drop the presupposition that the world exists (as a "completed whole") is not successful, and indeed just (as Hegel says in the *Science of Logic*) once again reproduces the same structure.

to, and *moreover* that it is not consistently possible to take a non-indexical position with respect to the totality from which *either* claim – that of the existence *or* the nonexistence of the totality – could be asserted.

Let us return, then, to the question of the possibility of metaphysics.

As suggested before, if the antinomic argument works this way, it transforms the double bind that, with Aristotle, enjoins us to do philosophy as metaphysics into the double aporia of its contradictoriness. Whether we assume there to be an object for philosophy or there is not, the result is contradictory; taking, then, possibility as having the sense of non-contradiction (and it is worth asking whether it has ever had, for metaphysics, any other sense), on both horns of the dilemma *philosophy is impossible*. And this is, moreover, for reasons that appear to be properly called *logical* rather than themselves metaphysical. It is not that metaphysics just happens to find, one day, something which makes it impossible, or indeed which verifies its possibility. It is that the very *existence* of indexicality and irreducibly indexical phenomena renders, as a matter of logical form or structure, any total picture that includes them, itself, contradictory.

Given this, we can now consider Jon Cogburn's introduction of what he terms, explicitly drawing out the implications of Kant's and Russell's antinomies among others, "paradoxico-metaphysics:"

> Metaphysics aims to give a maximally general account of what reality is like such that we encounter the phenomena that we do. But what if we encounter phenomena such as the Berkeley/Fichte and Kant/Russell arguments that seem to entail that metaphysics is impossible? Then the task of metaphysics is to give a maximally general account of what reality is like such that metaphysics is impossible.[18]

Both the parallel with, and the difference from, Aristotle's argument in the *Protrepticus* are now clear. Like Aristotle's argument, Cogburn's suggestion operates within what we may think of as a general medium – the quest for an "account of what reality is like" – that must apparently be coherent if either of the horns of the relevant disjunction is to be upheld. But unlike Aristotle, Cogburn envisions (on the second horn) that "metaphysics is impossible" not just because its subject matter may be lacking but in the sense (presumably) that it is impossible *because* paradoxical or contradictory. Still, the effect on the

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[18] Cogburn (2017), pp. 8-9; quoted in Bensusan (2021), p. 18.

"possibility" of metaphysics is apparently unchanged: metaphysics, even if 'impossible' (because or in virtue of what is "entailed" by some peculiar or paradoxical phenomenon or phenomena), is *still* possible, exactly as the investigation into "what reality is like such that [it] is impossible."

However, if – as I have argued – the antinomic arguments that operate as *double* reductios of the totality are uniformly predicated on indexicality, the (coherent) *possibility* of the "maximally general account" does not survive them. There is just no such account to be given, unless from an imaginary non-indexical position that we cannot consistently take. This is all to say why I think there is no such thing as "paradoxico-metaphysics" in Cogburn's sense.[19] On the one hand, the absence of the possibility of metaphysics – its own possible impossibility – is more radical than Cogburn, with Aristotle, supposes: it is not just a matter of what there is or is not but of the structure of what is called "possibility" itself. On the other, metaphysics, as the metaphysics "of" possibility, is too much imbricated with the idea of noncontradiction to succeed in guaranteeing its own existence once we, in light of the antinomic arguments, are prepared to question it.

But the antinomic arguments nevertheless point to a different use of paradoxes "of totality" in philosophy, one that is certainly the underlying

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[19] What of the option of "affirming the (metaphysical) whole *as contradictory*"? This might seem not only to be open, but even recommended, by an application of "dialetheism" to the question of totality. But what is actually the content of such an affirmation? There are paraconsistent systems of logic, and their availability shows we do not have to credit in general the principle of "explosion" (or *ex falso, quodlibet*). But of course the mere availability of the plurality of systems has *no* tendency to support any single "metaphysical" conclusion about the nature of the whole (and rather seems to support the claim that there is no such conclusion to be drawn). The option of "affirming the whole" as contradictory is an option *only within a space of possible views "about the whole"*: just as one could (on the suggested picture) have the view that the whole is consistent, one could also have the view that it "is" inconsistent. However if, in light of the antinomic reasoning, *both* of these views along with all others are shown to be incoherent, then the picture of the broader space in which these two views would be possibilities is also shown to be incoherent. As such, it is an illusion, and should be rejected.

Something similar goes – I believe – for the oft-cited claim due to McDowell that we cannot take (what he calls in *Mind and World*) a "sideways-on view" of the world. If we *cannot* take such a view and if the reason for this "cannot" is logical in the sense I have been discussing – if, that is, it is *incoherent* to suppose that we can take it – then just as it is incoherent to say or suppose that we can take such a view, it is *equally* incoherent to say or suppose that we *cannot* take it. This is also related to why, as Bensusan argues (*Indexicalism*, p. 41), we must reject from an indexicalist position even the kind of inconsistent "fragmentalist" world that Kit Fine suggests in Fine (2005).

intention of Kant's use of antinomy, even if he himself stops short of applying it with maximal rigor. This use is *critical,* rather than metaphysical. It is to criticize from within the constitutive structure of our human thought and language that leads us again and again to suppose there to exist a coherent totality, whether of the world, of language, of practice or of meaning, and to suppose ourselves capable – such is the form of philosophy's original thought, in Aristotle, of the rational capability that defines the human – of mastering it. And if we can say that critique is, as such, the critique *of* metaphysics, nevertheless this does not mean that in so saying we must imagine its vindication in the form of positive, consistent and general coherence. But that the critique of metaphysics is also, just as such, the critique of ideology points more closely to its relevance to the concerns of everyday life and practice, as well as to their contemporary determination in the capitalist present, and "our" location within it.

An illuminating development of this critique can go, perhaps surprisingly, by way of the most familiar facts or phenomena of our everyday self-location, or our routine understanding of what is involved in our being spatiotemporally located in a "here" and a "now", and what this indexical (self-)location implies for perception, practice, and the form of our empirical knowledge of the world in general. One plank in the platform that provides the basis for Hilan Bensusan's general position of "indexicalism" is John Perry's familiar argument for what he (Perry) calls an "essential indexical". As Perry argues, there are many kinds of examples of knowledge that we can obviously possess, and state in indexical terms, which cannot be fully captured or reduced to objective or third-person terms. More rigorously, there is essential locational information or knowledge that cannot be put in third-person structural descriptions (purged of tense and indexicality and phenomenality) in the sense of Carnap's *Aufbau.* If it is right that there are indexicals that are essential in this sense – that of "irreducibility" to any non-indexical description -- then it is also the case that a nonindexical description of reality *cannot* be complete.[20] But it also follows – or so I shall argue – that a

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[20] The thesis of Bensusan's book overall is not simply that indexical terms, facts, or descriptions are "essential" in the sense of "irreducible," to non-indexical terms, facts, or descriptions, but that they are "foundational" or irreducibly part of the ultimate "furniture of reality". But since I am not sure how to think about the question of what makes a term, fact, or description "foundational" in this sense, I will focus here just on the question of irreducibility.

third-person and nonindexical description of reality *augmented* with various indexical descriptions cannot be complete either. That is, it cannot be a description of *one* reality. Nor any (coherent) number of realities: not even an infinite number.[21]

The reason is that the "indexical facts" are, when combined with one another into a single overall "account", *themselves mutually inconsistent*. A quick route to this conclusion is the one that McTaggart takes in trying to argue for the ultimate unreality of time: objective temporal relationships (B-Series) presuppose and are founded on tensed ones (A-series). But the tensed relationships are inconsistent: for example, "past," "present," and "future" are mutually exclusive and jointly exhaustive temporal predicates, but what is (now) present can also be (later) past; what is (now) future can be either or both, and so on. There are further reasons to think that the inconsistency of the temporal determinations (perhaps by contrast to the similar but merely apparent inconsistencies in the case of spatial or egocentric indexicals) is itself essential to structuring temporal change and becoming: any account of temporal becoming that aims to be coherent overall must embrace these inconsistencies, or "unfold" them, in falsifying fashion, in the form of static diachrony in order to maintain consistency overall. At any rate, I want to argue in the remainder of the paper that what thus seems to be the case with the temporal relationships holds generally. The indexicals are essential, in the sense of "irreducible", but what is essential is not simply their figuring as a basis or a foundation, necessarily, for everything else. What is essential is rather the *contradiction* introduced by them, and thus permanently characteristic of human existence, or of the existence of anything that locates itself at all; anything, that is, that has a being that is a being-here-and-now-in the world. And if the general arguments above about the indexical form of antinomy can indeed be credited, then the irreducibility of indexicality that is shown by Perry's and McTaggart's arguments can serve as the formal basis for a radical critique of the positionality that is supposed by the positive project of metaphysics, and thus (as I shall now argue) of the anthropogenic violence that it protects and shelters.

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[21] Sufficient reason to think that even an infinite number will not do, in modal contexts, is given by "Kaplan's paradox;" we shall return to this in section III, below.

II

If metaphysics can be seen as an activity of "making sense" of beings as such and as a whole,[22] then its pretension to take a *consistent* total view with respect to them promulgates a distinctive power, and a violence. Insofar as, in other words, the metaphysical project of "making sense" of things as a whole requires, and produces, the illusion of a perspective from which they can be seen as having a *unitary* sense, a perspective from a position capable of viewing them *as a mutually consistent* whole, it both presupposes and inscribes the right to an operation of force which could be justified only from such a position. This is the position of that which can claim to *delineate* and *anticipate in advance* the sense of all that which is other to it, to pre-judge and ultimately appropriate this sense as its own. This is the violence against which, of course, Levinas's ethical project is most broadly directed. As Levinas understands it, it is predicated, as Derrida emphasizes in "Violence and Metaphysics," on a certain metaphorical allegiance of thinking, understood as light or illumination, with power, amounting in the history of the metaphysical development of western philosophy to an "ancient complicity between theoretical objectivity and technico-political possession."[23] Within this framework, as Levinas suggests, knowledge is never simply separable from power, and the relation in which an agent or subject stands to what she knows is always displaced toward the neutrality of grasping or possessing, as if (Derrida) "everything given to me within light appears as given to myself by myself…"[24] Relatedly, this violence is distinctive in that it aims to appropriate the *meaning* of what is known for the benefit of the knower. Bensusan usefully discusses this appropriation as the "extraction of intelligibility", and its project as the colonialist one of "maximizing the extraction of intelligibility in order to secure the sameness of future experience – to render the future secure."[25]

In these terms, the extraction of intelligibility is a violence. It is an operation of setting-upon, or of the forcible seizing of what appears from, or in, something for the ends of another, or for the One itself. It is a violation and a violence when

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[22] Compare A.W. Moore's recent articulation of the project of metaphysics in *The Evolution of Modern Metaphysics: Making Sense of Things*.

[23] Derrida, "Violence and Metaphysics", p. 113.

[24] Derrida, "Violence and Metaphysics", p. 114.

[25] Bensusan, *Indexicalism*, p. 185.

one or the one, who has the *power* to do so seizes or extracts a sense from an other in particular; it is *hyperbolic* violence when it claims, taking a "view from nowhere," to comprehend and extract the sense of *every* other in general. But what is it that grants one, or *the* one, this power? What are the conditions of this power in general and how are these connected to the "conditions" of intelligibility in *a* one, or *the* one in general? If the extraction of sense is the operation in which any one – every one – seeks to effect and secure its power over that from which it extracts, I should like to suggest that the effect of the antinomical considerations we have entertained is, in relation to this project and this question, twofold. First, it shows the real and unavoidable structure of this power, of the capacity that the one who is "capable" of sense is supposed to have. Second though, it shows the incoherence of its claims, and thus provides an elemental undertow to those claims, and those acts of violence, themselves.

I do not know whether this critical undermining can be termed an "ethics". It is, at any rate, a way in which the *motivation* of metaphysics – what Levinas calls "metaphysical" desire – is called into question on a logically constitutive ground. If the argument leading from ineliminable indexicals to antinomy is credited, it gives reason to think that the project of metaphysics cannot be, ultimately, an *effective* one: it cannot produce the end it envisions – that of the extraction of unitary sense – and therefore cannot *ultimately* serve the ends of the power it attempts to promote. It cannot serve these ends, at any rate, without at the same time serving their undermining; it cannot extract a unitary sense without at the same moment contesting and challenging just this sense itself. To recognize this is, I would suggest, substantially the same as the recognition that consistency is *produced*. It is produced by dissimulating the counter-tow of the antinomical under the assumption of the availability of consistent generality, of law in general, or of the power of human comprehension in the form of reason, the form of the *logos* itself. And if this is correct, then the critique of unitary sense that the antinomic arguments yield is then nothing other than a critique of this power, and a critique of the privilege of the human as such as that being which, endowed with the capacity of reasoning, is also thus seen as capable, through this mastery, of mastering possibility: of understanding in advance (so to speak) the contours and totality of the "space" of all that can be, or take place.

The ambiguity of what he terms "metaphysical desire" sometimes leads

Levinas to suggest that, prior to its "ontological" reduction to totality, metaphysics produces itself as critique. This self-production as critique is even, Levinas sometimes suggests, the same as what he wishes to call "ethics."[26] More specifically, in the movement toward totality that "theory" is, thinking nevertheless discovers its own contingency (Levinas says: its "dogmatism and naïve arbitrariness") and thus is moved to call into question its *own* autonomy, its own assumed self-relation as freedom and law. Passing through the moment of the encounter with the Other, it thus rediscovers that critical self-questioning which allows it to respect alterity in general, and in each case call into question the "exercise of the same" that the ego, functionally and constitutively, is. In this movement, the self recoils on itself to seek the origin of what it posits as its freedom. But crucially for Levinas, the reflexive movement would be an infinite regress if it remained within ontology and its constitutive reduction of the other to the same. That it need not do so – that it can rather call this reduction into question, and along with it the ground of the self on which it has assumed itself, within ontology, to rest – is the effect of the presence of the Other, and thus the specificity of what Levinas calls "ethics."

But as Bensusan rightly notes, the terms in which Levinas himself proposes the critique of violence, as rigorous and radical as they are, nevertheless *in general* presuppose that the address, or the manifestation of the Other, is in the most primary sense a *human* encounter. In the terms of *Otherwise than Being*, Levinas accords a primacy to the "saying" over the said, and to the *systematic* role that the

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[26] "To theory as comprehension of beings the general title ontology is appropriate. Ontology, which reduces the other to the same, promotes freedom – the freedom that is the identification of the same, not allowing itself to be alienated by the other. Here theory enters upon a course that renounces metaphysical Desire, renounces the marvel of exteriority from which that Desire lives.

But theory understood as a respect for exteriority delineates another structure essential for metaphysics. In its comprehension of being (or ontology) it is concerned with critique. It discovers the dogmatism and naïve arbitrariness of its spontaneity, and calls into question the freedom of the exercise of ontology; it then seeks to exercise this freedom in such a way as to turn back at every moment to the origin of the arbitrary dogmatism of this free exercise. This would lead to an infinite regression if this return itself remained an ontological movement, an exercise of freedom, a theory. Its critical intention then leads it beyond theory and ontology: critique does not reduce the other to the same as does ontology, but calls into question the exercise of the same. A calling into question of the same – which cannot occur within the egoist spontaneity of the same – is brought about by the other. We name this calling into question of my spontaneity by the presence of the Other ethics." (*Totality and Infinity*, pp. 42-43)

priority of the "I"/other takes for him over other indexical relations and oppositions, a priority that is announced from the first pages of *Totality and Infinity*.[27] This priority is why the Other – even the absolute Other – is for Levinas in general a human other and one who, beyond or before the gaze that I direct to her, may address me with her words or her silence. Rightly, Bensusan contests this priority: a critique of violence and its movement that presupposes the relation to the other as human cannot rise to the critique of the violence *of* the human as such, of the capability (of language or of concepts of or reason) that defines this, cannot finally address the violence of the concept or of power against all that is exterior to this capability. In this it does not do justice to (what Bensusan calls) "the Great Outdoors," the others as others and to the irreducible exteriority this implies.

For Levinas, the exteriority of the Other as necessarily requiring an absolute transcendence, one metaphor of which is *infinite* height. This transcendence is, for Levinas, *asymmetric* and *hyperbolic*. It is a relation that is, as relation, impossible: a relationship between me in my finitude and an absolute height, an absolute infinity. One can thus question the coherence of this picture (or metaphor) of height, as does, for example, Derrida, in "Violence and Metaphysics:" as Derrida points out there, it is essentially the image of a height that is so hyperbolic as to "[tear] apart, by [its] superlative excess, the spatial literality" of the metaphor or

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[27] Thus, e.g.: "The alterity, the radical heterogeneity of the other, is possible only if the other is other with respect to a term whose essence is to remain at the point of departure, to serve as *entry* into the relation, to be the same not relatively but absolutely. *A term can remain absolutely at the point of departure only as I.*

To be I is, over and beyond any individuation that can be derived from a system of references, to have identity as one's content. The I is not a being that always remains the same, but is the being whose existing consists in identifying itself, in recovering its identity throughout all that happens to it. It is the primal identity, the primordial work of identification.

The I is identical in its very alterations. It represents them to itself and thinks them. The universal identity in which the heterogeneous can be embraced has the ossature of a subject, of the first person. Universal thought is an "I think"" (*Totality and Infinity*, p. 36)

In these remarks in which the constitutive self-identity of a *thinking self* is affirmed as the very condition of possibility of alterity, a couple of things to notice: i) This being of being me is – perhaps ineliminably for Levinas – specified (here at least, apparently uncritically) as a "having", i.e., explicitly, "to have identity as one's content" is the being of the self; ii) the reference is to the "entry" provided by a "point of departure" and it is said that only an "I" can have these. It follows from this, apparently, that that which cannot or does not think its self-identity does not, for Levinas, have any possibility of entering, remaining, or departing from anywhere; or at least cannot do so "absolutely".

structure of height itself.[28]   One can, relatedly, ask whether the "ethical" use of these figures or metaphors of the absolute, whatever their role in serving the critique of the violence that any assumption of symmetry between me and the other inscribes, does not at the same time threaten to impose another kind of violence or force, namely a hyperbolic or divine violence or force of the "most high." Levinas indeed sometimes associates such a divine violence *explicitly* with eschatology, in claiming for this eruption of the eschaton in history that it *alone* can bring a genuine peace).[29] Or again, one can question Levinas's identification of the infinite with the absolute in radical disjunction from totality, on the ground of a Cantorian or post-Cantorian thinking of the infinite which recognizes, on the one hand, the existence of infinitely multiple infinite totalities each of which (beginning with the set of all natural numbers ω) is, yet, not all-inclusive, and on the other, the absolute inconsistency that is demanded by that conception, as Cantor himself realized, of any infinity considered as *all-inclusive* or "unincreasable".

Any of these lines of questioning, if followed out, would, I believe, tend to suggest that Levinas cannot appeal to the figure or value of the Other as *absolute* infinity – or indeed to the ethical valence or use to which he puts it in the context of the self-Other "relationship" – without also inscribing and noting the consequences of an absolute and irreducible inconsistency in the very appeal to the possibility of this relationship.   But rather than pursue any of them, let us rather return to the main lines of Bensusan's critique of Levinas as systematically privileging the position and power of the human, and to the question of how and to what extent this privileging – in the form, for example, of the presupposition of that which can present itself to me as that which bears the possibility of formulating to me a (linguistic) address, that which addresses me from the position of that which speaks or *can* speak in words intelligible to me – rests on and requires the privilege of a *consistent* logos and thus the assumption of the privileged power of that (animal) which (as the tradition with, and since, Aristotle

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[28] Derrida, "Violence and Metaphysics," pp. 115-16.

[29] "Morality will oppose politics in history and will have gone beyond the functions of prudence or the canons of the beautiful to proclaim itself unconditional and universal when the eschatology of messianic peace will have come to superimpose itself upon the ontology of war." (*Totality and Infinity*, p. 22); "Of peace there can only be an eschatology." (*Totality and Infinity*, p. 24).

supposes) uniquely "possesses" or practices it.

We have seen that the logic of some of Levinas's metaphors for the infinity of the absolute Other is not distinct from that of a classical (and markedly privileged) figure of Platonic thought. Specifically, it is the figure of the Good in book VI of the *Republic*: that of a Good (perhaps, as neo-Platonism suggests, a One-Absolute) beyond being in the sense of *ousia*, and hyperbolically and incalculably superior to it "in rank and power."[30] Now of course this is also a central figure or metaphor of a neo-Platonic metaphysics which would organize the totality of being beneath the ordering superiority of the One. And even if Levinas thinks "metaphysics", in the positive sense in which he intends it, much more in the sense of the appeal to this "beyond Being" than in the Aristotelian sense of "beings as such and as a whole", still the correlative sense it gives to the elevation and hierarchy of the One is that of what conditions or surrounds, and in any case commands, just that whole.

If Levinas will have differentiated himself from this uncritical Platonist or neo-Platonist metaphysics it will only be by underscoring the "ethical" rather than "religious" character of his appeal, and by allowing it to characterize not just the approach of the individual to the divine Other but – as he often emphasizes – to any Other, or to what is Other in any one as such. But it remains that the application of the metaphor, or the analogy, requires not just the maximum of height but, more generally, the analogy it introduces between this "most high" and that which, in the Other, allows it to appear in a presentation – appear, that is, as One.

For Levinas, this condition of appearance is the *face*, the face of what has one. As Bensusan rightly points out, if we are to grasp the deeper structure of an indexicalist ethics of the others, this needs to be extended beyond the privilege of the human: it is not only human beings that effectively have a face, or that anyway have a presentative aspect as well as a voice, an address. But how are we to do this, within the metaphor or the structure of the *logos* itself? It is in relating to

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[30] Hyperbolically and incalculably superior, that is, if we take Socrates' metaphor of the sun here on its face. As Carlos Segovia rightly pointed out to me during the book symposium, however, with respect to the reconstruction of Plato's own deepest intentions, however, it is perhaps essential to take into consideration the explicitly *comically absurd* (*geloios*) response to the excess of this metaphor that he puts in the mouth of Glaucon at 509c: "By Apollo, what *daimonic* hyperbole!"

others as others that we find ourselves before this presentational face or appearance of that which can be heard, that which can speak. By resemblance or analogy to human speech, the other speaks to me or I to it. The analogy, though, functions *as an analogy* (that is, it can be an an-*alogy*), only if it functions within a general space that we can specify as that of the *logos* in general, a *logos* that must be shared between me and the Other. For me to approach the Other or to hear its address, it must speak in a language that I can understand. We must share a language: that is, on the thinking that begins with Plato and Aristotle and runs through Western philosophy, we must share a capability of language or possess in common a structure, a *logos*, that we both can hear and access. But to assume this is evidently just to assume a humanism of the Other, one that (whatever the extent of Levinas's commitment to it) would be quite at odds with Bensusan's admirably broader project.

Derrida suggests (following the summary claim, by Heidegger, that *all* metaphysics is, essentially, a humanism) that the classical figure of the Absolute in Levinas is, indeed, not separate or separable from this humanism of the *logos*.[31] If this is right, then nevertheless both the figure and the privilege of its claimed connection to metaphysical generality are open to challenge on the basis of the antinomic and critical reasoning discussed in section 1, above, itself. Given this antinomic reasoning, as we have seen, it is impossible for me to suppose that I encounter an other – any other -- *only* within the neutral medium of a shared and

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[31] "Now, Levinas simultaneously proposes to us a humanism and a metaphysics. It is a question of attaining, via the royal road of ethics, the supreme existent, the truly existent ("substance" and "in itself" are Levinas's expressions) as other. And this existent is man, determined as face in his essence as man on the basis of his resemblance to God. Is this not what Heidegger has in mind when he speaks of the unity of metaphysics, humanism, and onto-theology? "The encounter with the face is not only an anthropological fact. It is, absolutely speaking, a relation with what is. Perhaps man alone is substance, and this is why he is face." Certainly. But it is the analogy between the face and God's visage that, in the most classical fashion, distinguishes man from animal, and determines man's substantiality: "The Other resembles God." Man's substantiality, which permits him to be face, is thus founded in his resemblance to God, who is therefore both The Face and absolute substantiality. … "…The Other resembles God…" Is this not the original metaphor? The question of Being is nothing less than a disputation of the *metaphysical* truth of this schema; which, let us note in passing, "atheistic humanism" employs precisely in order to denounce the very process of alienation. The question of Being draws back into this schema, this opposition of humanisms, in the direction of the thought of Being presupposed by the determination of the existent-man, the existent-God, and the analogical relationship between them; for the possibility of this relationship can be opened solely by the pre-conceptual and pre-analogical unity of Being." ("Violence and Metaphysics," pp. 178-79)

consistent *logos*, capable of subsuming the whole or totality in which we both coexist; for given the antinomic reasoning, any such *logos*, within which I can find, or think, my relationship to an other or to any other in general, will be contradictory and the address I make or I hear, within it, finally undecidable with respect to its sense. This means, I believe, that any approach to another, any proximity I enjoy or can occupy with respect to it, is itself subject in principle to this contradictoriness and undecidability. The relationship between us, if there is one, is not the function of a shared capacity or the identity of a communication across a homogenous medium. It is rather a manifestation of a sense that is also an appearance or a demonstration of one to another. And it can be this only if, and because, there is no *neutral* space of general, and consistent, contact between us.[32]

If the nonhuman or more-than-human "great outdoors," then, in the sense in which Bensusan rightly appeals to it, is not a "most high" and is not a "beyond being," it is because the indexical address of my relation, in every speaking but also before it, in every relation as such, is not to the *maximum* of height but just to a "higher than," an "up there" or maybe even just an "out there" without any maximum. And so the appeal which Bensusan makes to it must situate an indexicality that does not ultimately lodge itself (or need to) in the thought or manifestation of any noncontradictory absolute. Rather this appeal must be, in its own logical structure, able to go all the way to paradox and the undecidability of sense. So rather than getting us into a kind of relationship that is with something beyond being or something that can only be understood within the theological terms of a coherent absolute or a hyperbolic infinity of height beyond all height, we may acknowledge the irreducibility of indexicals *along with* the paradoxes of (contradictory) totality to which this leads. To do so is, I have

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[32] Levinas might respond that the idea of a neutral medium is an illusion; rather there is the presence of proximity of a "third," he or she or it which is able to witness the two of us and thereby provide or possess terms in which our proximity and our relationship can be assessed (this form of response is developed, especially, in *Otherwise than Being*). However, though I cannot go into detail here, it does not seem to me to solve the underlying critical problem, for (at least) two reasons: first, because the "third" will herself be, on Levinas's terms, an Other to each of us, and so will not succeed in *fixing* the sense of our communication unless in the eyes and witness of yet another (fourth) Other, and so on *ad inifinitum*; and second because this third must *also* – as a precondition for the very witnessing – apparently herself understand the language that we speak, and so must, after all, exist in the medium of the *logos* in which we communicate.

argued, not to inscribe a new metaphysics or discover a new truth of the whole. It is rather to further the critique of metaphysics itself, or allow it to produce itself *as* critique, which is, as I have argued, not distinct from the critique of human violence, and of the power of the *logos* as such. The urgency of this critique, and of the extension of its terms beyond the human to the generality of all that live and suffer, is marked in Bensusan's remarkable book. It is to be hoped that the temptations of a presumptive philosophical generality, or the pursuit of a consistency that is, in reality, chimeric, here do not limit the force of its articulation or obscure the urgency of what it gives us to think, and that to which it calls us to respond.

III

I have argued that a rigorous indexicalism implies, through the very dynamics of its appeal to the irreducibility of indexical facts, a kind of critique of violence that is at the same time a critique of (consistent) possibility: of, that is, the neutral medium of the *logos* in which metaphysics, since Aristotle or Plato, identifies and purports to produce the privileged medium of what *can happen*, in general and as such. As metaphysics is, as such (I have suggested) the metaphysics of possibility, it is reasonable to think that this indexicalist critique can (and even should) today be pursued in view of the conception of modality and the "semantics" of modals that has been most prominently and forcefully articulated in our time: namely that of the logic of "possible worlds."

I shall consider briefly, in particular, one of the most complete recent developments of the implications of this logic – developed in an explicitly "metaphysical" mode – namely, David Lewis's conception of the plurality of possible worlds. Familiarly, Lewis's position combines an attitude of modal realism – realism about possible worlds in general – with an indexicalism about *our* world, the "actual" one.[33] On his view, all of the worlds, with complete generality – all of the *ways things could have been* – are, ontologically speaking, equally real: none is privileged in an absolute sense. When we say that one of these is actual as opposed to all the others that are merely possible, we are really

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[33] For Lewis's indexicalism about actuality, see Lewis (1986), pp. 92-93; the position was introduced in "Anselm and Actuality" in 1970.

saying only that it is the one that *we* are in: both "actual" and "possible" (in the sense in which it implies non-actuality) are thus, irreducibly and basically, indexical terms.

Now, I think that this combination of commitments is faithful to a basically indexicalist motive. To begin with, the thoroughgoing indexicalist is evidently committed to Lewis's indexicalism about actuality if she is willing to extend her indexicalism to modal contexts at all. Why – if, as the indexicalist holds, indexical facts are irreducible and basic to spatial and temporal description – should indexical facts not be similarly basic to modal description, including to the sense of counterfactuals, as well? In considering, of a possible state of affairs, whether or not it is actual, and then coming to believe that it is, I evidently come to locate *myself* within one of an open set of possibilities: I come to know that *the* world, *my* world, is like *this* rather than *that*: it is this possibility, that is, rather than any of those others, not (as it turns out) actual, that I contrastively considered in coming to this belief. In fact, as is shown by the argument of his 1979 article, "Attitudes De Dicto and De Se," Lewis is here prepared to go quite far, with respect to intentionality and sense, in an indexicalist direction. In the article, Lewis suggests that bearing an intentional attitude toward a proposition, such as believing it or hoping that it is true, is a matter of *self-ascribing* the property of inhabiting just the set of worlds in which it is true. Thus, for example, if I believe that cyanoacrylate dissolves in acetone (Lewis's example), I ascribe *to myself* location in one of the worlds in the relevant sense: this is a matter of indexically finding myself, of self-location *within* the broader space of (relevant) possibilities itself.[34] Since the proposition is a contingency, there are other worlds wherein it is not true: in believing it true, I believe myself not to be located within one of these worlds, and positively to be located within one of the worlds where it is. Similarly for other attitudes besides belief: if I hope that it will rain outside today, I hope to find myself in one of the worlds in which it does.[35] In so doing, I consider (in a

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[34] Lewis (1979), p. 518.

[35] The account, as Lewis points out, also nicely generalizes nicely to the non-propositional attitudes, such as expecting someone to come (without having anyone determinate in mind). Here, I expect to find myself in one (any one) of the possible worlds in which any one of the people who *could* come, indeed does. A further generalization, which Lewis considers briefly in the article, can also plausibly accommodate

hopeful way) this set of worlds or possibilities, in opposition to those in which it does not rain. What I hope for, though, is just that some world in this set will be one in which *I* find myself – will turn out, that is, to be *this* (indexical) world, rather than one of *those*.

For this reason, it appears that engaging in the kind of consideration that is implicit in holding any propositional attitude in general involves, irreducibly, the taking of an indexical attitude toward the "actual". Indeed, it appears that this is the kind of attitude an indexicalist must take toward the "actual," if she is to have a view about its status at all. For the only apparent alternative is to take actuality to have an *absolute* status: what is actual is, on this kind of view, is just a kind of absolutely given fact, determined "in advance" and independently of us (as it were) from some necessarily non-indexical position. But to hold this is just to countenance the kind of non-indexical position (be it the position of God, in choosing for actuality – as in Leibniz – the best of all worlds, or whatever else) that the thoroughgoing indexicalist must seemingly refuse.

For reasons I will not defend in detail here, I also think that the thoroughgoing indexicalist should affirm Lewis's *modal realism* in general: all of the worlds are equally real or "concrete", and there are no intrinsic differences of "ontological status" between them. My main reason for thinking so is that – as Lewis himself emphasizes in his own responses to (what he calls) "linguistic ersatzism" – any plausible view that does not endorse modal realism in general must construe all of the non-actual possibilities as (in some sense) *abstracta* or as essentially constituted by their abstract and non-indexical linguistic descriptions. But there are genuine differences in possibilities – for example the possibilities of two individuals who are differently but *symmetrically* positioned with respect to the knowable facts of their world -- that can be differentiated by using indexicals, but cannot be differentiated by *any* amount of (only) linguistic description. So granting this, it appears that the modal indexicalist should indeed affirm the equal ontological status of all worlds, and thus affirm modal realism (or "concretism" about possible worlds) in general. But I grant that this might be

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perceptual cases, as (for example) when I *see* that there is a man wearing a hat in front of me (without knowing who the man is).

resisted;[36] and at any rate it is not essential to my argument. What is presently important is just that, whatever the ontology of worlds or possibilities might be, we should think of them as essentially "accessed," in the first and most logically determinative sense, by means of indexical terms and descriptions.

From this basic modal indexicalism, however, there follow important and radical critical consequences about the form and structure of the "space" of possible worlds, or (as I shall argue) about the structure and nature of possibility as such. We can bring some of these critical consequences into view by considering a paradox bearing on standard formulations of "possible worlds semantics" that was introduced by David Kaplan in the 1970s (though Kaplan's first published description of it appeared only in 1995).[37]

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[36] In his initial reply to the first version of the paper, Prof. Bensusan suggests that he would resist Lewis's modal realism, while nevertheless agreeing with Lewis's indexicalism about the "actual", for (what I take to be) two interrelated reasons. The first reason is that Kripkean considerations about direct reference suggest that one can indexically fix reference to an *actual* individual in a way that is sufficient to pick out the modal facts about that individual across possibilities, so it is unhelpful or misleading to suppose (as Lewis himself does) the alternative possibilities, as concretely existing worlds, contain entirely *different* and substantively existing individuals. The second reason (I take it) is that Lewis's indifferent realism appears to require a "modal telescope" view of our possible access to the alternative worlds, of the kind that Kripke inveighs against in *Naming and Necessity* (pp. 43-46) and which ought to be incoherent from an indexicalist position. By contrast with this, as Bensusan points out, in Kripke's picture I retain my identity across all the possibilities I consider, when considering my possibilities or relevant counterfactuals, and there is no need to view the other possibilities (as it were) "from above" in order first to determine the relevant trans-world identities or (for Lewis) counterpart relations.

To this I would respond that while (as Bensusan recognizes) the problem of "trans-world identities" (and especially the problem of "cross-identifying the subject" for the purposes of "epistemic" or "centered" possibilities: for some relevant considerations, see Lewis (1983) and Livingston (2017b)) will be difficult for any modal theory, I do not see any intrinsic need for the modal realist of the kind I am considering to adopt either Lewis's counterpart theory or the "modal telescope" conception of our access to the alternative possibilities. What is relevantly at issue is just what is required for it to be possible for my indexical modal description (e.g. my statement, while pointing at Humphrey: "*That* guy could have won the election.") to be true; and as Lewis indeed argues (*OPW*, p. 196) the claim that there is *something* "about" Humphrey that makes it true (supposing that it is), and that I can indeed "access" this "something" indexically rather than only descriptively, is not in dispute between the modal realist and the (Kripkean) non-realist. Somewhat similarly, Kripke inveighs against the "modal telescope" view on the ground that direct reference already allows us to pick out an individual and refer to its possibilities, without needing to (or being able to) view the alternative "possible worlds" in general as if from above. But I see no reason why the indexicalist cannot agree with this while still retaining modal realism in general: i.e. the claim that the alternative possibilities which *are* accessed in the first instance through direct or indexical reference are nevertheless concrete rather than mere *abstracta*.

[37] Kaplan (1995).

The crux of Kaplan's argument is a cardinality consideration about the totality of possible worlds, or (equivalently, as Kaplan suggests) about what is involved in our consideration of "all" the possibilities in "logical space". Consider the total number of possible worlds; suppose it is κ. Now recall the familiar identification, within standard "possible worlds semantics" of propositions with *sets* of possible worlds. By elementary cardinality considerations (Cantor's theorem), given this identification, the number of propositions will then be 2^κ, which is strictly (cardinally) greater. Now, to derive the paradox, it is sufficient to suppose that there is some property, Q, such that it is possible, for each proposition, that that property holds of that proposition uniquely. Kaplan suggests, for example, that we may take the relevant property to be "being queried": it is evidently possible, of each genuine proposition, that it be the unique proposition that is queried in a world. But which actual property is chosen is not important; all that is important is that there is some property of propositions which may possibly hold of them each uniquely. Given this, though, there will be at least one world corresponding to each proposition: so the number of worlds will be at least 2^κ rather than κ, as was supposed.

It follows that, for *any* assumption about the cardinal size of the totality of possible worlds, there will be strictly *more* worlds than there are assumed to be. It appears to follow that there is no consistent way, given the assumptions of the argument, to discuss "the" totality of logical space, or the space of "all" possibilities that possible worlds semantics is intended to model. In the 1995 article, Kaplan does not resolve the paradox, but noting the identity of its structure with that of Russell's paradox, he considers two ways of addressing it by way of devices analogous to those standardly used to domesticate that paradox in set theory.[38] Both succeed in blocking the paradox, but neither, as Kaplan notes, will succeed in delivering what possible worlds semantics is (intuitively)

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[38] On the first of these, analogous to Russell's theory of types and corresponding to the assumption that models or possibilities are "constructed" in a hierarchical way from basic and nonintensional primitives, the relevant sentential operator Q applies at the first level only to possibilities consisting in these primitives, and never (at any level of the hierarchy) to a sentence which contains that very operator. On the second, more closely in line with contemporary approaches such as Kripke models, the possibilities are not regarded as constructed but as already "out there", but the semantics is thought to characterize, at most, the behavior of intensional notions applied to possibilities that could themselves have been stipulated without appealing to them.

supposed to deliver: namely, a model-theoretical treatment for *all* the possibilities that are evidently real.

Alternatively, one might respond to the paradox by denying the identity it presupposes between "propositions" – thought of as something that might actually be asserted or queried or thought – and arbitrary sets of possible worlds. On this kind of response, among all the possible such sets, only a very few specially structured ones are suitable to be understood as "propositions" in the linguistic or cognitive sense, or to be legitimate "contents" of thought or linguistic expression. Those which are too complicated, or wildly disjunctive, to correspond to legitimate propositions (in the sense of what is actually thinkable or assertible) are then not relevant to the argument – so the response goes – since they do not correspond to genuine "possibilities" that we should consider to be such, and so do not have to (as the paradoxical argument requires) be correlated to unique possible worlds. The form of this response (Lewis himself gives a version of it in *OPW*)[39] is thus to rectify the paradox by "throwing out" all those disjunctive or complex sets which, it is reasonable to suppose, a speaker of a natural language or a finitely constituted thinker could not reasonably be held to assert or entertain. But really, as Kaplan himself suggests, what is basically at issue in the paradox is not which or how many propositions could be asserted by a speaker of a natural language or a finitely constituted thinker at a time, but rather what possibilities there are (at all) and whether or not they can all be modelled by possible worlds.[40] Intuitively, in this sense, we need not take a "proposition" to be something that could reasonably or plausibly be uttered or thought (or "queried"); we apparently need only take it to pick out some (non-total) *way things can be*, and this will be sufficient to get the paradoxical argument going. So it does not appear that considerations about the limitations of language or linguistically shaped thought are sufficient, after all, to resolve the problem about possibility in general that Kaplan's paradox suggests.

But it is clear from this, at any rate, that although Kaplan presents the paradox primarily in terms of possible worlds described non-indexically and talks

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[39] Lewis, On the Plurality of Worlds, pp. 104-108.

[40] Indeed, given the way that he presents the paradox in the 1995 article (the earlier presentation, from Davies, to which Lewis reacts in *OPW* differs in this respect), all that is really necessary is to suppose that there is some property which each proposition (in the set-of-possible worlds sense) *might* uniquely possess.

of it as a problem for "the" space of existing possibilities, it can readily be motivated on indexicalist grounds, and thereby shown (like the paradoxical arguments considered in section 1, above) to have a (slightly hidden) underlying indexicalist motivation. Here, the decisive consideration is the one appealed to at the beginning of this section in arguing for indexicalism about the "actual": that our access both to the "actual" world and to any possible alternatives is, in the first and logically basic instance, indexical. In considering the possibilities of an actual individual or the counterfactual possibilities for it, we may begin by directly referencing or indexically indicating *that* individual; we then imaginatively vary the properties, coming (when empirical knowledge is attained) to distinguish *this* possibility – the one we find ourselves, indexically, in -- from all *those* others that surround it counterfactually. In so doing, we may say in the light of the paradox, beginning with a present moment (that of what is here, now, or actual) we move out from this present "this" to an open horizon of possibilities that surround the present one, and then back to the way that the present moment (the "actual" world) is surrounded, and its sense conditioned, by "all" the alternatives around it.

Put this way, the parallel with the paradoxical structure of the various antinomies considered in section 1, above, is direct. In both cases, for the "thesis" moment, we must consider the *total* space of (relevant) possibilities that surround this (actual) one and thus condition it by determining or constraining its sense. At the same time, we recognize in the "antithesis" moment that, however we understand this total space, reason itself (here, the Cantorian argument turning on the cardinality of propositions) pushes us to consider it, itself, as conditioned and thus to expand it beyond any stipulated or assumed limit we can take it to have. As above, in both movements, we begin with the indication of the present: here, the *actual* world, or things as they actually are. But we then carry out two opposed movements: in one, we move from this indexical present to the others (here, the other possibilities) that we understand to surround and condition it, and then back to the actual as presupposing this surrounding in general. In the other (but simultaneous) movement we understand that, for any specification of this surrounding space of possibilities, we can and indeed must expand the space of *its* conditioning possibilities further, so it is never coherent to suppose it to exist as a limited whole.

On the present argument, that these two movements are both implied in any accounting for the modal structure of the actual world, and that they are mutually inconsistent, appears to show that our access to possibilities – even the access that is involved in the most immediate and basic determinations of what is the case – cannot coherently be seen as operating within, or over, a total "space" of possibilities that is, in itself and as a whole, consistently specifiable. This does not mean, of course, only that the various possible worlds are not consistent *with each other*. Rather, the claim is that it is impossible to think consistently the *total* space of alternatives, even as (genuinely mutually incompossible) disjunctive alternatives: it is incoherent, as is shown by the Cantorian considerations that demonstrate the impossibility of giving it a determinate number, to suppose *this* space to exist. On the other hand, it is equally impossible to suppose the "logical space" of relevant possibilities *not* to exist: for if it did not, there could not be any determinate sense of what *does* (actually) happen, any determinate way of understanding what it means that *this* indeed happens (here and now) rather than *that*.

Stepping back a bit, then, Kaplan's argument appears to suggest, if viewed in this way, that there can be no such thing as a *consistent* "metaphysics of modality." And if (as I have suggested) the Western project of "metaphysics" is, constitutively and essentially, tied to the universality of the claim of the principle of non-contradiction, it indeed follows that there cannot be a "metaphysics of possibility" at all. For this reason and by this token, in view of the argument, we can no longer take the accessibility of possibilities in general and as such to be grounded in what we have supposed to be *our* ability to access a coherent and overall noncontradictory space of the *logos* articulated according to the fundamental logical structures of negation and (non)-contradiction. As I have suggested above in connection with Aristotle and Levinas, this appears to defeat any claim, grounded in what is pictured as the specifically human possession of such an ability, of logical mastery over the space of possibilities, or of the space of the "possible" senses of things in general and as such. In the wake of this critique, it then no longer appears unproblematic to suppose the human being, through what is supposed to be its privileged faculties of thought or language, to be the *master* of possibilities; or indeed to suppose that "access" to them is the exclusive domain of human language or thought. It appears, rather: on the one hand, that

possibilities and sense are always *excessive* to whatever we may understand, on the basis of whatever thinking of our own capacities or abilities, to limit or determine them; and, on the other, that the sense and possibilities of things are *open,* in principle, not only or primarily *to* or *for* a privileged structure of human thought or language in accord with an assumed non-contradictory *logos*, but indeed *from* or *to any* perspective in general – *any* "here" and "now" at, or in, which things can appear. The recognition of this excess, and this generality, may, as I have suggested, represent a significant moment in the contemporary "development" of reflexive and logical thought in (disruptive) continuity with the historical tradition of metaphysics. But in an way that is irreducible to this and vastly more exigent, it may also, I have suggested, begin to point the way toward an altered mode of planetary life with others at some distance from the forcefully dominative claims of human mastery, and the routine and progressive raging of its extractive violence over the senses of the earth.

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