

# *Structure*

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## Note from the Editors

*Structure* was launched this year, and we are very pleased to have received so many excellent submissions on such varied questions in metaphysics and ontology, which we loosely define as the study of reality and the study of being. Topics range from how we are to understand contemporary modal concepts metaphysically to assessing the relevance of answers to Heidegger’s question of being that use paraconsistent logic. The questions range from how and in which ways racism is present in our societies to how truth-values can be determined under Gila Sher’s composite correspondence theory of truth. We hope that this journal will continue to be a platform for the meeting of ideas from such diverse contexts.

We are especially grateful to all those who participated in blind review for this journal. Thank you to Hank Blackburn, Nicko Boylan, Elisabeth Holmes, Neal Going, Ryan Leventhal, Bryce Liquerman, Mason Liddell, and Grace Rust for volunteering your time and effort to reading and evaluating submissions. We greatly appreciate the dedication you all demonstrated in giving your time to make the process fair and to see it out to the end. We could not have done it without you.

We also would like to thank the Philosophy Department at William & Mary for their support in creating this journal. Special thanks go to Dr. Joshua Gert and Dr. Elizabeth Radcliffe for their help in making this journal a reality.

Sincerely,  
Jake Beardsley & Jared Jones

# Determining the Truth-Value of Mixed Predicates Under Composite Correspondence

Michelle Yue

## *Bio*

Michelle Yue is a rising junior and 1693 Scholar at the College of William & Mary, double majoring in philosophy and biology. Her primary philosophical interests include metaphysics, ethics, aesthetics, epistemology, and philosophy of language. She is also heavily involved in undergraduate developmental biology and bioengineering research. During the 2021-2022 academic year, she will be studying philosophy and medical anthropology at the University of Oxford.

## **Abstract**

In response to Adam Stewart-Wallace's objection towards the composite correspondence theory of truth proposed by Gila Sher, I will argue that the composite correspondence theory of truth allows for the truth-value of atomic sentences with a mixed adjective-noun predicate to be determined. I will do this by proposing two possible solutions: (1) that it can be determined by first rephrasing the atomic sentence and then evaluating the truth-value of the rephrased sentence or (2) that it can be determined by first evaluating the satisfaction of the noun in the mixed predicate and then evaluating the satisfaction of the combined adjective-noun predicate given that the noun-predicate is fulfilled. Additionally, I will argue that the latter method is the better method for determining the truth-value of atomic sentences with mixed adjective-noun predicates.

## **Introduction**

Gila Sher's composite correspondence theory of truth states that truth-values of all sentences are determined through correspondence with reality and that the ways in which a sentence corresponds to reality differ depending on the domains of discourse being considered.<sup>1</sup> However, Adam Stewart-Wallace rejects the composite correspondence theory of truth because he claims that it cannot determine the truth-value of all types of mixed atomic sentences<sup>2</sup>—sentences that involve the determination of truth in more than one domain of discourse, such as the physical domain, the mental domain, and the moral domain (i.e., they are mixed) and cannot be broken down into more basic sentences while retaining the meaning of the original sentence (i.e., they are atomic). Chiefly, Stewart-Wallace argues that Sher's composite correspondence theory is not able to determine the truth-value of atomic sentences with a mixed adjective-noun predicate (e.g., a predicate such as “good

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<sup>1</sup> Gila Sher, “Functional Pluralism,” 326.

<sup>2</sup> Adam Stewart-Wallace, “An Old Solution to the Problem of Mixed Atomics,” 368.

dog,” which involves determination of truth in both the moral domain for the adjective “good” and the physical domain for the noun “dog”).<sup>3</sup> In this paper, I will defend Sher’s composite correspondence theory against Stewart-Wallace’s objection by arguing that in accordance with Sher’s theory, the truth-value of atomic sentences with mixed adjective-noun predicates *can* be determined, and I will do so by exploring two possible methods:

- (1) First, rephrase the atomic sentence so that it no longer has a mixed adjective-noun predicate and so that it fully retains its original meaning. Then, evaluate the truth-value of the rephrased sentence.
- (2) First, evaluate the satisfaction of truth for the noun in the mixed predicate (in the form of correspondence applicable to the domain associated with the noun). Then, given that the satisfaction of truth for the noun in the predicate is fulfilled, evaluate the satisfaction of the full adjective-noun predicate (in the form of correspondence applicable to the domain associated with the adjective).

Additionally, I will argue that the latter method is the better method for determining the truth-value of atomic sentences with a mixed adjective-noun predicate. Through my argument, I aim to undermine Stewart-Wallace’s objection and defend Sher’s composite correspondence theory of truth.

## The Correspondence Theory of Truth

Before I begin my defense of Sher’s composite correspondence theory of truth, I will first define what truth is according to correspondence theory and outline various features of the correspondence theory of truth. The correspondence theory defines truth as being the property of corresponding with reality.<sup>4</sup> In other words, a truth-bearer (e.g., a sentence, statement, belief, proposition, etc.) is true if and only if it corresponds to reality.

In addition to establishing that there is a direct relationship between truth and reality (because it implies that truth is dependent on the way reality is), the correspondence theory also provides a substantive account of truth. In saying that the correspondence theory is substantive, I mean that it establishes that truth is a “rich, significant, and fundamental” notion that should be defined in an “explanatory, constructive, and systematic” way.<sup>5</sup> Because creating a substantive theory of truth has been proven to be problematic, many truth theorists have been motivated to reject substantivism and instead accept deflationism,<sup>6</sup> which claims that truth does not have a fundamental nature but “exists solely for the sake of a certain logical need.”<sup>7</sup> However, the difficulty of developing an unproblematic

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<sup>3</sup> Adam Stewart-Wallace, “An Old Solution to the Problem of Mixed Atomics,” 368.

<sup>4</sup> Paul Horwich, “The Minimal Theory,” 8.

<sup>5</sup> Gila Sher, “In Search of a Substantive Theory of Truth,” 5.

<sup>6</sup> Gila Sher, “Forms of Correspondence: The Intricate Route from Thought to Reality,” 157.

<sup>7</sup> Paul Horwich, “The Minimal Theory,” 2.

substantive theory of truth should not deter truth theorists from trying to describe truth in a substantive way altogether. Instead, accepting the possibility that truth is substantive and attempting to describe truth in a substantive way is a worthwhile goal as it may provide a more comprehensive account of truth and its possible nature than that which deflationary theorists can provide. Sher undertakes this task of attempting to describe truth in a substantive way through her composite correspondence theory of truth.

## Gila Sher's Composite Correspondence Theory of Truth

Sher's composite correspondence theory of truth is a version of the correspondence theory of truth as it agrees with the notion that truth-values of all sentences are determined through correspondence with reality.<sup>8</sup> However, in addition to being a version of the correspondence theory of truth, composite correspondence is also a form of pluralism because it claims that the ways in which a sentence corresponds to reality differ depending on the domains of discourse being considered.<sup>9,10</sup> In particular, because the composite correspondence theory states that the property of correspondence with reality is a universal property of all true statements, this theory is a form of moderate pluralism, which claims that there is more than one truth property and that there is a universal truth property shared by all true statements.<sup>11</sup> In contrast to moderate pluralism, strong pluralism claims that there is more than one truth property and that there is no universal truth property shared by all true statements.<sup>12</sup>

One challenge that many pluralist truth theories face is that they do not allow for the truth-value of mixed atomic sentences to be determined.<sup>13</sup> In order to clarify this problem, I will use the following example:

- (1) I am holding a one-dollar bill.
- (2) Stealing money is bad.

Both (1) and (2) are atomic sentences because they cannot be broken down into more basic sentences that retain the same meaning. (1) is not a mixed atomic sentence because it exclusively involves discourse in the physical domain (as the subject "I," the action "holding," and the predicate "money" all belong to the physical domain). Since (1) belongs completely to the physical domain, the truth-value of (1) is determined in only one way, through correspondence with reality.<sup>14</sup> However, (2) is a mixed atomic sentence because it involves multiple domains of discourse (the physical domain for the

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<sup>8</sup> Gila Sher, "Functional Pluralism," 326.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> See Lynch ("Is Truth Relative?" 43-44, 98-100), ("Truth and Multiple Realizability" 384-408); Wright (Wright, 123-154); and Pederson and Wright (Pederson and Wright 87-112) for additional examples of pluralist theories of truth.

<sup>11</sup> Nikolaj J. L. L. Pedersen and Cory D. Wright, "Pluralism about Truth as Alethic Disjunctivism," 89.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Gila Sher, "Functional Pluralism," 322.

<sup>14</sup> Michael Lynch, "Truth and Multiple Realizability," 400.

action “stealing” and for the subject “money” as well as the moral domain for the predicate “bad”). Thus, the following question arises for the pluralist theory of truth: is the truth-value of (2) determined in the physical domain or the moral domain or both? In an attempt to resolve the problems associated with both the pure correspondence theory of truth and with pluralist theories of truth, Sher proposes her own theory, the composite correspondence theory. The primary motivations for Sher’s composite correspondence theory are the following:

- (1) It provides a substantive account of truth (similar to the correspondence theory).
- (2) It maintains the direct relationship between truth and reality (similar to the correspondence theory) by establishing that all truth is determined by correspondence with reality.
- (3) It recognizes that there seems to be a plurality of ways in which truth can be determined in different domains of discourse (which the correspondence theory fails to do but which is accounted for in pluralist theories) by stating that truths in different domains of discourse correspond to reality in different ways.
- (4) It establishes a way in which the truth-value of mixed atomic sentences can be determined (which many pluralist theories fail to do).

I will briefly elaborate upon point (4) above. Sher’s composite correspondence theory resolves the problem many pluralist theories face with regard to mixed atomic sentences. This is because the composite correspondence theory specifies that the way in which every sentence corresponds to reality is determined by the combination of forms of reference, satisfaction, and fulfilment of internal structures of a sentence (such as subjects, actions, and predicates) by the real world (where the different forms distinguish between the different domains of discourse).<sup>15</sup> For example, the way in which the mixed atomic (2) Stealing money is bad. corresponds to reality is determined by the combination of the following forms of reference, satisfaction, and fulfilment:

- A. The physical fulfilment of the action of “stealing”
- B. The physical reference of the subject “money”
- C. The moral satisfaction of the predicate “bad”

Therefore, if the state of reality satisfies A, B, and C above, then (2) is true.

## **Stewart-Wallace’s Objection to Sher’s Composite Correspondence Theory**

Although Stewart-Wallace recognizes that Sher’s composite correspondence theory is able to determine the way in which some types of mixed atomic sentences correspond to reality, he claims that Sher’s theory “does not speak to all sources that lead to mixed atomics.”<sup>16</sup> In particular, Stewart-Wallace argues that composite correspondence is unable to determine the way in which an atomic

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<sup>15</sup> Gila Sher, “Functional Pluralism,” 328.

<sup>16</sup> Adam Stewart-Wallace, “An Old Solution to the Problem of Mixed Atomics,” 368.

sentence with a mixed adjective-noun predicate is able to correspond to reality because it is unclear what form of satisfaction a mixed predicate would entail. To clarify Stewart-Wallace's argument, I will use an example. Consider the following atomic sentence with a mixed adjective-noun predicate:

(1) This is a good dog.

According to Sher's composite correspondence theory, the truth-value of (3) is determined by the combination of the following forms of reference, satisfaction, and fulfilment:

- A. The physical reference of the subject represented by the word "This"
- B. The physical fulfilment of the action of being represented by the word "is"
- C. The [insert domain] satisfaction of the predicate "good dog"

Because the predicate "good dog" is mixed, Stewart-Wallace claims that the composite correspondence theory is not able to determine the way in which the predicate "good dog" is satisfied.<sup>17</sup> This is a potential problem for the composite correspondence theory because the way in which a sentence corresponds to reality is dependent on the combination of ways in which the internal semantic structures of that sentence are satisfied. If the form of satisfaction for one of the sentence's internal structures cannot be determined, then the way in which that sentence corresponds to reality cannot be determined either.

### **Solution 1: Rephrasing the Atomic Sentence to not have a Mixed Predicate**

One possible method of resolving the problem associated with mixed predicates which Stewart Wallace identifies is by rephrasing the atomic sentence so that the following conditions are satisfied:

- (1) The rephrased sentence no longer has a mixed adjective-noun predicate.
- (2) The rephrased sentence fully retains the meaning of the original atomic sentence.

However, through this method, whether or not conditions (4) and (5) are both satisfied for a rephrased sentence must be determined on an individual basis for each atomic sentence. This is because the satisfaction of condition (5) is dependent on what the original atomic sentence is intended to mean, which varies depending on context. For example, let us revisit the sentence (3) This is a good dog. It is possible that an accurate interpretation of (3) can result in the atomic sentence being rephrased in the following ways while satisfying both conditions (4) and (5):

- (i) This is a dog, and she is good.
- (ii) This is a dog, and she is good at being a dog.
- (iii) This is a dog, and she is good at doing what I want her to do.

The truth-value of all three of these rephrased sentences can be determined by Sher's composite correspondence theory because they no longer contain a mixed adjective-noun predicate, satisfying

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.



condition (4). However, we do not know which (if any) of the rephrased sentences (i), (ii), or (iii) satisfies condition (5) because the intended meaning of the predicate “good dog” in the original sentence is ambiguous (i.e., the meaning is not known to us just from the information provided by the sentence itself),<sup>18</sup> and because we are not provided with context informing us of what the mixed predicate is intended to mean. It is important to note that the issue with this solution is not that the truth-value of an atomic sentence with a mixed adjective-noun predicate *cannot* be determined—Sher’s composite correspondence theory allows for the truth-value of a mixed atomic sentence to be determined as long as there *is* a way to rephrase it so that conditions (4) and (5) are satisfied, regardless of whether or not we are able to know if a specific rephrased sentence does satisfy conditions (4) and (5). Instead, the issue with this solution is that if we do not know the full meaning of the original mixed atomic sentence, then we are not able to *specify* the way in which an atomic sentence with a mixed adjective-noun predicate must be rephrased so that it satisfies conditions (4) and (5), and we therefore cannot *specify* the way in which the truth-value of the original atomic sentence is determined under Sher’s composite correspondence theory.

## Solution 2: Two-step Satisfaction of Mixed Predicates

Because the first solution that I propose for solving the problem associated with mixed predicates faces this issue, I will propose a second solution. Additionally, because the second solution that I propose escapes the issue that I have addressed regarding the first solution, I will argue that the second solution is the better method for determining the truth-value of atomic sentences with mixed adjective-noun predicates.

This second method involves two steps for evaluating the truth-value of a mixed predicate in the adjective-noun form:

1. Evaluate the satisfaction of truth for only the noun in the mixed predicate in the form of correspondence applicable to the domain associated with the noun
2. Then, given that the satisfaction of truth for the noun in the predicate is fulfilled, evaluate the satisfaction of the full adjective-noun predicate in the form of correspondence applicable to the domain associated with the adjective

In order to exemplify how this solution works, let us revisit the atomic sentence (3) This is a good dog. Under this method, the truth-value of (3) is determined by the combination of the following forms of reference, satisfaction, and fulfilment:

- A. The physical reference of the subject represented by the word “This”
- B. The physical fulfilment of the action of being represented by the word “is”
- C. The physical satisfaction of the predicate “dog”

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<sup>18</sup> Hans Kamp, “Two Theories about Adjectives,” 225-226.

D. The moral satisfaction of the predicate “good dog,” given that the physical satisfaction of the predicate “dog” is fulfilled

Therefore, if the state of reality satisfies A, B, C, and D above, then (2) is true.

Unlike the first solution that I proposed, this solution can be applied for all predicates in the adjective-noun form. This is because when using this method, there is no need to rephrase mixed atomic sentences with adjective-noun predicates individually in order to ensure that their original meanings are retained since there is no need to rephrase mixed atomic sentences with adjective-noun predicates at all. Furthermore, because there is no need to rephrase the original atomic sentence, there is no need to worry about whether or not *all* atomic sentences with mixed predicates can be rephrased so that their original meanings are retained. Therefore, because the second solution escapes issues that the first solution faces, it is the better method for determining the truth-value of atomic sentences that have mixed adjective-noun predicates under Sher’s composite correspondence theory of truth.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, I have explored two methods of undermining Adam Stewart-Wallace’s argument against Gila Sher’s composite correspondence theory of truth. The first method involves rephrasing an atomic sentence that has a mixed adjective-noun predicate so that it no longer contains a mixed adjective-noun predicate and so that it fully retains its original meaning and then evaluating the truth-value of the rephrased sentence. However, an issue that this method faces is that unless we know the full meaning of the original mixed atomic sentence, then we are not able to *specify* the way in which an atomic sentence with a mixed adjective-noun predicate must be rephrased so that the rephrased sentence no longer has a mixed adjective-noun predicate and still retains the meaning of the original atomic sentence. In contrast, the second method involves evaluating the satisfaction of truth for the noun in the mixed predicate (in the form of correspondence applicable to the domain associated with the noun) and then, given that the satisfaction of truth for the noun in the predicate is fulfilled, evaluating the satisfaction of the full adjective-noun predicate (in the form of correspondence applicable to the domain associated with the adjective). Because it allows for the composite correspondence theory of truth to determine the truth-value of atomic sentences with a mixed adjective-noun predicate, and because it can be applied for all mixed atomic sentences with an adjective-noun predicate, I conclude that the second solution undermines Stewart-Wallace’s argument and enables me to defend Sher’s composite correspondence theory of truth better than the first solution.

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# Fictionalist Modal Expressivism: An Alternative Approach

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## *Bio*

I am Xinran. In 2021, I obtained my BA in philosophy from the University of Notre Dame. I am interested in contemporary metaphysics, the philosophy of mind, and the philosophy of language. Most recently, I have been working on the intersections of Buddhist philosophy and analytic metaphysics. Outside of philosophy, I enjoy walking and hiking with my dog.

## **Abstract**

This paper examines two quite different views about modality: modal expressivism and modal fictionalism. First, I show that both traditional modal fictionalism and modal expressivism face thorny problems. Then I argue that a combined view of modal fictionalism and modal expressivism – what I call fictionalist modal expressivism (FME) – offers us a better way to solve these problems.

## **Introduction**

Talk of modality is concerned with ways that the world *might*, *must*, or *could not* be. Not only is the use of modal notions ubiquitous in our ordinary hypothetical reasoning about counterfactual states of affairs, but modality also plays a central role in dealing with issues and theories in various domains of philosophical inquiries.<sup>1</sup> For example, questions about the identity condition of objects and relations of ontological dependence are oftentimes framed in explicitly modal terms: *could* the ship of Theseus survive the complete replacement of its parts? *Could* there be a world or situation in which mental properties without any physical properties? *Must* the universal of justice be instantiated by some particular act token by which the universal is borne? These questions seem legitimate and worth asking. However, it seems *prima facie* puzzling what it is for a fact or object to have a modal status and in what ways modal facts are related to the non-modal facts about the actual world (or for that matter, non-modal facts about possible worlds). In addition, assuming that there is a fact of the matter what modal facts or properties there are, it seems utterly mysterious how we can know about them.<sup>2</sup> Various answers ranging from realism, skepticism, to antirealism about modality and possible worlds have been put forward, but each has received its share of criticism. Here I want to give an account of a largely unexplored position which combines what I think are the two most promising accounts of the nature and function of modality and its relation to possible worlds: modal fictionalism and modal

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<sup>1</sup> This paper will primarily focus on one specific kind of modality, namely metaphysical modality.

<sup>2</sup> Christopher Peacocke, for example, takes very seriously the need to address the epistemological issues about modality. In his *Being Known*, Peacocke (1998, p. 1) labels the challenge of reconciling the metaphysics of modality with the epistemology of modality the “integration challenge.”

expressivism. The goal of this paper is to explore the prospect of this neglected position in the philosophical landscape of modality, and to motivate the claim that this combined view offers an overall more satisfactory explanation of our modal discourse and practices than alternative accounts.

Here is a roadmap of the paper. In section 1, I introduce the doctrine of modal fictionalism as formulated by Gideon Rosen, and present two of the major objections to modal fictionalism in the literature. In section 2, I articulate the central thesis of modal expressivism and spell out the Frege-Geach problem for this form of expressivism. Then I motivate the view of fictionalist modal expressivism (FME) in section 3. Section 4 and 5 are devoted to showing that FME not only presents a quite promising way of responding to the Frege-Geach problem, but also avoids some of the most pressing worries for modal fictionalism.

## 1. Rosen's Modal Fictionalism and His Critics

One mainstream approach to modality analyzes it in terms of quantification over possible worlds.<sup>3</sup> According to this approach, the modal claim “it is necessary that  $p$ ” is more perspicuously paraphrased as “ $p$  obtains in all possible worlds.” Similarly, the claim “it is possible that  $p$ ” is analyzed as “there are some worlds in which  $p$  is true.” However, as successful as the attempt to reduce modal facts to facts about possible worlds has been, this approach incurs a heavy explanatory burden regarding the nature of possible worlds. Two paradigm theories of possible worlds are David Lewis's modal realism and various sorts of abstractionist realism. Lewisian realism takes possible worlds as spatiotemporally isolated, maximally concrete entities while the abstractionists usually construe possible worlds as abstract entities such as maximal sets of propositions, states of affairs, or some kinds of complex properties.<sup>4</sup> Suppose both options seem ontologically extravagant while one nevertheless agrees that the talk of possible worlds offers an illuminating analysis of modality, then one might be in a position to adopt modal fictionalism as a way of preserving one's right to engage in the possible-world talk while doing away with problematic ontological commitments.<sup>5</sup> By “modal fictionalism” I mean the conjunction of the following claims:

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<sup>3</sup> Another option is to analyze modality in terms of dispositions or potentialities of actual objects rather than possible worlds. See Vetter (2011, 2015) for an exploration of this view.

<sup>4</sup> Besides the canonical Lewisian modal realism (1986), see Bricker (1996) and McDaniel (2004) for defenses of variant versions of modal realism. Among prominent ersatzist theorists of possible worlds are Plantinga (1974, chapter 4) who construes possible worlds as possible and maximal states of affairs, or as maximally consistent sets of propositions, Stalnaker (1984) and Forrest (1986) both of whom take possible worlds as structural properties, and modal combinatorialists such as Bigelow (1988) and Skyrms (1981) who take possible worlds to be recombinations of properties and relations. In addition, Wang (2013) defends a non-reductive version of modal combinatorialism that takes possible worlds as combinations of properties that respect what she calls primitive compatibility relations between properties.

<sup>5</sup> The abstractionist theories of possible worlds might seem less ontologically extravagant than modal realism. Nonetheless, abstractionist theories are faced with serious difficulties. A good place to look is Divers (2002, Chapter 14, 15, 17). The dialectic between modal abstractionism and modal fictionalism will not be the focus of this paper. But see Brogaard (2006) for a detailed comparative evaluation of the theoretical advantage of modal fictionalism and abstractionism.

(MF1) Modal claims serve to describe modal properties and facts, and to articulate assertions about modal reality.

(MF2) Modal claims are truth-apt, and some are true.

(MF3) The truth-conditions of modal claims are given in terms of what is true in the fiction of possible worlds.

With respect to (MF1) and (MF2), modal fictionalism concurs with modal realism and various sorts of abstractionist theories. What sets them apart is (MF3). In contrast to the realists, the modal fictionalists suggest that we take our talk about possible worlds as “an innocent *façon de parler*, involving no commitment to worlds of any sort.”<sup>6</sup> The strategy to achieve that is to construe possible worlds as fictions and to interpret the possible-world talk by analogy with fictional discourse. Thus, just as we might interpret claims about fictions as being implicitly embedded within a silent fiction operator, the modal fictionalists claim that the apparent quantification over possible worlds figured in the realists’s analysis should be taken as a claim within the scope of a fiction prefix “according to such-and-such fiction,” where the content of the fiction is standardly taken to be Lewisian realists’s ontology of concrete possible worlds supplemented by what Rosen calls an *encyclopedia*, i.e., “a list of non-modal truths about the intrinsic character of this universe.”<sup>7</sup> Just like ordinary discourse about fictions does not seem to commit us to entities referred to in the fictions, once modal claims are analyzed in terms of a modal fiction, then arguably the modal fictionalists can resist the inference from modal claims to the existence of possible worlds, concrete or otherwise.<sup>8</sup>

Following Rosen, we may state the translation schema for modal fictionalism. Where  $P$  is an arbitrary modal claim, and  $P^*$  is the realist analysis of modal claims in terms of possible-world talk, the modal fictionalists endorse instances of the following equivalence relation:

*P if and only if according to Modal Fiction, P\*.*<sup>9</sup>

To illustrate, consider a claim stated in quantified modal logic:

(1) Possibly, there exist tail-less kangaroos.

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<sup>6</sup> Rosen (1990, p. 330)

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 335.

<sup>8</sup> In claiming that fictional discourse is not ontologically committing, the modal fictionalists endorse anti-realism about fictional entities. Alternatively, one might be a realist about fictional entities. For discussions of various versions of realism about fictional entities, see Thomasson (1998), van Inwagen (1977, 2003), Kripke (2013) and Parsons (1975).

<sup>9</sup> Rosen (1990, p. 335).

Rendering (1) in possible world discourse, we get:

- (2) There is a possible world in which there are tail-less kangaroos.

Instead of taking the description of worlds at face value, the modal fictionalists offer what they think is a more perspicuous interpretation of (2) in terms of the content of a fiction, where the fiction is standardly taken to be Lewis's hypothesis of possible worlds:

- (3) According to Lewis's hypothesis of possible worlds, there is a possible world in which there are tail-less kangaroos.

In uttering (2), the modal fictionalists would say that we do not genuinely assert it, but only *quasi-assert* it, or make *as if* to assert it.<sup>10</sup> In claiming that (2), all we are committed to is (3), whose semantic structure permits valid inference to nothing more than the existence of a fiction of possible worlds.

It might be worth stressing that the sort of modal fictionalism portrayed here is of a strong kind in the sense that it takes the modal fiction to offer an *analysis* of modal claims, so that modal truths *depend on* or are *derived from* the content of the modal fiction.<sup>11</sup> While not denying its attractiveness, there are some thorny problems associated with this strong version of modal fictionalism. In the following, I spell out two difficulties: (1) the incompleteness problem and (2) the problem of arbitrariness.

The gist of the incompleteness problem is that the content of the modal fiction is insufficient to ground all modal truths, since the modal fiction is silent on some important features of possible worlds. On Rosen's modal fictionalism, for example, the content of the modal fiction is supplied by Lewis's theory of concrete possible worlds. Now, Lewis's theory says that there is a maximum size of worlds but is silent on the cardinality of objects  $k$  in the largest possible world(s). The result is that the corresponding modal fiction will have nothing to say about the cardinality of objects in the largest possible world(s) as well. So, for the sentence

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<sup>10</sup> Following Rosen (1994, 1997), I use the term "quasi-assertion" to distinguish the illocutionary act performed when a speaker utters a fictional sentence from an act of assertion. What exactly quasi-assertion amounts to is not a settled issue. For example, according to the pretense account or what Eklund (2019) and Yablo (2001) call the instrumentalist account, in an act of quasi-assertion, the speaker is making no genuine assertions at all, but only pretends to do so. Alternatively, one might think that the speaker is genuinely asserting a certain non-literal content of a sentence. According to yet another view, a quasi-assertion is an expression of the speaker's intention that her audience make-believe that her utterance is true. Currie's account of fictional discourse seems to fall under this category (1985, pp. 387-8). For standard modal fictionalism, it will not matter too much which account of quasi-assertion to take.

<sup>11</sup> Rosen (1990, p. 354), Nolan (1997, pp. 262-3). On the other side is what Rosen and Nolan call "timid fictionalism". Timid fictionalism takes the modal fiction as a useful device to be used in modal reasoning. It denies that modal truths depend on truths in the modal fiction, and thereby avoids some of the most pressing worries for strong modal fictionalism.

(S) there is a possible world that contains  $k$  objects, where  $k$  is a number larger than the number of space-time regions in our universe.

neither (S) nor not-(S) will belong to the content of the fiction.<sup>12</sup> Now here is the problem. For the realists, there is a fact of the matter what the cardinality of the largest possible world is, although this fact is unknown to us and hence absent in Lewis's theory. However, the modal fictionalists will have difficulty in saying that there is a fact of the matter regarding (S) even though (S) and not-(S) are both absent from the modal fiction: given that modal truths are *derived from* the modal fiction, if the modal fiction does not give a definitive answer as to cardinality  $k$ , there would be no fact of the matter regarding the truth or falsity of the modal claim concerning  $k$ . Furthermore, even if the fictionalists can somehow find a way to skirt this worry, Nolan points out a potentially more pressing worry.<sup>13</sup> Recall the fictionalist paraphrase schema:

*P if and only if according to Modal Fiction, P\**.<sup>14</sup>

If we define  $P^*$  as true in the modal fiction just in case  $P^*$  is one of many sentences that compose the modal fiction, then another kind of incompleteness problem emerges. Since there are an infinite number of possibilities, a complete description of them will take an infinite number of sentences. But if we take fiction as human artefact, it is unlikely that anyone could ever produce such a fiction. So, it seems that our modal fiction might not merely fail to yield the truth of one or two contested modal sentences, it would likely be drastically incomplete, thus falling short of grounding the infinitely many modal truths we want.<sup>15</sup>

A quick response from the modal fictionalists is perhaps to say that even though the explicit content of the modal fiction, i.e., what sentences are included as part of the fiction, is far from complete, what is explicitly stated in the fiction *entails* or *implies* the infinitely many other contents that we want – following Nolan, let's call them the *implicit content* of the fiction.<sup>16</sup> For example, the explicit content of the modal fiction says that “at world  $w$ ,  $p$ ” and “at world  $w$ ,  $q$ .” Now, although “at world  $w$ ,  $p$  and  $q$ ” is not part of the explicit content of the fiction, the modal fictionalists may insist that this sentence belongs to the implicit content of the fiction, since it is entailed by the explicitly stated content. By appealing to the entailment relations within the modal fiction, the modal fictionalists may claim that the modal fiction would be complete if both explicit and implicit content are included in the modal fiction.

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<sup>12</sup> Rosen (1990, p. 341)

<sup>13</sup> Nolan (1997)

<sup>14</sup> Rosen (1990, p. 335)

<sup>15</sup> Nolan (1997, pp. 266-8)

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 267-8.



However, as Nolan points out, this line of response is not available for this kind of modal fictionalist, since entailment is a modal notion itself.<sup>17</sup> Given that the task of (strong) modal fictionalism is to elucidate modality in terms of the content of the modal fiction, smuggling modal notions in our specification of the content of the modal fiction invites a serious problem of circularity. Therefore, the strategy to generate enough content of the fiction by making use of entailment relations is illegitimate. The incompleteness problem is still left unanswered.

And in yet another line of response to the incompleteness problem, one might take issue with the artefactual account of fiction, which in our case takes the modal fiction to be an artefact created by a particular author in time.<sup>18</sup> More specifically, it may be argued that the incompleteness objections could be avoided if we construe the modal fiction as a Platonic entity, i.e., an infinite set of propositions that exists independently of the creative endeavor of its author. The reason is that if the fiction is a set of propositions, then there is no barrier to thinking that the set is infinitely large, and thus the modal fiction would contain sufficient explicit content to ground all modal facts.

Would the modal fictionalists be happy with this response? I think not. Here are two reasons why the modal fictionalists may find the Platonic account of modal fiction as a response to the incompleteness worry less than satisfying. For one thing, construing the modal fiction as a Platonic entity does not seem to accord with our ordinary practice regarding fiction creation. When an author creates the modal fiction, she does not seem to be in the business of discovering an ever-present set of abstract propositions, but rather bringing something into existence through her intentional mental acts.<sup>19</sup> More seriously, when the modal fiction is seen as a set of Platonic propositions, this Platonist account risks collapsing into a certain form of abstractionist account of possible worlds: the ontological commitments of the Platonist account, namely sets of abstract propositions, are the same as those of the abstractionist account of possible worlds. Accepting this consequence seems to undermine the original motivation for modal fictionalism, which is to formulate an account of modality without invoking commitment to extravagant ontologies that the realists and abstractionists embrace.<sup>20 21</sup>

The objection from arbitrariness is no less worrying than the incompleteness problem. Simply put, the charge is that the fictionalists fail to adequately justify their decision to pick one modal fiction instead of another as the ground of all modal truths.<sup>22</sup> Since modal fictions are all regarded as literally false or at least not literally true, we may ask: what is the distinguishing feature of Rosen's preferred fiction, namely Lewis's modal realism, that makes it uniquely suitable for grounding all modal facts?

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 268.

<sup>18</sup> Thomasson (1998), for example, defends the view that fictions are abstract artefacts.

<sup>19</sup> Thomasson (1998, p. 6); Turp (2007, p. 43)

<sup>20</sup> Nolan (1997, p. 272); Turp (2007, p. 43)

<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, Nolan (1997, p. 272) argues that standard modal fictionalism seems to be at a disadvantage compared to the abstractionist accounts, since it will not only need to deal with any problems for the abstractionist account, but also need to invoke (and try to give an account of) the problematic notion of truth-in-fiction.

<sup>22</sup> This worry is articulated in Rosen (1990, p. 353) and Peacocke (1998, p. 154)

If no adequate reason for the selection of fiction is forthcoming, then the tenability of modal fictionalism would likely be detracted from the unprincipled manner of fiction-selection.

One way to meet the challenge is to point to the (alleged) fact that the modal fiction that uniquely grounds all modal truths is extensionally accurate, i.e., the modal truths that it delivers accord with our imaginative habits or prior modal opinions.<sup>23</sup> However, this response only seems to push the arbitrariness problem a step further. At this point, the opponents to modal fictionalism may ask: what justifies the claim that the modal fiction should be formulated on the basis of our imaginative habits or prior modal opinions instead of something else? It seems to me that standard modal fictionalists have no good answers to this further question.

In addition to the above-mentioned worries, there are several other difficulties for the modal fictionalist account that are worth mentioning in passing but will not be the focus of this paper. Among them, Hale's dilemma and Rosen-Brock objection are the two technical worries that have been most widely discussed in the literature.<sup>24</sup> Both objections take issue with Rosen's fiction-prefixing strategy and charge modal fictionalism of its failure to deliver plausible modal truths. Various replies to these two objections have been offered, and I leave it to the reader to judge to what extent these replies are successful in rescuing modal fictionalism from the two problems.<sup>25</sup>

## 2. Modal Expressivism to the Rescue

Section 1 left modal fictionalism in some serious difficulties. Although I do not take myself to have definitively ruled out modal fictionalism, I hope to have made an appealing case that modal fictionalism is unlikely to succeed in light of the various difficulties it faces. However, a well-reasoned pessimism about the prospect of modal fictionalism does not mean that we ought to abandon the project altogether. Rather, I suggest that modal fictionalism potentially represents a route towards the formulation of a more plausible theory of modality if its fictionalist approach to possible worlds is integrated into the non-realist metaphysical framework of modal expressivism. But before I motivate the combined view, I shall first explain what modal expressivism is, and spell out the influential Frege-Geach problem.

### *2.1 Introducing Modal Expressivism*

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<sup>23</sup> This line of response is articulated by Woodward (2011, p. 537-8); Rosen (1990, p. 353) also seems to have made this suggestion, but then he suggests that modal fictionalism so construed is similar to a conceptualist theory of possibility, which "aim to locate the source of modal distinction in us, in our capacity to imagine or conceive alternatives to the actual state of things".

<sup>24</sup> Hale (1995), Brock (1993), Rosen (1993), Nolan (2020).

<sup>25</sup> See Menzies and Pettit (1994) and Noonan (1994) for two different attempts to meet the Rosen-Brock objection; for replies to Hale's dilemma, see Divers (1999) and Rosen (1995).

Broadly construed, expressivism is the idea that the primary function of the discourse in question is not to *represent* or *describe* some portion of reality, but rather to express some form of *non-cognitive* attitudes or mental states. Non-cognitive attitudes are thought to be very unlike what is usually called *representational belief states*, which involve the speaker's taking the propositional content of the uttered sentence as true, i.e., being in correspondence with the portions of reality that it purports to represent. For example, in the case of metaethics, there is a tradition of thinking of moral language as being in the business of merely expressing some sort of emotions or pro/con attitudes towards types of action, dating back to Ayer and Stevenson.<sup>26</sup> For Ayer, the moral claim "murder is morally wrong" should be taken as an expression of the speaker's disapproval of murder rather than an assertion of a moral proposition, although surface structure of our moral discourse seems to suggest otherwise. Hare is also an influential early proponent of ethical expressivism, but he differs from Ayer and Stevenson in construing the attitudes expressed by moral claims as commitments to or acceptance<sup>27</sup> of rules and prescriptions of behaviors.<sup>28</sup> Of course, expressivism is not specific to metaethics – versions of it have also been developed and defended in other domains of philosophy such as aesthetic discourse, probability claims, knowledge claims, logic, and modal discourse, among others.<sup>29</sup>

In light of the general characterization of the core ideas of expressivism, let us now focus on the expressivist approach as applied to the modal discourse. In what follows, I articulate two broad ideas that capture something definitive of the general spirit of modal expressivism.

*Non-descriptivism thesis*

Modal sentences do not aim to represent a realm of genuine modal properties or modal facts (i.e., modal properties and modal facts as the realists understand them).<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Ayer (1936), Stevenson (1944)

<sup>27</sup> It is important not to confound the mental act of acceptance with belief, or to think that acceptance and belief mutually entail each other. In Cohen's seminal paper "Belief and Acceptance" (1989), Cohen offers a detailed explication of their differences. One main difference relevant to our concern is that, for Cohen, while belief is a disposition to take some proposition as true, acceptance consists in the *voluntary commitment* to taking some proposition *p* as a premise in one's reasoning (as well as the logical consequences that follow from the conjunction of all the propositions one accepts), regardless of the degree to which one believes in that proposition.

<sup>28</sup> Hare (1952)

<sup>29</sup> For discussions of various kinds of local expressivist views, see Hopkins (2009) for an articulation of the expressivist account of aesthetic discourse; see Schroeder (2008) and Brandom (2008) for an expressivist treatment of logical vocabularies; see Coventry (2006) about causation; and see Field (2000) for an expressivist approach to explaining the notion of apriority. In addition, see Barker (2020) and Price (2015) for discussions about the prospect of global expressivism.

<sup>30</sup> It is important to distinguish modal expressivism from the error theory of modality. Modal error theory says that modal claims are assertoric, i.e., express propositions, but modal claims are systematically false. In this paper, I will not spend time explaining why I reject the error theory of modality. However, here I point out two potential connections between modal expressivism and the error theory. Firstly, expressivists can fully agree with the thesis of error theory when construed in conditional form: *if* modal discourse expresses assertions as the realist understands them, then it is systematically false. As we will see later, the expressivists deny the antecedent of the conditional. Secondly, if one embraces an austere modal metaphysics as the error theorists do, then my proposal of modal expressivism may be seen as a viable way of dealing with the remaining task of accounting for the apparent semantic behavior of our modal discourse as well as avoiding what seems to me a highly implausible form of eliminativism of modal talk that might follow from the error theory. From this

Thus, according to modal expressivism, a modal sentence does not express any *substantive* modal proposition that designates modal properties or facts. The negative thesis of non-descriptivism is supplemented by a positive thesis about the function of modal judgments.

*Non-cognitivism thesis*

The *primary use* of modal claims is to express some form of *non-cognitive* attitude towards the claims in question.

Before addressing the question of which non-cognitive attitude is expressed, it is important at this stage to distinguish two kinds of modal expressivism on the basis of a further condition regarding the truth-aptness of modal claims. I will label the two kinds “simple expressivism” and “sophisticated expressivism.” According to simple expressivism, modal claims are *mere* expressions of attitudes. It follows that a sincere utterance of a modal claim can neither be seen as an act of making a genuine assertion, nor does it amount to an expression of the speaker’s genuine belief or judgment. Consequently, modal claims are not truth-apt.<sup>31</sup> In contrast, in the spirit of Blackburn’s quasi-realism, sophisticated modal expressivism claims that even though modal claims are non-descriptive, it should not deter us from saying that modal claims express genuine assertions and beliefs in addition to their primary function of expressing non-cognitive attitudes.<sup>32</sup> Therefore, modal claims are truth-apt (and some of them are true). As will become clear in section 3, the particular version of modal expressivism I intend to motivate endorses this sophisticated kind of modal expressivism.

As in the case of moral expressivism, the question about what kind of non-cognitive attitude is being expressed in making modal claims is a subject of debate. One option that I am inclined to endorse can be characterized as commitment-expressivism.<sup>33</sup> According to commitment-expressivism, if a speaker X accepts that it is metaphysically necessary that *P*, then whenever X is hypothetically reasoning from any range of suppositions *S*, X takes on a commitment to being willing to expand the original range of suppositions *S* with the embedded proposition *P* (and conveying a recommendation or demand on others to undertake this commitment as well).<sup>34</sup> Thus once one accepts that necessarily *P*, along with the original range of suppositions *S*, the new set {*S*, *P*} would come to be suitable (in the light of the speaker’s commitment) to function as premises in hypothetical reasoning. In slogan form, according to commitment-expressivism, one’s acceptance (or the sincere utterance) that

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perspective, I believe that modal expressivism has both an explanatory and a pragmatic advantage over the error theory. Notice that Richard Joyce brings up a similar point in the analogous case of moral fictionalism (2011, pp. 10-1).

<sup>31</sup> The simple modal expressivism parallels the early stage of moral expressivism, especially the emotivist tradition represented by Ayer, who denies that moral claims express anything more than non-cognitive attitudes and emotions, and consequently they are not truth-evaluable.

<sup>32</sup> Blackburn (1984, 1993).

<sup>33</sup> The version of commitment-expressivism sketched here parallels Gibbard’s formulation of norm expressivism as applied to moral claims (2003).

<sup>34</sup> Note that one’s commitment may not manifest through the actual act of adding the embedded proposition *P* into the relevant range of suppositions *S* in every single case. Rather, following Divers and Elstein (2012, p. 8), the commitment-expressivism says that one’s commitment associated with a certain modal claim consists in the *willingness* of or at least the *non-resistance* to expanding the range of suppositions with the embedded proposition.

necessarily  $P$  consists in an expression of one's commitment to taking the embedded proposition  $P$  as a premise over a range of suppositions.

In addition to metaphysical necessity, commitment-expressivism can also account for other kinds of modality by variously restricting the relevant range of suppositions in play.<sup>35</sup> Consider nomic necessity. According to commitment-expressivism, one is committed to taking the claim “nothing travels faster than the speed of light” as nomically necessary, if one is committed to taking this claim as a premise when reasoning under the range of suppositions delimited by relativistic physics (e.g., the suppositions may include certain properties of light itself and features of our spacetime structure). However, suppose instead that the set of suppositions in play contains claims that violate the constraints of relativistic physics, then in this new context of reasoning, one should withhold one's commitment to adding the claim “nothing travels faster than light” to that set of suppositions, and hence should not accept the modal claim “necessarily, nothing travels faster than light” in this particular context.<sup>36 37</sup>

One close relative to this commitment-expressivism is Divers and Elstein's disposition-expressivism, which takes attitude expressed in making modal claims as disposition of preparedness to deploy the relevant propositions as premises.<sup>38</sup> Yet an alternative way to be a modal expressivist is to construe the non-cognitive attitude expressed by modal claims as the speaker's epistemic confidence to be able to make sense of the proposition hypothetically. Here I set aside the issue of deciding which option is the most plausible. Since the dialectic of this paper does not hinge on which specific option to take, for clarity of exposition, I will assume commitment-expressivism in what follows.

One important thing to note is that while I endorse commitment-expressivism as an account of the *primary function* of modal discourse, I part ways with the existing accounts by explicitly adding an additional clause in my specification of the function of modal discourse. Here, modal fictionalism comes to play a crucial role. Recall that the modal fictionalists analyze modal claims in terms of the possible-world fiction. The connection I want to draw between the fictionalist analysis and the function-thesis of modal claims is this: modal utterances not only have a *primary function* of expressing

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<sup>35</sup> It is important to distinguish the commitment-expressivism from Brandom's account of modal expressivism. According to Brandom, modal claims are non-descriptive and non-cognitivist. While the commitment-expressivism sketched here and Brandom's version of modal expressivism both agree that what one is *doing* in making a modal claim is making a commitment, they differ with respect to what exactly the commitment that one undertakes is. As I understand it, Brandom construes modal claims as an expression of one's commitment to following the *norms of inferences* that hold among the ordinary empirical concepts and claims. For discussions of Brandomian expressivism, see Brandom (2008; 2015, Chapter 5, 7)

<sup>36</sup> See Divers and Elstein (2012) for a similar view.

<sup>37</sup> We may understand modal claims with a possibility operator in a similar fashion. For example, in uttering “it is possible that one may survive one's brain-death”, what is conveyed by the speaker is her commitment to entertaining the survival of a brain-dead individual as a premise over the relevant range of suppositions, her commitment to the policy that one should *not always* be ready to add the negation of the embedded proposition – namely, “one does not survive one's brain-death”, as a premise over any range of suppositions in hypothetical reasoning, and her recommendation for others to reason in conformity with her commitment.

<sup>38</sup> Divers and Elstein (2012)

the speaker's commitment to taking some proposition as premises or suppositions, they also perform a *secondary function* of expressing the speaker's commitment to taking her modal fiction as authoritative and encouraging others to see her modal fiction in the same light. As will become clearer later in section 2.2 and section 3, on the particular account I intend to motivate, the appeal to the modal fiction in the secondary function of modal claims would come to be especially important in constructing a plausible expressivist semantics for complex modal claims.

## 2.2. The Frege-Geach Problem

In this section, I outline the Frege-Geach problem that has traditionally been conceived as a challenge for any expressivist account of some subject matter.<sup>39</sup> The Frege-Geach problem is twofold. Firstly, given the expressivist thesis that the function of modal claims is to express non-cognitive attitudes, it seems *prima facie* difficult to make sense of logically complex sentences in which modal sentences are embedded, both in terms of their expressive function and their meanings. For example, consider the following argument:

- (P1) Necessarily  $p$
- (P2) If necessarily  $p$ , then necessarily  $q$ .
- (C) Necessarily  $q$ .

given commitment-expressivism, in uttering (P1) the speaker expresses her commitment to taking  $p$  as a premise over a range of suppositions. But it is less obvious what kind of attitude is expressed in uttering (P2), which is a complex claim with a modal antecedent. The only thing we may say at this stage is purely negative: the modal antecedent in (P2) might not express the same attitude as the free-standing (P1), since we can imagine that someone who refuses to accept the modal antecedent “necessarily  $p$ ” might still for some reason accept the conditional claim (P2).

Secondly, the modal expressivists face the difficulty of accounting for the *logical properties* of modal sentences. For example, the expressivists need to explain why the conjunction of  $\{(P1), (P2)\}$  entail (C), why  $\{(P1), (P2), (C)\}$  together constitute a *valid* argument, and why  $\{(P1), (P2), \sim(C)\}$  is an *inconsistency*. For the *modus ponens* argument to work, logic requires that the *meaning* of (P1) need to be preserved through embedding it in the antecedent of the conditional (P2), otherwise the argument would be invalidated due to the equivocation of two occurrences of the sentence “necessarily  $p$ ” in the unembedded and embedded context. But given that each of the two occurrences of the sentence “necessarily  $p$ ” expresses different attitudes, and presumably contributes different *meanings*, this set of sentences fails to meet the standard requirement of entailment. So it seems that the expressivists need to locate an alternative basis from which logical properties are derived.

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<sup>39</sup> The Frege-Geach problem was first explicitly articulated in Geach (1965) as a problem for some early versions of moral expressivism.

The accompanying question is to explain what people are *doing* when they give or accept valid arguments with modal terminology in light of what the modal expressivists say about the function of making free-standing modal claims.

The present example points to the task of giving a plausible explanation of the logical property of modal sentences, but the Frege-Geach problem also generalizes to other forms of embedding contexts such as propositional attitude ascription. For example, it seems puzzling how to make of the utterance “Abby believes that necessarily *p*,” once we take it that “necessarily *p*” does not express a modal proposition but rather conveys some non-cognitive attitude or mental state that Abby is in.

Before we look at what solutions are available, one crucial assumption involved in the set-up of the argument is worth pointing out. The assumption is that the meaning of modal claims is *wholly* given by their use. Thus, once we have explained the expressive functions of modal claims in terms of attitudes and disposition, there is nothing more we need to say about the meaning of the modal claims, since their functions constitute their meaning. This is a path that most traditional expressivists have taken and a number of contemporary expressivists espouse.<sup>40</sup> Now, given this assumption, can the modal expressivists come up with an adequate solution to the Frege-Geach problem? One much-discussed way to meet the Frege-Geach problem is to interpret utterances of the relevant complex sentences as expressions of higher-order attitudes that involve more basic attitudes as their constituents, and then go on to explain logical notions such as validity in terms of the features of the relevant attitudes that the speaker has.<sup>41</sup> This approach has been most prominently defended by Hare, Blackburn, among others in the expressivist tradition of metaethics, and has recently undergone rigorous development by Schroeder.<sup>42</sup> To apply this approach to the case of modal expressivism, let us consider (P2) which says “If necessarily *p*, then necessarily *q*.” Roughly stated, the attitude expressed by (P2) would be a special higher-order commitment to coordinating one’s attitudes in such a way as to ensure that the attitude expressed by uttering “necessarily *q*” always *follows from* the attitude expressed by uttering “necessarily *p*.” Or in Blackburn’s words, the sincere utterance of (P2) expresses the speaker’s endorsement that the attitude expressed by the antecedent “*involves*” or is “*coupled with*” the attitude expressed by the consequent.<sup>43</sup> On this view, what the speaker expresses is a higher-order attitude since it is an attitude of the connection between the two basic attitudes expressed by “necessarily *p*” and “necessarily *q*.” So, given that one is committed to endorsing the connection between the two basic attitudes, if one sincerely utters “necessarily *p*,” then one is under a rational requirement to come to acquire the attitude expressed by “necessarily *q*,” and hence be committed to

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<sup>40</sup> Stevenson (1937), for example, thinks that the meaning of moral claims is wholly constituted by the attitudes and emotions they express. Thus, moral claims have what he calls *emotive meaning*. In addition, see Hare (1963, 1970, 1993) for a similar construal of the semantics of moral claims. Contemporary literatures on this view include Blackburn (1968, 1984), Schroeder (2008), among others.

<sup>41</sup> Note that a different approach that does not appeal to higher-order attitudes is explored in Gibbard (1990).

<sup>42</sup> Blackburn (1968, 1984), Hare (1970, 1993), and Schroeder (2008)

<sup>43</sup> Blackburn (1984, p. 194)

the conclusion of the argument, otherwise it is argued that the speaker's overall attitudes would be incoherent. Why incoherent? Because a refusal to accept the consequent would amount to a failure to act according to what one has been committed to do. Validity is thus explained in terms of the coherence of attitudes.<sup>44</sup>

There have been some attempts to distinguish various grounds for skepticism on whether this higher-order attitude approach would work as well as attempts to refine it so that it avoids the objections.<sup>45</sup> But technical difficulties aside, even if the higher-order attitude approach ultimately succeeds, this approach seems extremely complex and unsystematic.

Consider the simple case of negation. If the sentence "it is necessary that  $p$ " expresses an attitude of being committed to take  $p$  as a premise in reasoning, it is not clear what attitude is expressed by "it is not the case that necessarily  $p$ ". Regardless of what we construe this attitude to be, presumably it will be a negative kind of higher-order attitude about the basic attitude expressed by "necessarily  $p$ " such as one's resistance to deploying  $p$  as a premise on some occasions. In addition to Blackburn's proposed solution to conditional claims, we would also need to posit distinct attitude-kinds for disjunctions, conjunctions and bi-conditionals. Things get more complicated when it comes to modal claims with quantifiers. For example, what attitude is expressed by "some fruits are *essentially* acidic" or "all human persons are *essentially* animals"? Perhaps one quick response is to collapse modal claims with quantifiers into potentially extremely long conjunctive claims. For example, it may be argued that "some fruits are *essentially* acidic" expresses the same attitude as "apple is essentially acidic, kiwi is essentially acidic, and orange is essentially acidic". However, *prima facie*, the move to identify the attitude expressed by the quantificational sentence with its paraphrase may lack some support. This difficulty aside, the attitude-kind would quickly get complicated when multiple logical connectives interact within a single sentence to generate multiple layers of embedding. Consider "if necessarily  $p$  and it is not the case that necessarily  $q$ , then necessarily  $p$  just in case necessarily  $r$ ." Even though we might have a story to tell how one might go about constructing an attitude-kind that corresponds with this modal claim, the relevant attitude would be extremely complex.<sup>46</sup>

What the higher-order attitude approach results in is that for each *form* of complex syntactic construction, we need to posit a differently structured higher-order attitude.

Furthermore, the more complex the modal sentence is, the more complex will the associated higher-order attitude be. As the level of complexity reaches a certain point, I suspect that it would be

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<sup>44</sup> Blackburn (1984) characterizes invalidity and inconsistency in terms of what he calls "attitude clash" or "fractured sensibility".

<sup>45</sup> One major objection that has been repeatedly raised against Blackburn's attempt to construct higher-order attitudes for complex moral claims points to its failure to explain the *logical properties* of moral claims or arguments. See Schueler (1988), van Roojen (1996), and Schroeder (2008) for articulations of this objection. Blackburn (1988) has offered a reply to this worry, but see Hale (1993) and van Roojen (1996) for further objections.

<sup>46</sup> Horgan and Timmons defend this strategy of constructing a hierarchy of complex attitude-kinds (2006, 2011, pp. 28-31). Nonetheless, echoing the worry stated in footnote 36, Schroeder (2008, p. 51) stresses that the supporters of this strategy owe us an explanation about the alleged *logical relations* that hold in the hierarchy of complex attitude-kinds.



psychologically implausible to say that the speaker really has such a higher-order attitude that the theory ascribes to him. What we want instead, I suggest, is a theory that can solve the Frege-Geach problem with a relatively straightforward solution, one that avoids positing multiple layers of attitudes, while at the same time remaining faithful to the expressivist spirit that what is being expressed is not modal propositions but some kind of non-cognitive attitude.

But even so, there is no reason to despair at this point, since recall that there is another path to take from the expressivist account of the function of modal claims to a claim about meaning. The second path, which I am inclined to take, refuses to take it that the function of modal claims wholly constitutes their meanings. Rather, one may embrace expressivism as a claim about the function of modal claims while having a different story to tell concerning the semantic content of modal claims.<sup>47</sup> Given the difficulties of the path that Schroeder, Blackburn and many others have trodden, I suggest that we explore the prospect of the second path with both modal fictionalism and modal expressivism in mind, and see whether it might prove to be more theoretically fruitful than the first one.

### 3. Introducing Fictionalist Modal Expressivism (FME)

What I want to propose is a theory of modality that integrates the modal fictionalist interpretation of the *meaning* of modal discourse with an expressivist account of the *use* of modal talk.<sup>48</sup> I characterize the core of the view by the following theses:

(FME1) The *meaning* of modal claims is analyzed in terms of the content of the modal fiction.

(FME2) The *primary use* of modal claims is to express the non-cognitive attitude of commitment to the norm of taking the relevant sentence as a premise or supposition. The *secondary use* of modal claims is to express the speaker's non-cognitive commitment to taking a modal fiction as authoritative.

One thing to note is that our new theory FME endorses the semantic thesis of modal fictionalism, while it does away with realism about modality (MF1) which Rosen's strong modal fictionalism and most of the other versions of modal fictionalism take for granted. Thus, FME comes with no ontological commitments to *substantive* modal facts, modal properties, or possible worlds of any kind.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Contemporary expressivists who nevertheless reject expressivism as a semantic thesis include Kalderon (2008, 2005) and Thomasson (2020, pp. 82-5).

<sup>48</sup> It is, of course, not unprecedented to combine fictionalism with expressivism about the relevant discourse: Kalderon (2005), for example, articulates and defends a fictionalist account of the semantic content of moral discourse and an expressivist account of the function of moral discourse.

<sup>49</sup> One thing to note is that FME does not *entail* the anti-realist ontological thesis that there are no possible worlds. Rather, FME is neutral about the ontology of possible worlds, e.g., realism, anti-realism or agnosticism/quietism.

The second thing is to explain what I mean by (FME2). In section 2.2, I have explained the primary function of modal claims in terms of what I call commitment- expressivism, but the secondary function still requires some explanation. What is it to be committed to taking a modal fiction as authoritative? My answer is this: for any arbitrary modal claim  $p$  and  $p^*$  which is the paraphrase of  $p$  in terms of possible-world talk,

*Whenever one is committed to taking a modal fiction as authoritative, if according to that fiction,  $p^*$ , then one should accept that  $p$ .*

Recall that where  $p$  is a non-complex modal claim, one's acceptance of  $p$  amounts to an expression of the corresponding non-cognitive attitudes as construed in the framework of commitment-expressivism. To illustrate (FME2) with an example, consider "necessarily, objects are extended." In sincerely uttering this claim, what the speaker is primarily doing is to express her commitment to taking up the proposition "things are extended in spacetime" as a premise in her reasoning. What that speaker is also doing, albeit implicitly, is to express her commitment to taking as authoritative a modal fiction according to which objects are extended in every possible world, as well as her recommendation for others to adopt this particular fiction as authoritative just as she does. By the schema that we sketched above, since according to that modal fiction, objects are extended in every possible world, it follows that the speaker would accept that "necessarily, objects are extended."<sup>50</sup> From this example, we can see that no matter which modal fiction one is committed to taking as authoritative and what modal commitments one has, our twofold specification of the expressivist function of modal claims would always ensure that the modal fiction one adopts as authoritative perfectly matches with one's modal commitments.

More importantly, this characterization points to another crucial point that FME diverges from modal fictionalism. Recall that for standard modal fictionalism, it is a fully factual matter which modal fiction delivers modal truths. By the equivalence schema,<sup>51</sup> whenever some truth obtains in *the* modal fiction, the truth-condition of the corresponding modal claim would also be satisfied. Thus, the sincere utterance of a modal claim amounts to making an assertion and conveying a belief about the obtaining of the corresponding truth- condition in the modal fiction. In contrast, FME denies that utterance of modal claim amounts to an assertion of its truth-condition. Why? The answer is that FME denies the presence of an objective criteria by which truths in the modal fiction may be assessed, and hence unlike modal fictionalism, the modal fiction falls short of supplying substantive truth-conditions for modal claims. In other words, FME construes the content of the modal fiction not so much as an object that is apt for truth or falsity, as an object of *evaluation*. This construal of the modal

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<sup>50</sup> As stated in footnote 22, it is important to keep in mind that the *acceptance* of a modal fiction is a non- cognitive attitude.

<sup>51</sup> On page 3, the equivalence schema is stated as follows: where  $P$  is an arbitrary modal claim, and  $P^*$  is the realist analysis of modal claims in terms of possible-world talk,  $P$  if and only if according to Modal Fiction,  $P^*$ .

fiction coheres with our specification of the function of modal claims as stated in (FME2): what is expressed in uttering a modal claim does not amount to an assertion or a factual belief about which truths obtain in the modal fiction, but rather to an articulation of one's non-cognitive commitment to taking a modal fiction as authoritative and a manifestation of a stance one takes regarding which modal fiction one chooses to reason with. Therefore, on the FME account, making a modal claim is not an assertion of the obtaining of its corresponding truth-condition in any substantive sense.

It is equally important to not to conflate FME with a relativistic or a contextualist account of modal discourse. Just like a speaker relativist about moral discourse like Dreier may say that a sincere utterance of the modal claim "x is good" is an expression of the proposition "x is approved by a moral system *M*," where *M* is determined partly by the motivational states of the speaker in a given context of utterance,<sup>52</sup> a relativist about modal discourse may say in a similar spirit that the truth or falsity of a modal claim is determined by which modal fiction the speaker adopts as authoritative. What results is that the very same modal statement may be true according to the modal fiction I adopt, but false according to the fiction that another person adopts. However, an important upshot of construing the truth-condition of modal claims in a relativistic way is a failure to account for the phenomenon of modal disagreement. The reason is that if modal claims amount to nothing more than a factual report about what individual fictions say, then it seems that there will often fail to be factual disagreements about the truth value of modal claims. For example, for the speaker relativists, what makes A's claim that "necessarily *p*" true is the modal fiction that A adopts – let us call that fiction *F<sub>A</sub>*. What makes B's claim that "not necessarily *p*" true is the modal fiction that B adopts – let us call that fiction *F<sub>B</sub>*. Clearly, *F<sub>A</sub>* and *F<sub>B</sub>* have different content and hence they are different modal fictions: according to *F<sub>A</sub>*, *p* is true in all possible worlds, whereas the same claim is false according to *F<sub>B</sub>*. However, on the relativistic account, even though A and B differ in which modal fiction they adopt, the relevant modal claims are nonetheless both true and no disagreements about the relativized truth of modal claims emerge. Fortunately, FME does not share the relativist's problem of explaining disagreements in our modal discourse. As stated above, FME construes modal claims as expressions of non-cognitive attitudes, namely the speaker's commitment to taking some propositions as premises and adopting the corresponding modal fiction as authoritative. This gives us a plausible explanation of what modal disagreements consist in: for FME, disagreements in modal discourse arise from a clash of commitments we have about which modal fiction ought to be taken as authoritative and differences in our attitudes towards the relevant propositions.

However, saying that making a modal claim is not an act of assertion or an expression of belief might give rise to a worry. The worry arises from the uncontroversial observation that our

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<sup>52</sup> Dreier (1990, p. 23). One thing to note is that Dreier distinguishes his account of speaker relativism from a Humean account of moral subjectivism, according to which the truth-condition of a moral claim is specified in terms of facts about the speaker's attitudes, motivations and dispositions. Dreier thinks that there are reasons to reject the Humean account of moral subjectivism (1990, pp. 15-7). No matter which version of subjectivism or relativism one adopts, one will still face the problem of accounting for moral disagreements.

modal discourse *seems* realist: we seem to assert and believe in modal facts, and we ascribe truth or falsity to modal claims in a seemingly disciplined manner (even if the truth figured in expressivism might not be the kind of truth that a full-blown realist has in mind). However, since our modal claims merely express non-cognitive attitudes, on the face of it, they are not apt for truth or falsity. I think that this worry can be avoided. How? In the following, I shall first construct a plausible quasi-assertibility condition for modal claims in light of (FME1) and (FME2), and then show how to “save the phenomenon” i.e., accommodate the truth-aptness of modal discourse, by appealing to truth minimalism.

There is undoubtedly a tension between saying that it is only an attitude of being committed to something that is being expressed in making a claim and ascribing truth or falsity to the claim in question. After all, unlike belief, commitment itself is not capable of being true or false. But here is another important feature that we may also distinguish from the observation of modal discourse: although FME denies that any *substantive* assertions are made in making modal claims, there is no barrier to thinking that a speaker may *quasi-assert* or act *as if* to assert a modal sentence, when the relevant intention to perform the function of modal claim are present, such as a desire to express one’s attitude, to communicate one’s attitude to others or to persuade other to acquire a particular attitude towards the relevant proposition. Equipped with the expressivist thesis about the function of modal claims, I think that we would have enough resources to construct conditions about what modal claims are quasi-assertible and what are not, given the speaker’s relevant attitudes. Thus, I claim

(FME3) Modal claims have quasi-assertibility conditions.

With FME’s core theses in mind, the specific condition for a successful act of quasi-assertion can be formulated as follows: for any arbitrary sentence  $p$

*The claim that “it is necessary that  $p$ ” is quasi-assertible for  $X$  if and only if  $X$  is committed to taking a modal fiction  $f$  as authoritative according to which in all worlds  $p$ .*

*The claim that “it is possible that  $p$ ” is quasi-assertible for  $X$  if and only if  $X$  is committed to taking a modal fiction  $f$  as authoritative according to which in some worlds  $p$ .*

Now, having formulated the quasi-assertibility condition, one path that I suggest FME go on to embrace is (FME4):

(FME4) Modal claims are minimally true.

According to truth-minimalism, truth is not a substantive property of modal sentences.<sup>53</sup> Rather, predicating truth to a claim requires nothing more than the obtaining of the corresponding condition for sincerely uttering or quasi-asserting that claim. Thus on this view, the expressivists are warranted to trivially infer from the modal claim “necessarily  $p$ ” to the truth claim “it is true that necessarily  $p$ ” provided that the assertibility condition of “necessarily  $p$ ” obtains. We may formulate it using the T-schema.

(T-schema) It is quasi-assertible for X that it is *minimally true* that necessarily  $p$  iff it is quasi-assertible for X that it is necessary that  $p$ .

Note that the T-schema needs not be restricted to truth-talk. It may also allow the expressivists to move from modal sentence to fact-talk, belief-talk and assertion-talk using the same deflationary strategy:<sup>54</sup>

It is quasi-assertible for X that it is a *minimal modal fact* that necessarily  $p$  iff it is quasi-assertible for X that it is necessary that  $p$ .

X *minimally asserts* that necessarily  $p$  iff X quasi-asserts that necessarily  $p$ .

X *minimally believes* that necessarily  $p$  iff X is in a condition to quasi-assert that necessarily  $p$ .

What is the motivation for endorsing truth minimalism? Following Smith and Blackburn, I think FME should love minimalism about truth, since truth minimalism provides us with an adequate answer to the worry raised earlier about whether FME could adequately explain the realist trappings of our modal discourse.<sup>55</sup> Once truth minimalism is accepted, it should turn out that FME is quite successful in “saving the phenomenon” of our everyday modal practices. It earns us the right to talk just like the realists talk about modal facts, modal beliefs and assertions by doing away with the heavyweight notion of truth that comes along with extravagant ontological commitment and replacing it with a lightweight, minimal construal of truth. So understood, embracing truth-minimalism allows us to become what Blackburn calls “quasi-realist.” I should note that embracing minimalism is, of course, not a trivial move.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Horwich (1998), Blackburn (1984, 1986, 1993, 2006), Smith (1994).

<sup>54</sup> Blackburn’s (1984, 1986, 1993) quasi-realism can be regarded as a marriage of expressivism and minimalism. In addition, Thomasson’s formulation of modal normativism also embraces a union of expressivism and minimalism of truth, fact, property and belief. See Thomasson (2020, pp. 129-32) for discussion.

<sup>55</sup> Blackburn (1984, 1986, 1993, 2006), Smith (1994).

<sup>56</sup> It would lead us too far afield on the present occasion to enter into a thorough discussion of truth minimalism. So here I will rest content with suggesting that FME should embrace minimalism without offering a full-blown argument. This paper focuses on what theoretical resources that truth minimalism can make available for FME. But see Divers and Miller (1994) and Hoffman (2010) for arguments against the program of truth minimalism.

## 4. FME's Solution to the Frege-Geach Problem

Having formulated the theory of FME, let us see how well it tackles each aspect of the Frege-Geach problem in turn. One aspect of the Frege-Geach problem is to give an account of the attitude involved in making (or accepting) complex modal claims. The solution I propose is this: making a complex modal claim does not involve the *primary use* of modal claims as specified in (FME2), but only a species of the *secondary use* of modal claims is in play. More specifically, the commitment that the speaker is undertaking herself and recommending to others in sincerely uttering a complex modal claim  $M$  is this:

*to ensure that the modal fiction that one adopts as authoritative is such that the possible-world paraphrase of the complex modal claim  $M$  is true according to that modal fiction.*

As an example, consider the complex claim (P2), which says that “if necessarily  $p$ , then necessarily  $q$ ”. We ask: what is it that the speaker is committed to doing in uttering (P2)? The first step towards answering the question is to paraphrase the modal claim into the possible-world language. The paraphrased says: “if  $p$  is true in all possible worlds, then  $q$  is true in all possible worlds”. In accepting what the paraphrase says, the speaker undertakes a commitment to ensuring that the paraphrase is true according to the modal fiction that she adopts as authoritative. Thus, the end result of the speaker's acceptance of (P2) would be the speaker's commitment to taking as authoritative a modal fiction according to which if  $p$  is true in all possible worlds, then  $q$  is true in all possible worlds.

One important implication is that the acceptance of complex modal claims sometimes puts one under a rational requirement to modify one's modal commitment towards the propositions in question. To illustrate with the example from section 2.2,<sup>57</sup> suppose that at  $t_0$  the speaker accepts (P1) “necessarily  $p$ ” but not “necessarily  $q$ .” So at  $t_0$ , the fiction she takes as authoritative says that  $p$  is true in all possible worlds but it is not the case for  $q$ . Suppose further that at  $t_1$  she comes to accept (P2) which says “if necessarily  $p$ , then necessarily  $q$ ” as a result of being persuaded by someone who endorses (P2). As stated above, for the speaker, accepting (P2) involves her expressing the commitment to ensuring that the modal fiction she regards as authoritative is such that according to that modal fiction if  $p$  is true in all possible worlds then  $q$  is true in all possible worlds. And given that her fiction already has  $p$  true in all possible worlds, the speaker ought to make it the case that  $q$  is also

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<sup>57</sup> The example stated in section 2.2 is this:

- (P1) Necessarily  $p$
- (P2) If necessarily  $p$ , then necessarily  $q$ .
- (C) Necessarily  $q$ .

true in all possible worlds according to the fiction she takes as authoritative.<sup>58</sup> What it results is a change of view about the content of the modal fiction that she should regard as authoritative as well as a transition into a new mental state towards  $q$  – after  $t$  the speaker comes to be committed to taking not only  $p$  but also  $q$  as premises in her reasoning over a range of suppositions.

The illustration above may let us see how FME can solve the other aspect of the Frege-Geach problem, which is the challenge of giving an account of the logical features of our modal discourse such as validity. I think that FME has a good answer to this problem when equipped with the theoretical resources provided by truth minimalism. As we see in the above example, the speaker's acceptance of both (P1) and (P2) will put her under a rational requirement to accept the conclusion (C). Recall that according to the T-schema, if a speaker is in a condition to accept or quasi-assert a modal claim, then it is quasi-assertible for the speaker that the relevant modal claim is minimally true. It follows that on truth minimalism, taking (P1) and (P2) as minimally true would put one under a rational requirement to take (C) as minimally true. Given that the truth of the premises guarantees the truth of the conclusion, we may claim that this argument, namely  $\{(P1), (P2), (C)\}$ , is valid.<sup>59</sup>

Furthermore, the above examples may shed some light on how FME could answer the further question about *why* the expressivist function of complex modal claims is framed in terms of what we do with the modal fiction. The answer, I suggest, is that the modal fiction is implicitly taken by us as a convenient medium of communicating, coordinating and negotiating our modal commitments, i.e., which sets of propositions ought to be regarded as necessary, thus appropriate to play the role of premises over a range of suppositions, and which sets are not. As the example has shown, by voluntarily making an intellectual commitment to changing the content of one's modal fiction or by urging other to do so in the same manner, one *indirectly* expresses one's normative demand for a reconfiguration of one's modal commitment and hence a change in one's the overall mode of reasoning and cognitive landscape, whether the demand is self-imposed or is meant for one's audiences. Now, the reader might not be fully convinced, since another *why*-question emerges: why do we bother to manage each other's modal commitments by changing each other's modal fiction, given that we are not in pursuit of any substantive modal facts? Following Thomasson, I think that quite a lot of pragmatic implications hinge on the metaphysical debates about modality, although these debates appear to be fairly remote from the concerns in our everyday lives.<sup>60</sup> For example, we care about what the metaphysicians say about the modal properties of persons (can person survive brain-transplant?), art works (can a painting survive minor changes in its color?), the supervenience of

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<sup>58</sup> An alternative way this speaker could respond upon accepting (P2) is to revoke her prior commitment to (P1), and hence doing away with the need to accept (C). However, suppose the speaker is sufficiently committed to (P1) as well as (P2), she will not take this alternative option.

<sup>59</sup> If a FME theorist is not inclined to embrace truth minimalism, then one alternative way of explaining validity that does not rely on the notion of truth preservation is through appealing to higher-order attitudes. For discussions of this alternative approach, see Blackburn (1984).

<sup>60</sup> Thomasson (2016; 2020, Chapter 8)

mental on physical properties (do persons in persistent vegetative state remain conscious?), etc. How one chooses to answer these modal questions likely has far-reaching impact on how we organize our lives, carry out our medical practices, organize social institutions, just to give a few examples.<sup>61</sup>

In addition, it is worth highlighting one more feature of the FME's approach as a salient desideratum when seen in comparison to the higher-order approach that I mention earlier. In contrast to the higher-order approach, FME holds the advantage of giving us a uniform and simple procedure for giving an account of the function of complex constructions with modal embeddings. No matter what logical form the sentence takes, the approach works uniformly across all logically complex modal claims: we first translate the modal claim into a claim about the modal fiction, then we would have all we need to say about what attitude the speaker expresses when uttering the sentence, namely her commitment to taking as authoritative the modal fiction whose content is constrained in a rule-governed way as well as her stance of commending others to do so as well. Furthermore, as the sentence structure gets more and more complex, what rule of constraining one's fiction may get complicated in the same proportion, but the attitude of being committed to following the rule does not entail any other attitude as its constituent. No appeal to higher-order attitudes is needed.

## 5. Responding to the Worries about Modal Fictionalism

In this section, I look at how fictionalist modal expressivism may respond to the two worries that are raised against Rosen's modal fictionalism. Consider the worry of incompleteness. Recall that the incompleteness worry points to the fact that the content of the modal fiction is insufficient to ground all modal truths. Although the problem seems devastating to modal fictionalism, I think that this problem simply does not arise on the view of FME. Why? According to FME, our modal fiction *embodies* and *reflects* our modal commitments: which propositions one is committed to taking as premises in reasoning and which ones not. Naturally, our commitments may remain far from complete. It should come as no surprise that most people hold no particular attitude towards most of the remote modal claims such as the one concerning the cardinality of the largest possible world. If one remains indifferent to a modal claim or simply has no attitude towards it, then it should also be undecided whether the claim is true according to the modal fiction that one takes to be authoritative. If this empirical characterization of our attitudes is to a large extent correct, then to match our attitudes, it would better be the case that the modal fiction is incomplete. This means that not only does the

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<sup>61</sup> The pragmatic significance of managing each other's modal commitments is perhaps more obvious when it comes to various kinds of restricted modality that figure in our everyday lives. For example, in sincerely uttering that "it is impossible that you could jump across that creek!", I recommend that you modify your expectation about your physical potentialities accordingly and adjust your current practices given your goal to reach the other side of the creek safely. If this modal claim is accepted, then the pragmatic force of the acceptance is manifested through its influence on your decision (not to jump across the creek) and subsequent actions.



incompleteness worry not refute FME, it can actually be used to show that FME seems to be a more plausible account than modal fictionalism in this respect.

Now, consider the arbitrariness problem. For modal fictionalism, the modal fiction performs the metaphysical heavy-duty task of grounding all modal truths. Given that, it would be devastating to the view if no plausible justification of the principle of fiction selection is forthcoming. But on the other hand, for FME, the arbitrariness problem may lend itself to quite plausible answers. The thing to note is that since the point of taking a modal fiction as authoritative is not to discover a genuine realm of modal facts but rather to express one's attitude, we would do better explaining the ground of our fiction selection by reflecting on *ourselves*. So we ask: what are the facts about *us* that make us modalize the way we do? Here, pragmatic considerations and naturalistic modal epistemology might help us see better why we modalize one way rather than another. As Thomasson says, what modal commitments one chooses to make may partly depend on the practical side of our modal practices: we might intend to steer our individual or social activities in certain ways, so we modalize in ways that would be conducive to accomplishing what we intend to do.<sup>62</sup> Nichols, in a similar spirit, has argued from the perspective of modal psychology that our common modal practices (i.e., engaging in hypothetical reasoning and imaginative exercise about specific domains) facilitate reasoning about risks and opportunities, hence making us into more prudent decision makers.<sup>63</sup> In so far as these explanations are correct, the underlying principle that governs how we select the modal fiction would come to be unmysterious.

## 6. Conclusion

I have presented two different ways of answering the big questions about the nature and role of modality: modal fictionalism and modal expressivism. I have shown that both views face thorny problems that seem irresolvable within their own theoretical frameworks (section 1 and 2). In response to those difficulties, I develop what I have called fictionalist modal expressivism (FME) as a novel position on the philosophical landscape of modality (developed in section 3). FME has, I claim, theoretical advantages over both modal fictionalism and modal expressivism. Not only does FME greatly benefit from the theoretical resources of modal fictionalism in constructing an adequate expressivist semantics for ordinary modal discourse, its expressivist (anti-realist) orientation also allows it to avoid some of the most pressing objections to modal fictionalism. These considerations suggest that FME is a more promising answer to the questions about the nature and role of modality than its rivals.

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<sup>62</sup> Thomasson (2016; 2020, Chapter 8).

<sup>63</sup> Nichols (2006, Section 3 and 4).

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# **Being as Ground: On the Relevance of Paraconsistent Formal Answers to Heidegger's Question of Being.**

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## ***Bio***

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## **Abstract**

Recently, Graham Priest and Filippo Casati have employed the notion of metaphysical grounding in conjunction with Priest's brand of paraconsistent logic, to reinterpret the work of Martin Heidegger and deliver what Priest believes to be an 'answer' to Heidegger's question of Being. In this paper, I will assess whether Heidegger's question can be answered by such means.

To arrive at such an assessment, I will first introduce Priest's and Casati's paraconsistent notions of grounding and show both to be structurally equivalent. Next, both authors' interpretation of their grounding-conceptions as answers to the question of Being will be contrasted with Heidegger's own view on the matter. I will argue with Heidegger, that the question of Being has to be separated into one question on how Being is always already understood in a given historical epoch and a second question on how Being can ever come to be understood in any such way at all. Heidegger calls the first the 'guiding question' and the second the 'question of ground'.

I will pose and defend the hypothesis, that paraconsistent notions of ground like those formulated by Priest and Casati provide what I will call an 'immanent' answer to the guiding question: They examine how Being is understood in modernity. On the other hand, such notions not only fail to address the question of ground, but prevent it from even being asked. The question of ground cannot enter philosophical consciousness if one remains rooted in what Heidegger calls a 'metaphysical' style of thinking. That the paraconsistent notions of grounding as discussed here are indeed rooted in such thinking will be reinforced, by contextualizing them in the contemporary grounding debate.

In the last section of this paper, I will suggest two alternative ways in which philosophy might approach the evasive question of ground.

## 1. Introduction

Is there a ground of all entities? And if so, what is it? How does the corresponding relation of grounding work? Is it an intelligible notion? A great part of the contemporary debate concerning foundationalism and metaphysical grounding can be framed as a discussion of this set of questions.

Two recent more or less explicit attempts to answer them in reference to the work of Martin Heidegger can be found in some sections of Graham Priest's "One" and Filippo Casati's essay "Heidegger's Ground".<sup>1 2</sup> Both present a certain reading of Heidegger and proceed to introduce a notion of grounding, based on a single paraconsistent ground of entities which is respectively titled "nothing" and "beyng".

This paper seeks to assess, whether an answer to formal questions like those characterizing the grounding debate can be a proper continuation of Heidegger's project: Can Heidegger's question concerning the sense of Being really be answered by the introduction of a contradictory grounding object, as Priest and Casati suggest?

To answer this question, we will proceed in four steps:

Firstly, it is to be shown that Priest's and Casati's notions of a paraconsistent metaphysical ground are not only structurally identical but also fit the same spot in Heidegger's thinking. The fact that the two authors draw on different Heideggerian terminology to denote their notions of ground can be shown to stem from a problematic interpretation of Heidegger by both Priest and Casati.

Secondly, it is to be asked, whether Heidegger would have agreed with a formal answer to his question of Being.<sup>3</sup> It will turn out that one must distinguish between what Heidegger calls the guiding question of metaphysics and the question of ground. It will be argued that the kind of paraconsistent grounding structure which we are here concerned with, provides a certain type of answer to the guiding question but – contrary to what the terminology involved might lead one to expect – not to the question of ground.

Thirdly, by contextualizing the paraconsistent notions of grounding here discussed in the contemporary grounding debate, a more complex relation to the question of ground will be revealed and the relationship of Priest's and Casati's work to Heidegger's project will receive its final assessment.

Lastly, it will be briefly discussed, how Philosophy might properly attend to the question of ground. While purely formal approaches seem to fail, two other ways of attending to the question will be suggested. What both seem to have in common and what separates them from

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<sup>1</sup> Priest, *One*.

<sup>2</sup> Casati, 'Heidegger's Grund: (Para-)Foundationalism'.

<sup>3</sup> I use „Being“, with a capital “B” to stand for Heidegger's “Sein”, and “being” to stand for Heidegger's “Seiendes”.

purely formal notions, is that they account for a fundamental entanglement of human perspectivity with Being.

## 2. Introducing the Notion of Being as paraconsistent Ground

The first three main sections will focus on establishing the relationship between Priest's, Casati's, and Heidegger's work and terminological apparatus.

This relationship is complex. Casati is undoubtedly influenced by Priest and both relate their works to similar aspects of Heidegger's thought. Both Priest and Casati see their work as a continuation of Heidegger's project, though in different senses. Consequently, both of them use Heideggerian terms. Sometimes they use the same word (e.g. "Being") to refer to different ideas, while both usages are still different from what Heidegger meant by the term. Another example of this terminological web we are dealing with is that Priest's term "nothing" refers to the same thing as Casati's term "beyng" while Heidegger uses both terms to say something entirely different.

In the following, we will therefore gradually develop the different terminological, interpretative, and structural relationships at play, introducing relevant concepts where they are needed for further understanding, to then be able to devote the second half of the essay to more systematic concerns.

Let us begin by noting the central tension which will tacitly motivate large parts of the coming essay:

Priest and Casati seek to make sense of Being<sup>4</sup> through its relational structure. To approach Being in this way, one must firstly justify, why Being can even occur in logical relations at all. This need for justification arises because to think of Being in this way is to think of it as a being of some kind. Heidegger, of course, emphatically and repeatedly denies that Being can be properly made sense of, in so far as it is conceptualized as a being of any kind.<sup>5</sup> Priest's attempt to honour this insight, while simultaneously making the question of Being accessible to his formal approach, is to understand Being as contradictory: It is simultaneously a being and no being. It is and is not.

Before discussing the implications of this move for the relationship of Priest's project to that of Heidegger, Priest's account of objecthood, his brand of paraconsistent logic, as well as the theory of gluons in the context of which he develops his account of Being<sup>6</sup>, nothing, and grounding will be briefly introduced.

Priest's respective understandings of "[B]eing" and "nothing" will then be explicated and their relationship to Heidegger's thought will gradually enter the picture. This will lead to a

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<sup>4</sup> They respectively call it "nothing" and "beyng". We will return to this terminological point in due course.

<sup>5</sup> Compare as one of many expressions of this idea: Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 4.

<sup>6</sup> Priest writes "Being" without the capital "B". I will stick with the capital way of writing, not to imply any kind of substantiality, but rather, to avoid confusion between Being and beings.

discussion on whether Priest's gluon theory really "provides a solution to Heidegger's notorious Seinsfrage".<sup>7</sup>

### **2.1. Exposition: Noneism, Dialethism, non-transitive Identity, and Gluons**

[Readers familiar with Priest's views on objecthood, paraconsistent logic, identity, and gluons may skip to section 2.2]

The first step of Priest's theory is his account of objecthood<sup>8</sup>, which he calls Noneism. According to this view, there are non-existent objects. An object is defined simply as anything one can quantify over, and consequently, which one can speak of. In short: Anything which is self-identical is an object. But objects can exist, or not exist. Existence is defined, simply as being part of causal relations. Objecthood is self-identity and existence is parthood of the physical universe.<sup>9</sup>

Continuing to Priest's account of paraconsistent logic, dialethism is the metaphysical view that there are true contradictions of a certain kind, termed dialetheia. This means, that there are truthbearers  $A$ , for which  $(A \wedge \neg A)$  is true. But since this view is not equivalent to the view that everything is true, Priest proceeds to show that not everything follows from the truth of the kind of contradiction he is concerned with. This is what makes his logic paraconsistent.

Slightly informally, we can summarize the theory of dialethism in a couple of definitions:

D1: A truthbearer  $A$  is true, iff  $A$  is a member of the class of true truthbearers  $\mathfrak{T}$ .

D2: A truthbearer  $A$  is false, iff  $A$  is a member of the class of all false truthbearers  $\mathfrak{F}$ .

D3:  $A \vDash B$  iff there is no case in which  $A$  in  $\mathfrak{T}$  and  $B$  not in  $\mathfrak{T}$ .

In a non-paraconsistent logic, D3 would result in anything following from a contradiction  $(A \wedge \neg A)$ , because normally any case in which  $A$  and  $\neg A$  would both be in  $\mathfrak{T}$  is prohibited. But for a paraconsistent logic of the kind Priest proposes, such an "explosion" is avoided by introducing:

D4:  $\mathfrak{T}$  and  $\mathfrak{F}$  have a proper intersection, i.e., an intersection which is not identical to  $\mathfrak{T}$  or  $\mathfrak{F}$

Consequently, we can define a true contradiction by

D5: A truthbearer  $A$  is both true and false, iff  $A$  is a member of the intersection of  $\mathfrak{T}$  and  $\mathfrak{F}$ .

This ensures, that not everything follows from the truth of a contradiction, as there are now cases in which both  $A$  is a member of the intersection of  $\mathfrak{T}$  and  $\mathfrak{F}$ , and  $\neg A$  is a member of the intersection of  $\mathfrak{T}$  and  $\mathfrak{F}$ . Consequently,  $A \wedge \neg A$  is a member of that intersection and hence a member of  $\mathfrak{T}$ . Since it is no longer the case, that  $A \wedge \neg A$  is never true, there can now be cases, where  $A \wedge \neg A$  is true (and false), while  $B$  is not true.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> cmp. Priest, *One*, xvii.

<sup>8</sup> During the exposition and discussion of Priest's views, "object" and "being" will be used interchangeably.

<sup>9</sup> cmp. Priest, *One*, 21–2 cmp. Priest: 'Towards non-being' for further elaboration of this view and its implications.

<sup>10</sup> cmp. Priest, *One*, xviii–xx.



Based on the presented accounts of paraconsistent logic and objecthood, Priest can proceed to develop his account of gluons, which will be central for what he proclaims to be an answer to Heidegger’s question of Being.

Gluons are conceptualized by Priest as the kinds of objects, on which the unity of wholes rests. They, so to speak, “glue” parts together, forming a whole. Conceiving gluons as objects however immediately makes them problematic, since as objects, they are parts of the wholes which they glue together. This, in turn, seems to require gluons of a second-order to glue the first order gluons to the parts of the whole they bind together, and third-order gluons to bind the second-order gluons and ad infinitum.<sup>11</sup>

But since the concept of unity cannot simply be dispensed with, Priest proposes a solution involving paraconsistent logic. Gluons, insofar as they are responsible for combining parts into wholes, are themselves no objects. Simultaneously they are objects by the definition of Noneism, as we can talk about them just fine. They are objects and no objects – they are dialethic.<sup>12</sup>

The described regress can then be stopped by having gluons be identical with each part of the object. Hence, no higher-order gluons are needed to glue them to the parts. But for any object with more than one distinct part, an obvious problem arises: How can the same gluon be identical with different parts? Priest’s solution is a non-transitive conception of identity.<sup>13</sup>

Equivalence of two objects  $a$  and  $b$  can be defined as them having exactly the same predicates. Formalized in second-order predicate logic, that means:

D6:  $a = b$  iff  $\forall X(Xa \equiv Xb)$

This definition becomes non-transitive if one accounts for the intersection of  $\mathfrak{T}$  and  $\mathfrak{F}$  specified in D4. Take three truthbearers  $A$ ,  $B$ , and  $C$ . Now take  $A$  to lie exclusively in  $\mathfrak{T}$ ,  $B$  to lie exclusively in  $\mathfrak{F}$  and  $C$  to lie in the intersection. The material equivalence ( $\equiv$ ) of two truthbearers is true iff they lie in the same class  $\mathfrak{T}$  or  $\mathfrak{F}$ . In the described case, both  $A \equiv C$  and  $B \equiv C$  are true (and false), even though  $A \equiv B$  is simply false. Equivalence is non-transitive.<sup>14</sup>

This allows us to understand how gluons bind: They are identical to a number of non-identical parts. They themselves are therefore objects and no objects; they are self-identical and not.<sup>15</sup>

## 2.2. Priest’s Answer to the Question of Being

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<sup>11</sup> cmp. Priest, *One*, 9.

<sup>12</sup> cmp. Priest, *One*, 14–5.

<sup>13</sup> cmp. Priest, *One*, 17.

<sup>14</sup> cmp. Priest, *One*, 18–9.

<sup>15</sup> cmp. Priest, *One*, 27.

When answering Heidegger's question of Being through the lens of gluon theory, what Priest offers is quite obviously not a conservative reading of Heidegger. This alone speaks neither for nor against him – Heidegger may simply have been wrong, or if not wrong, short-sighted in an important way. The second option is exactly what Priest attests to him when he writes:

It is an irony that a thinker of the acuity of Heidegger, who was so critical of his historical heritage, should have been blind to the possibility, that people had logic wrong [because they insisted on the law of non-contradiction] [...]. Perhaps if Heidegger had been writing later, with a full knowledge of developments of modern logic, he would have said that an adequate thinking of being requires not simply *aletheia*, but *dialetheia*.<sup>16</sup>

Priest holds, that the tools of paraconsistent logic allow him to give an answer to the question of Being, which Heidegger simply could not have come up with, as he was missing the technical tools. This formulation should already ring bells with anyone who has ever glanced at Heidegger's views of technology. The divergence between Priest and Heidegger is likely larger than a difference in available formal tools; both thinkers have a completely different way of assessing what formal tools as such mean for the question of Being.

But before continuing to critique Priest's way of tackling the question, it will first have to be pinpointed where exactly the disagreement between the two thinkers can be located. A brief summary of the disagreement can be gained from looking at Priest's paper "Heidegger and the grammar of being", in which he claims, that the only language available to speak about Being and about anything else for that matter, is that of metaphysics.<sup>17</sup> We must and in fact, can talk about Being as a being.<sup>18</sup> This is – as Priest himself points out in the same paper – not at all Heidegger's view.

Since Priest denies the possibility of a different way of speaking, the only possible conclusion is that the way Heidegger speaks about Being as ineffable in subject-predicate language, commits him to a contradiction.<sup>19</sup> According to this view, any attempts by Heidegger to circumvent this contradiction by crossing out "Being"<sup>20</sup>, or putting the "is" in "Being (is)" in brackets<sup>21</sup> only fails to circumvent the inevitable:

[N]either of these techniques takes away from the fact, that even if one tries to use a non-standard form of language, the standard form of language did express, what could not be expressed.<sup>22</sup>

Now, if this factual effability is coherent with the theoretical ineffability of Being, the paradoxical conclusion is that "one can speak of the ineffable".<sup>23</sup> To Priest, this is the first reason to consider Being as a dialethic object.<sup>24</sup> He conceptualizes the Being of beings as that, which makes them self-

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<sup>16</sup> Priest, *Beyond the Limits of Thought*, 248.

<sup>17</sup> Found in: Priest, *Beyond the Limits of Thought*, pp. 237-248.

<sup>18</sup> cmp. Priest, *Beyond the Limits of Thought*, 243.

<sup>19</sup> cmp. Priest, *One*, 52.

<sup>20</sup> cmp. for examples of Heidegger crossing out "Being": 'On the question of Being' in: Heidegger, *Wegmarken*, Band 9.

<sup>21</sup> cmp. for examples of Heidegger doing this: Martin Heidegger, *Der Satz vom Grund*, Band 10.

<sup>22</sup> Priest, *Beyond the Limits of Thought*, 245.

<sup>23</sup> Priest, *One*, 204.

<sup>24</sup> cmp. Priest, *One*, 51.

identical: that which is responsible for their respective unity. A being's Being is therefore its gluon. And this is true for simple objects, only made up of one part, as well as for complex objects. The former are simply their own gluon.

“To be, in the relevant sense, is to be one.”<sup>25</sup>

This is Priest's answer to Heidegger's question of Being. And it is also where he diverges from Heidegger, who did not think this question to be answerable in such a manner, as Priest himself reports.<sup>26</sup>

Priest proceeds to describe Being as a universal, hoping to make sense of what he interprets Heidegger to mean by the phrase 'Being as such', as opposed to the 'Being of beings'. I will simply quote Priest on the matter, as he puts it quite concisely:

The being of a being is, we know, its gluon. One might naturally take this to be its pin [property instance] of being (unity). Possessing this is what makes an object be (be one). The corresponding universal is the gluon of the object comprising these pins. Since this is a (proper) gluon, it is just as much an object and not an object as the individual pins; and all the considerations about effability and ineffability we have traversed still, then, apply.<sup>27</sup>

So far so good. Priest has given answers to what he understands the Being of objects and Being as such to mean. But looking at how Priest quotes Heidegger to motivate his step from Being of beings to Being as such, will once again confirm, that what Priest is doing here can no longer be read as an elaboration of Heideggerian concepts: He cites the passage:

The essential constitution of metaphysics is based on the unity of beings as such in the universal and highest.<sup>28</sup>

But in this passage, Heidegger is not talking about what he understands "Being" to mean. The passage stems from "Identity and Difference". In the period in which Heidegger wrote this text, he already used "metaphysics" as a diagnostic term to demarcate a certain, deficient tradition of understanding (or failing to ask) the question of Being: namely, any account which thinks of Being as a being.

Priest of course does exactly that, albeit in a new and sophisticated way which not only acknowledges but embraces the contradiction which comes from treating Being in this way. By basing his formulation of Being as such (just as that of the Being of beings) on this understanding, he situates himself firmly in exactly the tradition which Heidegger criticizes. This has interesting implications for the significance of Priest's work in relationship to Heidegger's. But we will return to this point in later sections.

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<sup>25</sup> Priest, *One*, 51.

<sup>26</sup> cmp. Priest, *One*, 52–3.

<sup>27</sup> Priest, *One*, 53.

<sup>28</sup> Heidegger, *Identity and Difference*, 2002, 61; cited from: Priest, *One*, 53.

First, to get the full picture, another way in which Priest breaks with Heidegger must be discussed: he considers “[B]eing” and “nothing” to have different meanings:

Heidegger arguably took being and nothing to be the same thing (at least at some times). We will not follow him down this path. Nothing(ness) is, in fact, a curious thing in its own right.<sup>29</sup>

Of course, Heidegger understood neither Being nor nothing to be things at all. But let us not presently dwell on this point. We must first introduce Priest’s conception of nothing.

### ***2.3. Priest’s Conception of Nothing as paraconsistent Ground***

Priest conceptualizes nothing, as might be expected by now, to be a contradictory object. It is the mereological sum of the empty set, and therefore, the absence of all objects. But according to Noneism, the fact that it can be talked about makes it an object. As a unity without parts, it is its own gluon, making it both an object, and no object.<sup>30</sup>

Nothing is what you get when you fuse no things. There is nothing in the empty set, so nothing is absolute absence: the absence of all objects, as one would expect. As an object,  $\oplus\emptyset$  is just as good as  $\oplus\Sigma$  for any other  $\Sigma$ .<sup>31</sup>

It is in relation to this conception of nothing, that Priest’s notion of metaphysical grounding finally enters the stage:

Priest understands objects as individuated by their web of relations to other objects. If two objects are, in their individuation, mutually dependant (e.g. the door is individuated by not being the wall, and the wall, by not being the door) then Priest calls this relation “interpenetration”.<sup>32</sup>

He continues to ask, how the property of even being part of such a web of relationships, of being a unified object, is to be described. This is where his notion of nothing comes in. Nothing relates to objects as such, through interpenetration. Any object, for its being an object, depends on its not being nothing, while nothing, for being nothing rather than any object, depends on not being any of them. Therefore, nothing is in some sense part of the web of relations of objects. Simultaneously, it is its absolute limit, and therefore, not an object.<sup>33</sup>

But how does this relate to metaphysical grounding? Is the relation of interpenetration the same relation as grounding? Is nothing grounded by objects, while objects are grounded by nothing? This is not the case: Priest sketches his view on how nothing relates to objects in terms of grounding, in a presentation he gave at the University of Bonn.<sup>34</sup> We will briefly elaborate on

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<sup>29</sup> Priest, *One*, 54.

<sup>30</sup> cmp. Priest, *One*, 56.

<sup>31</sup> Priest, *One*, 97–8.

<sup>32</sup> Priest, *One*, 178.

<sup>33</sup> cmp. Priest, *One*, 168–81.

<sup>34</sup> Priest, *Everything and Nothing*.

the difference between grounding and interpenetration, as grounding is what will interest us later in this paper:

Grounding differs from interpenetration formally, insofar as it is anti-symmetric, while interpenetration is symmetric. Anti-symmetry means that two different entities cannot ground each other. Nevertheless, interestingly, the relation of grounding holds between nothing and objects, in a certain sense: nothing, insofar as it is not an object, grounds itself, insofar as it is an object. It grounds objects as objects, these objects including itself. But objects do not ground themselves in this sense and neither do they ground nothing, insofar as it is an object. Thus we arrive with an antisymmetric grounding structure, which has nothing as the ground for all objects as objects, including itself, insofar as it is an object, and excluding itself, insofar as it is no object.<sup>35</sup>

Nothing, therefore, occupies a peculiar position: It both interpenetrates with objects and grounds them, while they do not ground it.

[T]o be an object is to be dependent on nothing. Something could not be an object if it were not so related. To be an object is to stand out against nothingness, [...] what makes systems of representation possible as systems of representation, the possibility of objecthood, is not representable in those systems. And this is nothing.<sup>36</sup>

Now we will have to object to a part of this quote: Namely, as Priest himself notes, nothing is representable in these systems of representation. We are factually talking about it. What is missing is not a possible representation for it, but rather, any kind of phenomenal content associated with it. What is missing is the presentational rather than the representational aspect of truth, to speak in the diction of Anton Koch.<sup>37</sup> Nothing can be represented through a sign. But there is no associated phenomenal content. The sign points at an absence, rather than at a presence. This point will become important towards the end of this paper.

We are now finished with sketching Priest's view on Being and nothing, having only briefly alluded to its relationship with Heidegger's views. One way in which we might get more clarity about this matter is by comparing Priest's account of grounding with a similar account put forth by Filippo Casati.

Casati, much like Priest and in allusion to him, works out a view of grounding with a paraconsistent element at its base. Casati's notion of grounding is structurally identical to Priest's.

The paragraph which follows is devoted to the exposition of this structural equivalence, and the notion of the "inclosure-paradox" from which it arises.

#### ***2.4. Structural Equivalence of Priest's and Casati's Grounding Conceptions and the Inclosure-paradox.***

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<sup>35</sup> cmp. Priest, *Everything and Nothing*, min. 50 and following.

<sup>36</sup> Priest, *Beyond the Limits of Thought*, 208.

<sup>37</sup> cmp. Koch, *Versuch über Wahrheit und Zeit*, 154 ff.

Casati's notion of grounding is more explicitly defined than the one which Priest uses:

Gr:  $x$  (ontologically) grounds  $y$  iff  $x$  makes  $y$  an entity.

But since the place of  $x$  in this relation can only be taken by Being, Casati substitutes the variable 'x' for 'b' in the above definition.<sup>38</sup> Heidegger calling Being the "abyss" (Ab-Grund) is interpreted by Casati as meaning, that b itself must be ungrounded.

It should be noted here that this purely formal interpretation of the matter does not do justice to the complex structure of presenting and withdrawal which Heidegger attempts to express through this phrase.<sup>39</sup>

Based on this, Casati gives a formal definition for any fundamental element (FE), being an element in which all other elements are grounded:

[“ $\rightarrow$ ”: ... is grounded by ...;  $\supset$  stands for implication.]

S1:  $\text{FEx iff } \forall y(x \rightarrow y \supset x = y)$

An element is fundamental if any element on which it is grounded is identical with it.

Once again substituting b for x, Casati can then write:

S2:  $\exists b (\text{FEb} \wedge \forall y(y \neq b \supset y \rightarrow b)$

Being is a fundamental element and grounds all beings which are not identical with it.<sup>40</sup>

Following roughly the same argument about objecthood and effability which we have already discussed regarding Priest, Casati arrives at the insight that Being, thus conceived, must be dialethic.<sup>41</sup> Casati introduces the term "beyng" to signal the change from a consistent conception of Being to a paraconsistent one.<sup>42</sup>

This, once again parallel to Priest's argument, leads him to conclude that beyng must be a being and no being, and also self-identical and not. Hence, he arrives at the following formal grounding structure, which he calls Para-Foundationalism 2:

PF2:  $\forall x \forall y (((\neg(x = b) \wedge \neg(y = b)) \supset ((x \rightarrow b) \wedge \neg(((x \rightarrow x) \vee (x \rightarrow y)) \vee (y \rightarrow x)))) \wedge (\neg(b \rightarrow b) \wedge (b \rightarrow b))) \wedge ((b = b) \wedge \neg(b = b))$ <sup>43</sup>

The grounding relation employed here is antireflexive [AR:  $\forall x \neg(x \rightarrow x)$ ] as well as not antireflexive, asymmetric [AS:  $\forall x \forall y ((x \rightarrow y) \supset \neg(y \rightarrow x))$ ] as well as not asymmetric<sup>44</sup> and extendable [E:  $\exists x \forall y ((x \rightarrow y) \supset (x = y))$ ] as well as not extendable.

<sup>38</sup> Casati, 'Heidegger's Grund: (Para-)Foundationalism', 295.

<sup>39</sup> cmp. Section 4.2 of this paper.

<sup>40</sup> Casati, 'Heidegger's Grund: (Para-)Foundationalism', 295–7.

<sup>41</sup> cmp. Casati, 'Heidegger's Grund: (Para-)Foundationalism', 299.

<sup>42</sup> cmp. Casati, 'Heidegger's Grund: (Para-)Foundationalism', 300 f.

<sup>43</sup> cmp. Casati, 'Heidegger's Grund: (Para-)Foundationalism', 303–4.

<sup>44</sup> Casati would call AS "anti-symmetry". But we have already reserved this word for weaker notion, that a relation cannot hold both ways between two *different* elements. Casati's notion of anti-symmetry does not require the elements to be different. We will thus call his stronger notion AS "asymmetry".

Priest's grounding structure based on nothing has exactly the same form. One only needs to substitute n (nothing) for b (beyng).

Both Priest and Casati employ the same arguments for paraconsistency. This similarity in argument is in turn based on the fact that they are not only tackling the same problem but also endeavor to solve the problem in the same way. The problem in both cases is what Priest calls an "inclosure-paradox" regarding the grounding structure. The proposed solution is the introduction of a dialethic fundamental object.

I will simply quote Priest on the matter of the "inclosure-paradox", as he puts it briefly and clearly:

An inclosure-paradox is a paradox that fits the inclosure schema. This arises when there is an operator,  $\delta$ , and a totality,  $\Omega$ , such that whenever  $\delta$  is applied to any subset,  $x$ , of  $\Omega$ , of a certain kind—that is, one which satisfies some condition  $\psi$ —it appears to deliver an object that is still in  $\Omega$ , though it is not in  $x$ . A contradiction will then arise if  $\Omega$  itself satisfies  $\psi$ . For applying  $\delta$  to  $\Omega$  will produce an object that is both within and without  $\Omega$ .<sup>45</sup>

Priest elaborates how nothing instantiates this paradox:

$\varphi(y)$  is 'y is a statement expressible in some system of representations'

$\psi(x)$  is 'for some system of representations  $z$ ,  $x$  is a set of statements of  $z$ '

$\delta(x)$  is a statement about the preconditions of the  $z$  in question being a system of representation. In particular, when  $x = \Omega$ , let this be the statement that nothing makes objects possible.<sup>46</sup>

Since they are structurally equivalent, we can thus understand both Priest's and Casati's notions of grounding as responses to just this paradox. But if they are structurally identical, why is different terminology used in both conceptions?

To answer this question, the notions of beyng and nothing as used by Casati and Priest will have to be related to their place in Heidegger's thought. Of course, one might argue that what we face here is simply a case of arbitrary terminological choice for a primarily structural issue. But if we seek to understand the significance of Priest's and Casati's projects, then their relationship to Heidegger's views might provide valuable insights. And to properly understand that relationship, a discussion of these terms is needed.

### 3. Being, Beyng, and Nothing in Heidegger's Thought.

Before delving deeper into Heidegger it should be noted that while Priest and Casati present a structurally equivalent notion of grounding, each of them situates their notion differently regarding Heidegger's work.

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<sup>45</sup> cmp. Priest, *One*, 20–1.

<sup>46</sup> Priest, *One*, 208.

Priest explicitly breaks with Heidegger and attributes Heidegger's alleged mistake of not thinking of Being as contradictory to a historical ignorance of paraconsistent logic.<sup>47</sup>

Casati is of the opinion that Heidegger essentially held a paraconsistent notion of Being, only lacking the tools to formally express this view.<sup>48</sup>

When assessing the proper relationship of their grounding conceptions to Heidegger, we will therefore have to either decide on one of these views or reject both in favor of a third. But at least one of Priest and Casati must have gone wrong.

Firstly, let us turn to what Priest frames repeatedly as his "answer to Heidegger's question" of Being.<sup>49</sup> Priest quotes the following passage from Heidegger to prove that the understanding of objects expressed in Noneism "is essentially Heidegger's understanding of [B]eing, too":<sup>50</sup>

Being is used in all knowledge and all predicating, in every relation to beings and in every relation to oneself, and the expression is understandable without 'further ado'. Everyone understands 'The sky is blue', 'I am happy' and similar statements.<sup>51</sup>

Preceding the quoted passage, Heidegger writes: "Being is the term which is most immediately and obviously intelligible [selbstverständlich]".<sup>52</sup>

What Heidegger is doing here is not presenting his own understanding of Being, like Priest seems to think he does. Rather, Heidegger introduces in this passage an every-day and pre-reflexive understanding of Being. Heidegger continues to write:

But this average intelligibility only serves to demonstrate the unintelligibility. [...] That we always already live in an understanding of Being, while the sense of Being is shrouded in darkness, proves the fundamental necessity to repeat the question concerning "Being".<sup>53</sup>

The way in which this pre-reflexive understanding of Being occludes the sense of Being constitutes Heidegger's motivation to even ask the question regarding Being. Therefore, contrary to what Priest implies, it can hardly reflect Heidegger's own understanding of the matter.

What Priest calls his "answer" to Heidegger's question of Being, must therefore rather be understood as a formal elaboration of a kind of a yet unquestioned understanding of Being. This does not devalue Priest's work, of course, but it reframes it in an important way. Contrary to what Priest seems to think, his work cannot be understood as continuing Heidegger's project, in any simple or obvious sense.

One consequence of this interpretative problem on Priest's side is of immediate importance for the current concern with disentangling Priest's and Casati's use of "[B]eing",

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<sup>47</sup> cmp. footnote 16.

<sup>48</sup> cmp. Casati, 'Heidegger's Grund: (Para-)Foundationalism', 300.

<sup>49</sup> Priest, *One*, 48.

<sup>50</sup> Priest, *One*, 49.

<sup>51</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 1997 p. 5. Cited from Priest, *One*, 50.

<sup>52</sup> Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 4 (my translation).

<sup>53</sup> Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 4 (My translation).



“nothing”, and “beyng”. Since what Priest understands as Being, is what Heidegger might call a pre-reflexive and everyday understanding of it, it becomes obvious, why Priest cannot follow Heidegger in his claim that Being and nothing (are) essentially the same. Priest and Heidegger simply no longer speak about the same matter, when they talk about Being.

But what then, is Heidegger’s understanding of Being and consequently, of nothing? And how do both relate to the pre-reflexive understanding of Being on which Priest’s notion is based, and to Casati’s and Priest’s notions of beyng and nothing, which are structurally equivalent? It might after all be the case, that Priest’s conception of nothing turns out to be a proper answer to Heidegger’s question.

In the following section, we will see how this is in some sense true, and in another not. To see how this can be the case, we will have to differentiate between two ways in which Heidegger suggests, that the question of Being can be posed.

### ***3.1. The Question of Being as Guiding Question vs. Question of Ground***

The question of Being – contrary to what Priest’s claim to have found “an answer” implies - is not a unitary conception in Heidegger’s thought. It must be answered with regard to what Heidegger calls a destiny/sending of Being (Seinsgeschick)<sup>54</sup>. There are two possible ways, in which the question of Being can relate to such “Seinsgeschicke”. Before describing these two ways of posing the question, we will briefly introduce the relevant aspects of the notion of “Seinsgeschick”. The term is used by Heidegger to describe how Being historically reveals itself as a certain understanding of what it means to be a being.<sup>55</sup> This roughly means, that we always already live, act, speak and theorize with some implicit understanding of Being, which shapes the way in which beings, broadly understood as including not only things but also relations, properties, other humans, etc. reveal themselves to us.

Heidegger understands the term “schicken” as “a giving, which only gives the given, but simultaneously withdraws and keeps itself to itself[.]”<sup>56</sup> Consequently, as long as one asks about Being in any of its “Geschicke”, Being as such always already withdraws itself. Being which always withdraws itself in any of its “Geschicke”, is what Heidegger tries to express by his term “Ereignis”, which can be translated as both ‘happening’, or ‘event’, but also has a connotation like ‘coming to oneself’.<sup>57</sup> Other expressions Heidegger uses in this context are “Being as Being”, “Being as such”, “clearing” and “nothing”. This is further evidence, that Priest’s notion of Being as such can hardly be understood as an elaboration of what Heidegger means by the expression.

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<sup>54</sup> The german word „Geschick” translates both to ‘destiny’ and ‘that which is sent’, as well as to the non-word nominalisation ‘a sending’. To avoid overemphasis or omittance of any of these readings, I shall use the original german expression for “Seinsgeschick” and its derivatives.

<sup>55</sup> cmp. Martin Heidegger, *Der Satz vom Grund*, Band 10, 131.

<sup>56</sup> Heidegger, *Zur Sache des Denkens*, Bd. 14, 12 (my translation).

<sup>57</sup> Though Heidegger himself regards ‘Ereignis’ as untranslatable, similarly to the ‘Dao’.

That is because, as we will soon see, Being as a universal *gluon* exactly presents itself in the modern “Seinsgeschick” of calculation under which Priest operates.

Using this observation as a starting point, we can now present a taxonomy of ways to pose the question of Being, and provisionally locate Priest’s and Casati’s endeavors in it, to then further elaborate what that means for both theories.

The question of Being can be asked in the following two ways:

Firstly, one can ask how “Being” is already understood in a given “Seinsgeschick”.

In his “*Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis)*”, Heidegger terms this way of asking the question the “guiding question” (*Leitfrage*) of western philosophy since Aristotle.<sup>58</sup> At other points, he calls it the question of metaphysics. Metaphysics, in turn, he characterizes as a way of thinking which

thinks beings as beings<sup>59</sup>. Whenever the question of what beings are is asked [in metaphysics], beings as such come into view. Metaphysical imagination [*Vorstellen*] owes this view to the clearing [*Lichtung*] of Being. But this light, meaning that which such [metaphysical] thought experiences as light, can itself not come into view for such thought; that is because it imagines beings only with regard to that which is.<sup>60</sup>

Another way in which Heidegger characterizes this question, which is of particular interest for this paper, is as the attempt to understand the Being of beings as their ground. Heidegger writes about the second way of asking the question, distinguishing it from the one so far presented:

To think Being itself and in its own, requires, to not regard Being like all metaphysics would, namely not to interpret<sup>61</sup> it from its relationship to what is, for this relationship, and as its ground.<sup>62</sup>

Any kind of asking the question in the first way is metaphysical in Heidegger’s sense, as it thinks of Being as just another being in its (grounding) relationship to beings. Answering the question in this first sense then means giving an account of how this grounding being is characterized in the respective “Seinsgeschick”.

This in turn can be done from two perspectives: On the one hand, one can ask from a historical<sup>63</sup> perspective: How did the Greeks, the Scholastics, or in general: how did some unified culture during a certain historical period understand Being? On the other hand, one can inquire into the way in which Being is understood by oneself and the “Seinsgeschick” in which one lives. Let us call the first perspective ‘historical’ and the second ‘immanent’.

But Being in so far as it precedes any “Seinsgeschick”, as the light in which such “Geschicke” always already occur, Being as “clearing” or “Ereignis”, is neglected by asking the question in its first sense from either perspective:

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<sup>58</sup> Heidegger, *Beiträge zur Philosophie*, Band 2, 75.

<sup>59</sup> In the original German stands “das Seiende” as a collective singular.

<sup>60</sup> Heidegger, *Wegmarken*, Band 9, 365 (my translation).

<sup>61</sup> Heidegger writes „*ergründet und ausgelegt*”; I have omitted „*ergründet*” in my translation as there seems to be no adequate word for it in English. ‘*Ergründen*’ means as much as “searching (or finding) something as as ground”

<sup>62</sup> Heidegger, *Zur Sache des Denkens*, Bd. 14, 9–10 (my translation).

<sup>63</sup> This should be understood as Heidegger’s ‘*geschichtlich*’ rather than ‘*historisch*’.

When talking about Seinsgeschicke, ‘Being’ means nothing but the sending [Schickung] of the granting [Einräumung] of the space for the appearing of that which is in its respective understanding [Prägung] and simultaneous withdrawal of the origin of the Wesen<sup>64</sup> of Being as such.<sup>65</sup>

Secondly, one can therefore ask for the sense of Being as “clearing” or “Ereignis”. Being thus understood always withdraws itself in answers to the question in its first (metaphysical) sense, but must precede and only makes possible any such answer.<sup>66</sup> Heidegger calls this second way of asking the question “question of ground” (Grundfrage). But as shown by one of the passages just quoted, this does pronouncedly not mean that Being should be understood as the ground of beings here. Rather what is asked for here is “Being as such” or Being in its “Wesen”. In his “Beiträge zur Philosophie”, Heidegger differentiates this kind of approach, by writing “beyng” instead of “[B]eing”.<sup>67</sup> This is what Casati’s use of the term “beyng” for his paraconsistent grounding object is motivated by, even though a grounding object seems to not be what Heidegger has in mind here.

The following table may help to bring clarity into the taxonomy thus far elaborated:

Ways to ask for Being:	Guiding Question		Question of Ground
What “Being” means in the respective way of asking the question:	Being is understood as the way, in which beings are thought to be in a certain “Seinsgeschick”.		Being is understood as presence as such, in so far as it precedes any concrete “Seinsgeschick”.
Perspectives from which the guiding question can be asked:	Immanent	Historical	

With the distinction between guiding question and question of ground in hand, we can now return to the notions of Being, being, and nothing as they are used by Priest and Casati. To determine how these notions relate to Heidegger, we should not focus on what terminology Priest and Casati respectively chose, but rather, how their projects fit into the taxonomy of asking the question of Being.

### 3.2. How do Priest and Casati ask and answer the question of Being?

We have previously characterized what Priest calls ‘[B]eing’, as an elaboration of a pre-reflexive understanding of Being. But this pre-reflexivity contrasted with an ontologically grounded understanding of Being is a notion which Heidegger developed in his early work and later abandoned. Consequently, the relationship of Priest’s account of “Being” must be revisited in light of the taxonomy of questions of Being as developed by Heidegger post *Being and Time*.

The notion of “Seinsgeschick” implies, that how beings pre-reflexively appear is determined by the respective historical and cultural circumstances. We said earlier that Priest’s “answer” to the

<sup>64</sup> A translation of „Wesen” as either “nature”, “essence” or “presence” would be inadequate. The term is left in its original German for this reason. One should especially note the temporal connotation of the term.

<sup>65</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Der Satz vom Grund*, Band 10, 131 (my translation).

<sup>66</sup> cmp. Heidegger, ‘Martin Heidegger im Gespräch’, 74–5.

<sup>67</sup> cmp. Heidegger, *Beiträge zur Philosophie*, Band 2, 76 ff.

question of Being is merely a structural elaboration of a pre-reflexive or everyday notion of Being. We must therefore now ask: But of what pre-reflexive notion? What “Seinsgeschick” is Priest operating under?

An answer to this question will now briefly be stated without much reasoning, and defended in the following sections:

Priest operates under the “Seinsgeschick” of technical calculation. The corresponding age is sometimes called the age of the atom [Atomzeitalter] or modernity [Neuzeit] by Heidegger. Priest’s notion of Being is a formal elaboration of Being, as it is pre-reflexively understood, in the “Seinsgeschick” of technical calculation. That is understood as the formal unity and self-identity of objects, cognized by subjects. This must not be understood as an “answer” to either of the two questions, but rather, as preparatory conceptual work, for Priest’s conception of nothing.

This conception, as well as Casati’s structurally identical conception of beyng, answer the guiding question for the “Seinsgeschick” of technical calculation. The question is answered from an immanent rather than a historical perspective since both Priest and Casati themselves operate under the “Seinsgeschick” of technical calculation.

If all of this is correct then Priest’s and Casati’s work can be hypothesized to be a unique symptom of this “Seinsgeschick”: Namely, these conceptions are an attempt to understand and solve the limitations which are constitutive to this “Seinsgeschick” employing its own machinery and methods.

The remainder of this paper will be devoted to a defense of this hypothesis and a discussion of its implications.

Nevertheless, briefly returning to the question we posed at the beginning of section three, we can conclude that we must reject both Priest’s and Casati’s assessment of the relationship between their work and Heidegger’s: Neither does Priest’s conception of “[B]eing” constitute an answer to Heidegger’s question of Being in any of its senses, nor is Casati’s understanding of “beyng” as ground an appropriate construal of what Heidegger intends to speak of when he uses the term “beyng”.

## **The Question of Ground and the Grounding Relation.**

A reader not sympathetic to our hypothesis might begin their critique by asking why an understanding of Being as the ground of beings would turn out to be precisely what Heidegger was not after when asking the question of ground. Why would he then call the question of ground ‘question of ground’? While I am not interested in looking at this matter from a historical perspective, it might be answered based on Heidegger’s lecture “Der Satz vom Grund”: “Ground”,

just like “Being”, can either be understood from any particular “Seinsgeschick”, or so to speak, as ‘ground as such’. Heidegger, therefore, differentiates between two different “intonations” of the principle of ground, paralleling the two different ways to ask the question of Being. And “Being [as Being] only comes into view, once the intonation changes” from a metaphysical, to a non-metaphysical hearing of the principle of ground.<sup>68</sup>

Consequently, any understanding of the question of ground depends on what Heidegger means, when he cautions us to change the intonation of the principle of ground and to not understand Being as the Being of any particular “Seinsgeschick”. To get a clearer grasp on this difference, we will now briefly examine the term “Ereignis”, which is central to Heidegger’s treatment of the matter.

#### 4.1. The “Ereignis”

To ask the question of ground means to

Think Being in its own-most – from the Ereignis – without regard to its relationship to beings. [...] That means, thinking Being without regard to metaphysics.<sup>69</sup>

Without any further context, this already gives support to the thesis, that Priest’s and Casati’s grounding conceptions can hardly be understood as accounts of the “Ereignis”. What they are doing, and what leads them down their path to paraconsistency, is thinking Being as defined through its grounding relations to beings, which in turn is the characteristic feature of thinking Being with “regard to metaphysics”.

But what *exactly* does Heidegger mean when he speaks of the “Ereignis”?

“Ereignis” does not mean “event”, as a direct translation might make us think. To say: “Es gibt das Ereignis”<sup>70</sup> does not have the sense of a proposition at all, as propositions always concern beings.<sup>71</sup> But the “Ereignis” is neither an object (Gegenstand), nor something enveloping or containing all objects and lastly, it is not their ground.<sup>72</sup>

This brings us back to Priest’s view, that the language of metaphysics, which requires us to speak of the “Ereignis” like it was an object, is the only language we have. When we speak of a “language of metaphysics”, we must understand this as broadly as possible, encompassing all ways of speaking which essentially rely on subject-predicate relations and which can only fathom Being as the ground of beings insofar as they are already understood in a certain way. This broad understanding must be contextualized in Heidegger’s claim, that all philosophy is metaphysics.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Der Satz vom Grund*, Band 10, 192 (my translation).

<sup>69</sup> Heidegger, *Zur Sache des Denkens*, Bd. 14, 29 (my translation).

<sup>70</sup> This is not properly translatable: “Es gibt” is used in German like “there is” would be in English. But Heidegger employs the phrase, exactly because it does not contain the word “is”. We will elaborate on the matter in the following.

<sup>71</sup> *cmp.* Heidegger, *Zur Sache des Denkens*, Bd. 14, 25–6.

<sup>72</sup> *cmp.* Heidegger, *Zur Sache des Denkens*, Bd. 14, 28.

<sup>73</sup> *cmp.* Heidegger, *Zur Sache des Denkens*, Bd. 14, 69.

Priest must essentially miss what Heidegger means when he talks about the “Ereignis”, because he is arguing from an *immanent* position regarding metaphysics, and more closely, the technical-calculating “Seinsgeschick” which characterizes the current understanding of metaphysics in debates like those about grounding.

But the “Ereignis” does not mean Being in any of its historical “Seinsgeschicke” as Idea, Actualitas, Will, or Objecthood. Rather, “Ereignis” means that which always withdraws itself, insofar as it reveals some understanding of what it means to be.<sup>74</sup> The “Ereignis” is not the ground / reason for beings appearing as they do. This role is filled by the different “Seinsgeschicke”. Rather it (is) the sending (Schicken) of such sendings (Geschicke). It *is* in no way, and “logical ordering-relations have no meaning” in this context.<sup>75</sup>

#### ***4.2. Why Dialetheia cannot account for the Ereignis***

So far, we have mostly focused on providing secure evidence that Heidegger would not have supported accounts of the “Ereignis” through metaphysical grounding. But we have also stayed heavily dependant on Heidegger’s language, or as some might say, jargon. Hence, this section is devoted to giving a more or less jargon-free account of what is the problem with grounding conceptions of Being understood in the sense of “Ereignis”:

First, we must admit one thing: Priest gets the diagnosis right. His inclosure-paradox points with an admirable clarity at the contradiction at the edges of any system of representation. Negating self-reference becomes inevitable when any system of understanding seeks to represent itself. This much seems to be true for any possible understanding of what it means to be a member of such a system, or more generally, for what it means to be. The inclosure-paradox is not particular to any “Seinsgeschick”.

Now an advocate of Priest’s view might conclude that the same is true for Priest’s view that “nothing” is the dialethic ground of beings. If the paradox is inevitable, regardless of “Seinsgeschick”, and the grounding conception around “nothing” is a solution to the paradox, then surely this conception itself must be independent of any particular “Seinsgeschick”. Factual effability and structurally necessary ineffability coincide in a true contradiction. The advocate might argue further – as Casati does – that this surely is, what Heidegger means, when he claims that the “Ereignis” as it sends Being, withdraws itself in its own-most.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> cmp. Heidegger, *Zur Sache des Denkens*, Bd. 14, 27.

<sup>75</sup> Heidegger, *Zur Sache des Denkens*, Bd. 14, 27 (my translation).

<sup>76</sup> cmp. Heidegger, *Zur Sache des Denkens*, Bd. 14, 27–8.

But this structure of sending and withdrawal is only contradictory if one reads “Ereignis” and “Being” as referring to a single, albeit contradictory, being. As we have pointed out repeatedly, they do not. What ensues is an increase in the structural complexity of the matter.

Namely, we must understand Being, in so far as it is understood as a term for what it means to be an entity, as withdrawing itself in one sense, and revealing itself in another. It withdraws itself, insofar as it is not immediately present as a being. It reveals itself in so far as it can be abstracted as the lowest common denominator or ground from the way in which beings present themselves in the respective “Geschick”.

For example, if the given “Seinsgeschick” is that of Christianity, beings are understood as created entities. But in so far as entities are created, they immediately imply the existence of a creator. Being thus presents itself as God, who is the ground of beings thus understood. Supporting our thesis that the inclosure-paradox obtains independently of “Seinsgeschick” it can here be found in the fact, that God is not himself a created being, but nevertheless somehow “is”. Similarly, in Priest’s view, beings are understood as anything which can enter into logical relations, and which can consequently be talked about. Thus, Being presents itself as nothing, which metaphysically grounds objects in their objecthood. Just like God was an entity, but not himself created, nothing is an object, but not itself able to stand in logical relations. But it also factually stands in such relations, much like for Christians, God factually exists even though he is not created. More generally, we can therefore characterize “metaphysics” as Heidegger understands it, as any view which solves the inclosure-paradox by introducing a being, which both fulfills and does not fulfill the requirements for what it means to be a being in a given “Seinsgeschick”, and serves as the ground for all other ‘normal’ beings in this “Seinsgeschick”.

This grounding being is then often thought to have its own *special* way of Being, e.g. God as a *perfect* as opposed to created being, and nothing as a *dialectic* as opposed to consistent being.

But one further characteristic is common among any such special being conceptualized to deal with the inclosure-paradox in a certain “Seinsgeschick”: Their modality of Being contains no presence. Neither God, nor nothing (or gluons in general), nor any other such metaphysically conceived special being in one of its historical “Seinsgeschicke” has any form of phenomenal reality. They do not *correspond* to anything, but a formal place in a metaphysical structure. This complete determination of Being through its situatedness in a structure is what it means, to conceive Being metaphysically or Being as the ground of beings. Any answer to the guiding question will take the form of such a special being.

What characterizes conceptions of ground arrived at in this manner, is that they are necessary for their respective system to be complete. A system of created entities would not be complete without God, and as Priest has shown a system of logically idealized structures presupposing self-identity would not be complete without true contradictions. Thus we can conclude our discussion of the withdrawal and revealing of Being in any of its “Seinsgeschicke” by noting, that the conception of Being as a grounding being (albeit of a different modality than

the beings which it grounds) always stems from a demand for systematic completeness. Such a demand is what characterizes the guiding question.

In contrast, the withdrawal of the “Ereignis” is of another kind. The “Ereignis” is Heidegger’s way of expressing, that while the kinds of special beings which metaphysical systems introduce to achieve their own completeness still somehow *are*, their *being present* as such *is* not. These special beings still somehow appear – though their lack of phenomenal content makes them appear *as absences*. Thus, what must precede them is *appearing as such*, which can never appear itself, *as anything*. “Ereignis” must therefore be heard as presence itself or unconcealment, rather than as a term for anything which is present, or even for any particular way of being present. Presence, or unconcealment itself (is) completely absent. An implication that is especially important for an interpretation of Priest’s views in this light is expressed in the following passage:

[It is] *aletheia*, unconcealment thought as the clearing, which grants the possibility of truth. That is because the truth itself, much like Being and thinking, can only be what it is in the element of the clearing.<sup>77</sup>

If presence itself somehow precedes truth, then it itself cannot be the object of logical statements with truth values, even if these truth values permit propositions to be both true and false. Presence as such can therefore not be understood as a dialethic entity, because the notion of *dialetheia* already requires truth to be in place. But presence as such precedes truth, or as Heidegger writes: “truth itself [...] can only be what it is in the element of the clearing”.

This structure of presence as such preceding truth seems to be either missed or rejected by both Priest and Casati.

But while it may sound arcane in Heidegger’s language, it is not immediately an implausible notion. What is essentially said here, and what I have been trying to differentiate throughout this essay, is that there are many different ways in which Being, truth, ground, etc. can be understood, but that any such understanding reveals these notions and withdraws itself, *as a structure of their revealing*. Consequently all such structures of revealing are in turn dependant on the possibility of revealing or presence as such, which (is) itself therefore *second order withdrawn*. Presence as such precedes not only what is intelligible but also any structure of intelligibility.

Assuming such a multi-order structure of presence and withdrawal not only accurately describes Heidegger’s thought; we now also have a structural understanding of how Priest and Casati’s frameworks relate to that of Heidegger.

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<sup>77</sup> Heidegger, *Zur Sache des Denkens*, Bd. 14, 85–6 (my translation).



But, as we have noted earlier, Being must not only be understood structurally but also historically. Interestingly, concerning the “Seinsgeschick” under which Priest operates and in which beings are understood as self-identical objects, Heidegger arrives at the following diagnosis:

The process that Being sends itself in the objecthood of objects, but simultaneously withdraws itself in its Wesen, determines a new epoch of withdrawal.<sup>78</sup>

He elaborates elsewhere:

With the sending [Zuschickung] of Being as objecthood, the most extreme withdrawal of Being begins, in so far as the origin of its Wesen cannot even be brought into view as a question, or as worthy of question. Why not? Because in the complete measuring-through of the area of the ratio as Vernunft<sup>79</sup>, the complete grounding of beings as such is decided and closed.<sup>80</sup>

The preceding section has shown, why Priest’s approach is structurally not suited to tackle the “Ereignis”. But if Heidegger is right, then there should be something unique to the “Seinsgeschick” under which Priest operates, which characterizes Priest’s failure to address the question of ground. Following Heidegger, we must suppose that Priest’s approach helps to occlude the “Ereignis” in some special sense, beyond the general tendency of metaphysics to not ask the question of ground.

The next section will be an attempt to show, what might constitute the unique way of withdrawal in the technical-calculating “Seinsgeschick”.

#### ***4.3. The technical-calculating Understanding of Being as a new Epoch of Withdrawal.***

In our treatment of the peculiarity of withdrawal in the technical-calculating understanding of Being, we will focus on the calculating part rather than on Heidegger’s critique of modern technology: Priest is after all a logician and no physicist or engineer.

Heidegger uses the term calculating (Rechnen) at times, to signify the kind of purely formal approach to the question of Being which Priest and Casati seem to pursue. This kind of formal pursuit is characterized by demanding “Rechenschaft”, that is justification in the form of rational (vernünftig), mathematical ground, for the way in which things are.<sup>81</sup> This understanding of ground and rationality then inevitably leads to an attempt to bring that which makes things as they are into view, through some kind of formal structure. This imperative to always find a formally expressible reason can be directly observed in Priest’s and Casati’s work.

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<sup>78</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Der Satz vom Grund*, Band 10, 83 (my translation).

<sup>79</sup> A direct translation as „reason” would exactly miss the point here, as it is just as ambiguous as the Latin “ratio” from which it stems. The German word “Vernunft” means “reason” in the sense, in which it is used e.g. in Kant’s “Critique of pure reason”.

<sup>80</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Der Satz vom Grund*, Band 10, 131 (my translation).

<sup>81</sup> comp. Martin Heidegger, *Der Satz vom Grund*, Band 10, 148–50.

This is peculiar to the calculating “Seinsgeschick” we are discussing, as the connotation of terms like “ratio”, “justification” and “calculation” more generally is dependant on the “Seinsgeschick” in which one operates.<sup>82</sup>

To really understand the peculiarity of Priest’s and Casati’s notions of grounding, one must remember the difference between the problem they try to answer, and how they answer it: The problem is the inclosure-paradox, which Priest points out with stunning clarity. While we have argued, that the paradox itself is not specific to any “Seinsgeschick”, the *formal expression* of this paradox which Priest gives, can be interpreted in Heidegger’s language, as the way in which the withdrawal of presence as such reveals itself *as a withdrawal* to the “Seinsgeschick” of calculation. To this “Seinsgeschick”, the withdrawal of presence or Being as such reveals itself as the contradiction at the edge of any formal system of representation.

If this diagnosis was all there was to Priest’s and Casati’s Project, this could hardly be called a new epoch of withdrawal. Rather, taking the inclosure-paradox seriously might even pave the way out of a metaphysical world-view and back towards an asking of the question of ground.

But Priest and Casati do not stop there. They instantly proceed to attempt to ‘plug the hole’ in the system through the addition of a dialethic ground. This is exactly, what one would expect given what has been said about the understanding of “reason” under which they operate: For them, the finding of a contradiction is instantly interpreted as a cue to add a formal ground in the form of a true contradiction. The new epoch of withdrawal is characterized by the “*principium reddendae rationis*”, according to which the justification (Rechenschaft) for beings must occur through the addition (reddendae) of an appropriate object as its rational ground.<sup>83</sup> It is characterized by

the moment of unconditional and continuous demand for the addition [Zustellung] of the mathematically and technologically calculable grounds, the total ‘Rationalisation’.<sup>84</sup>

Specifically for Priest’s and Casati’s case, this means, that if the only object appropriate to justify beings in their unity or as beings is contradictory, then the principle of ground demands the introduction of just such objects, even if classical logic must be sacrificed for it.

That these objects (beyng, nothing, gluons), whose introduction is only required presupposing a certain understanding of Being, ground, and reason, are then themselves confused for appropriate answers to the question of Being, explains why the epoch of technical calculation constitutes a new kind of withdrawal: *The question appears as formally solved, while it has in reality only been occluded.* The inability to even ask questions regarding presence as such is a symptom of the belief, that it is possible to *integrate a system’s horizon into the system, by the means of the system itself.*<sup>85</sup> And the technical-calculating “Seinsgeschick” seems to foster this belief.

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<sup>82</sup> cmp. Martin Heidegger, *Der Satz vom Grund*, Band 10, 150.

<sup>83</sup> cmp. Martin Heidegger, *Der Satz vom Grund*, Band 10, 148–50.

<sup>84</sup> Heidegger, *Zur Sache des Denkens*, Bd. 14, 28 (my translation).

<sup>85</sup> “The systems horizon” here refers to the contradiction which results from the inclosure-paradox.

This is likely what Heidegger means when he writes, that Being in its origin of *Wesen* cannot even come into view or be put into question in this “Seinsgeschick”,

[b]ecause in the complete measuring-through of the area of the ratio as *Vernunft*<sup>86</sup>, the complete grounding of beings as such is decided and closed.<sup>87</sup>

That which withdraws itself in any “Seinsgeschick” can no longer come into view *as withdrawn*. The demand to always provide a mathematical ground – what Heidegger calls the *principium reddendae rationis* – has occluded any ability to acknowledge the constitutive limits of our thought *as limits*.<sup>88</sup> After all, these limits – understood as a formal paradox – have supposedly already been incorporated into a formal system through means of *dialetheia*.

But when it comes to the constitutive withdrawal of the “Ereignis”, of presence as such, all logical relations lose their meaning.<sup>89</sup> Such withdrawal after all precedes any kind of truth, without which logical relations, contradictions, or dialethic solutions cannot even be conceived.

The desire to calculate “beyond the limits of thought”<sup>90</sup>, has not eradicated or overcome those limits. But it has occluded them through formalism. And as long as one attempts to grasp Being as an element in logical relations, one will not even be able to properly ask the question of Being in the sense of the question of ground. The “Ereignis” “withdraws its own-most from [the kind of] unhinged unconcealing” which is demanded and attempted by a consequently carried out calculation, like that of Priest or Casati.<sup>91</sup>

One could even make the case that Being, in so far as it is required to take a grounding position in a relational system and must consequently present itself as object and not object (*dialetheia*), is the *most complete self-expression* of the “Seinsgeschick” of technical calculation. But at the same time, this “Seinsgeschick” conceals its own contingent nature as a “Seinsgeschick”, convinced that the absolute rationalization it achieves is the absolute truth – even if that truth is the truth of a contradiction.

This *tendency of the modern “Seinsgeschick” to conceal its own contingency* is what Priest’s and Casati’s projects exemplify like few others. Likely, it is simultaneously the reason why Priest and Casati misconceive the relationship their own works have to that of Heidegger. In response to Priest, one could write:

It’s an irony, that a thinker of the acuity of Priest, who was so critical of his historical heritage – especially concerning logic – should have been blind to the possibility that it was his thinking in logical forms as such, which prevented him from properly engaging with the question of Being which he was so fascinated by.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Again, the English word “reason” would exactly miss the point here, as it is just as ambiguous the Latin “ratio” from which it stems. “Vernunft” is means “reason” in the sense, in which it is used e.g. in Kant’s “Critique of pure reason”.

<sup>87</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Der Satz vom Grund*, Band 10, 131 (my translation).

<sup>88</sup> cmp. Martin Heidegger, *Der Satz vom Grund*, Band 10, 35 ff.

<sup>89</sup> cmp. Heidegger, *Identität und Differenz*, Band 11, 45.

<sup>90</sup> Priest, *Beyond the Limits of Thought*.

<sup>91</sup> Heidegger, *Zur Sache des Denkens*, Bd. 14, 28 (my translation).

<sup>92</sup> cmp. the passage cited in footnote 16.

This concludes our project of situating Priest's and Casati's attempts of answering the question of Being in their proper relationship to Heidegger's thought.

What remains to be done is to determine, how the grounding conception discussed so far relates to the contemporary grounding debate. This might help to develop an understanding of what it would mean to turn away from what Heidegger calls "metaphysics" and towards the question of ground, properly understood.

## **Dialethic Ground and the current grounding Debate**

The grounding debate and the view of metaphysics from which it originates are firmly situated in the "Seinsgeschick" of technical calculation. In the last section, we have hypothesized, that *a dialethic notion of ground might be the most complete self expression of this "Seinsgeschick"*.

To defend this hypothesis, we will now elaborate how dialethic notions of ground relate to the current grounding debate. We will see how dialethic notions help to reveal central aspects of grounding, which otherwise remain implicit in the current debate and only sometimes surface in the form of two criticisms issued against the grounding relation as such.

Before proceeding with a discussion of the first of these criticisms, it should be noted that it is not at all easy, to situate the kind of grounding which was talked about so far in the current debate. This is due to the fact, that large parts of this debate are concerned with the formal attributes of the relation. This literature is "vast", as even Casati admits and the conception of grounding thus far employed is "broad and intuitive".<sup>93</sup> This worry, while prima facie daunting, should be dispelled by our discussion of the second criticism.

### ***5.1. Grounding of Beings through Being is not conceptually replaceable.***

Grounding theorists are faced with the fundamental worry, that the relation they are discussing is simply conceptually superfluous. It has been pointed out repeatedly, that there are plenty of other relations, like causality, supervenience, and logical consequence, which seem to fulfil many – some say all – of the needs, for which one might otherwise want to introduce grounding. Many of our everyday uses for "because" can be properly grasped, using relations other than grounding.

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<sup>93</sup> Casati, 'Heidegger's Grund: (Para-)Foundationalism', 312.

But supervenience and causality either need consistent (non-contradictory) beings as their relata (e.g. events) or have their relata depend on such beings (e.g. possible worlds). And logical consequence alone seems to be too restricted in use, to constitute a basis for arguing that the grounding relation is superfluous.

Hence, in the context where one is dealing with paraconsistent objects like nothing, the grounding relation seems non-replaceable: It makes no sense to say “beings supervene on nothing” or “beings are caused by nothing” or even “beings follow logically from nothing”: nothing is neither an event, nor something in a possible world, and surely no proposition either.

The inclosure-paradox ensures, that the context itself in which the talk of paraconsistent objects becomes necessary (given the “Seinsgeschick” in which we are operating here) is not itself reducible. Hence, it follows that the grounding-relation conceived in this manner is non-reducible to any combination of logical consequence, causality, and supervenience, but rather the only way in which the technical-calculating “Seinsgeschick” can deal with the inclosure-paradox on its own terms.

The second worry which underlies the debate is that discussion about grounding as such is simply senseless talk. The grounding relation might be irreplaceable. But – so the worry goes – it is also unintelligible.

## ***5.2. Why the Grounding Relation between Beings and Being is indeed unintelligible: A Diagnosis of the Grounding Debate***

That grounding may be unintelligible, has been suggested by theorists like Chris Daly.<sup>94</sup> But while this apprehension seems justified for the grounding relation here discussed, this is no objection against the relation. Grounding is conceptually necessary, given that we presuppose the “Seinsgeschick” in which the whole debate is situated. And in this “Seinsgeschick”, conceptual necessity – understood in the context of the principle of sufficient reason – is all that is needed to justify a notion.

Should the sceptic concerning grounding continue to worry, that our understanding of the relation is consequently nothing but formal, we will grant him this point as well. Though this is no argument against the conception of grounding specifically, but rather, against any attempt to understand Being from the perspective of the calculating “Seinsgeschick”. If one presupposes this “Seinsgeschick” – the grounding debate does this due to the way in which its primary questions are framed<sup>95</sup> –, the result at which both Priest and Casati arrive seems inevitable.

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<sup>94</sup> cmp. Daly, ‘Scepticism about grounding’, 89 ff.

<sup>95</sup> See the beginning of the introduction for what I take these to be.

The bringing to light of this inevitability and simultaneous unintelligibility of the grounding relation between beings and paraconsistent Being in the “Seinsgeschick” of technical calculation is what is meant by the thesis, that a dialethic notion of ground might be the most complete self expression of this “Seinsgeschick”. It turns out, that any understanding of Being possible in this “Geschick” will be purely formal and ultimately uninformative.

The misplaced demand for more than formal intelligibility, where such intelligibility is constitutively impossible, can be termed “Transparentism” in the diction of Anton Koch.<sup>96</sup> In the technical calculating “Seinsgeschick”, the demand for more than formal intelligibility of the grounding relation is a case of such unjustified demands.

As we have noted earlier, this seems to be precisely the problem with a dialethic solution: If one uses the tool of true contradiction to “plug” the hole which the irreducible contradiction – called antinomy by Koch – rips into any system seeking its own justification, one necessarily gives up one of the aspects of truth:

The truth of the antinomy is an edge-case of truth [...] in which the presentational aspect of truth, the unconcealment, can no longer properly unfold / be accounted for. The antinomy is true, only regarding the representational aspect, or in the representational sense of truth, only true as  $\sigma\eta\mu\alpha$ , that is symbol (and trace or tomb), for something absent. It is true as a symbol of Nothing. But it is untrue in the presentational sense: It is a proposition, a Logos, but no showing / pointing bringing-into-view of something present.<sup>97</sup>

Speaking of true contradictions, and introducing a grounding relation on their basis, is simply speaking empty formalities. They represent something absent. But as we have noted, the problem is even more severe than. Koch describes in this passage: by making a truth claim about the contradiction at the limit of their formal system while neglecting the presentational aspect of truth, Priest and Casati further occlude the absence of the absent. They push back the withdrawal of Being into the philosophical unconscious: Its withdrawal is cemented as something, which needs not even be thought-about or questioned because the “problem” of the antinomy has apparently been solved by a dialethic ground.

Through pointing this out I hope to have correctly diagnosed another case in the “history of suppression of disconcerting thoughts”.<sup>98</sup>

Priest and Casati have provided the basis for such a diagnosis, by making the implicit unintelligibility of the grounding relation explicit following the realization, that it inevitably instantiates the inclosure-paradox. While they get the diagnosis right, their supposed treatment of introducing a dialethic ground turns out to be yet another symptom, this time of the “Seinsgeschick” of calculation itself. And this symptom paradoxically is one, which serves, to

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<sup>96</sup> cmp. Koch, *Hermenentischer Realismus*, 46.

<sup>97</sup> Koch, *Versuch über Wahrheit und Zeit*, 295 (my translation).

<sup>98</sup> Koch, *Versuch über Wahrheit und Zeit*, 1 (my translation).

occlude the ‘illness’ of the philosophical psyche from which it originates. After having arrived at this diagnosis of the calculating “Seinsgeschick”, the obvious next step would be to look for a treatment: How does one overcome this repression? How can one bring the withdrawal of Being as such back into philosophical consciousness?

## **Beyond Grounding: How to address the Question of Ground?**

I have no final answer to the questions just asked. But it nevertheless seems appropriate to conclude this paper by collecting different suggestions by thinkers smarter than me:

The first step of acknowledging the absence of Being as an absence will be to rid oneself of unrealistic expectations of completeness, intelligibility, or some kind of formal closure of rational systems. One must drop the dogma of “Transparentism”. But how does one proceed from this point?

This might be practically achieved by not “subject[ing] Being to the interrogation of logic”. We should “think it without regard for [its] relation to beings”, which are after all always already understood in a certain sense, and would therefore introduce biases into our thought.<sup>99</sup>

If this is so, then the prospects seem to look bleak. If we cannot presuppose logic or any prior conception of what it means to be, then how can we even do philosophy? This seems to be the right place to repeat Kant’s question “What may I hope?”.

Two kinds of hope seem to suggest themselves to a thinker who genuinely wishes to attend to the question of ground:

Firstly, one can simply accept the “Ereignis” as a fact, as the term itself implies. Being has always already revealed itself in a certain sense. The “Ereignis”, here read as “event”, has always already happened. Truth and falsity always already have meaning. Any philosophy pursuing this approach would simply have to accept these and only these primordial facts as given and attempt to systematize the conclusions which they permit.

Anton Koch’s “Versuch über Wahrheit und Zeit“ takes just this approach. He starts from the “fact of truth”, that is the fact that we as humans constantly make truth claims, in regard to which we are fallible but also sometimes correct. From this fact, he develops a structural account of first philosophy.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Heidegger, *Zur Sache des Denkens*, Bd. 14, 29 (my translation).

<sup>100</sup> Koch, *Versuch über Wahrheit und Zeit*.

It should be noted, that when calling his approach “structural” what is meant is not logical formality in any sense. Koch’s account cannot be formal, because embodied subjectivity and consequently indexicality play a central role in it. Koch understands subjectivity to be constitutively entangled with Being. He calls this the “subjectivity thesis” and develops it independently from Heideggerian thought and especially from Heideggerian jargon.<sup>101</sup> This thesis might be what Heidegger tried to express when he wrote

Do we need to endeavor to get into correspondence with the Being of what is? Are we, as humans, not always already in such a correspondence, and not only factually, but in our *Wesen*? Is this correspondence not the fundamental feature of our *Wesen*? This is truthfully so.<sup>102</sup>

What *is* meant then, by calling the account structural, is that it systematizes the different moments which follow from the fact of truth, concerning the relationship of humans with Being and beings. This allows Koch to account for freedom, language, and truth. But it also requires him to acknowledge what he calls the antinomy and what Priest expresses in the inclosure-paradox: namely that every system of truth claims/ every “*Seinsgeschick*” contains a contradiction somewhere in its limit cases. What makes his account appropriate to the question of ground is that he does not attempt to ‘solve’ the antinomy as a ‘problem’, or to incorporate it into his system through the introduction of some kind of special (e.g. dialethic) entity.

What Koch does argue, however, is that the absence of the antinomy is necessary for a functioning discourse. Hence, he proposes to introduce a *regulative ideal* of non-contradiction and bivalence of truth. Abandoning the unrealistic hope to ultimately pin down the antinomy and solve it, this principle acknowledges that the antinomy must always exist in a potentially volatile state at the edge of our discourse. But because of its disruptive nature, it must continuously be banished from it. This saves not only classical logic but also the presentational aspect of truth neglected by dialethism, while treating the antinomy with the seriousness and respect it deserves.<sup>103</sup>

Thus, what renders Koch’s account able to address the question of ground, is that it *does not seek direct engagement* with it and with the antinomy. This is how Koch secures the argumentative clarity of his philosophical project. He secures access to classical logic, if only through the introduction of a regulative ideal.<sup>104</sup>

But some might want to respond, that this is not enough and that what Koch does, is not a genuine confrontation with the question of ground. According to this view then, a *real confrontation*

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<sup>101</sup> Most explicitly formulated in Koch, *Versuch über Wahrheit und Zeit*, 330 ff.

<sup>102</sup> Heidegger, *Identität und Differenz*, Band 11, 20 (my translation).

<sup>103</sup> cmp. Koch, *Versuch über Wahrheit und Zeit*, 70 f.

<sup>104</sup> It should be noted here, that Koch has partially corrected me on this. His philosophy, though introducing a regulative ideal to make discourse possible, is not a complete turn away from the antinomy. I will quote his (translated and in turn commented) comment on the matter here:

“From [the account of philosophy developed through regulating the antinomy] light is supposed to shine back on its [the accounts] own origin [being the fact of truth], in such a way that the ‘Ereignis’ ex post – at least partially – becomes (or has always already become) the ‘Er-Äug-nis’ [that is the Ereignis in its presentational aspect, which I have in this essay (possibly unrightfully) equated with facing the antinomy head on]”



with the question would endeavor to not turn away from but continuously face the antinomy. When asking what that might practically mean, one might wonder how a constructive discourse might look, after the regulative principle of bivalence has been abandoned, and dialectic solutions rejected.

The cynic would certainly dismiss such attempts as a fetishization of the secretive, mystical or vague. But Derrida, who arguably undertook exactly this attempt in works like “How to Avoid Speaking”<sup>105</sup>, might point us into a more hopeful direction. In his lecture “A Certain Impossible Possibility of Saying the Event” he argues, that to speak in the absence of such a regulative ideal is

something that’s not merely ignorance, but that no longer pertains to the realm of knowledge. A non-knowing that is not lack, not sheer obscurantism, ignorance, or non-science, but simply something that is not of the same nature as knowing. A saying the event [Ereignis] that produces the event beyond the confines of knowledge.<sup>106</sup>

Such a way of thinking and speaking can, as Heidegger puts it, only be achieved through a leap:

Through this leap, thinking reaches the expanse of the game, on which our being human is bet.<sup>107</sup> What it means, exactly, to take such a leap, I cannot say. Maybe it cannot be said – in any ordinary sense of what it means to say something – at all. For those who are intrigued, the works of the later Heidegger and of Derrida should be a good starting point. And for those who reject such speculative approaches, and would rather have a clear and structured account of what it would mean, to take the question of ground seriously, I can only advocate a look at Koch’s work. One convergence of Koch’s indirect and Derrida’s and Heidegger’s more direct way of engaging with the question of ground should be noted however: Humanity and human perspectivity play a central role in both.

## ***Conclusion***

This paper has argued that the question of Being understood as the question of ground cannot be answered by answering the kinds of questions, which characterize the contemporary grounding debate. That is because this debate itself, and the way in which it approaches issues of first philosophy, is itself dependant on a certain understanding of what it means to be. Therefore, contributions to this debate will necessarily remain indebted to this understanding, and therefore not capable of assessing the meaning of Being insofar as it precedes any such understanding.

The paraconsistent accounts of grounding of the kind which Priest and Casati suggest are firmly situated in the framework of this debate. It has been argued that their true contribution lies in their making explicit the implicitly contradictory nature of foundationalist conceptions of metaphysics. But rather than taking this contradiction itself and therefore the constitutive withdrawal of Being as such seriously, they introduce a dialectic entity to solve the formal problem

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<sup>105</sup> Derrida, *Wie nicht sprechen*.

<sup>106</sup> Derrida, ‘A Certain Impossible Possibility of Saying the Event’, 448.

<sup>107</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Der Satz vom Grund*, Band 10, 177 (my translation).

they are facing. Consequently, they keep the question of ground from even entering philosophical consciousness.

Two morals can be drawn:

Firstly, the inclosure-paradox which underlies the diagnostic accuracy with which Priest and Casati pinpoint the contradiction at the basis of any grounding structure is not particular to the context of grounding. This paradox could be used as a tool to diagnose, where other systems of metaphysics attempt to incorporate their own horizons and herein contribute to further occlude the question of ground.

Secondly, the question of ground cannot be answered in formal terms. One can either simply accept the fact, that Being always already reveals itself in some way and develop this “fact of truth” systematically, while introducing a regulative principle of bivalence, to deal with the antinomy.

Or, one can directly turn towards the antinomy, inquire into the places where it factually occurs in discourse as an absence of ultimate determination of meaning, and attempt to understand the significance it has for all kinds of human affairs. This direct approach likely requires a departure from logical reasoning.

Notions of grounding – be they consistent or paraconsistent – fail to address the question of ground, because being human cannot be grasped in a formal system. But as Heidegger and Koch convincingly argue, being human and Being as such, are entangled. Consequently, truth, Being and even rationality itself are in the end parts of what it means to be human. It therefore only makes sense, that they, too, cannot be grasped formally. It is slightly surprising that a large part of current philosophy would think otherwise.

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# Sameness of Spell: Notation and Identity in the Ontology of Literature

Salvador Chinchilla

## *Bio*

Salvador Chinchilla studies philosophy and literature in Medellín, Colombia. A believer in “ambidextrous” philosophy, he is interested in both analytic and continental approaches, especially as they pertain to aesthetics, literary, and political theory. In his free time, he meddles in creative writing to rather monstrous results and fruitlessly attempts to learn German.

Literature poses a special problem for ontology. Already in 1931, Polish phenomenologist Roman Ingarden noted that literary works do not seem to fit in any of the discipline’s standard categories: contradictions arise whenever one tries to place them as either real (material and mental) or ideal objects.<sup>1</sup> Literature’s mode of existence constitutes an enigma that stretches across the borders of the philosophy of language and the ontology of art, and a significant amount of academic literature has been written on the subject for the past two centuries, especially within the context of analytic philosophy.<sup>2</sup>

Nelson Goodman’s famous book *Languages of Art*, which became greatly influential in the tradition of analytic aesthetics due to its discussion of forgery, notation, and pictorial representation, also contains an interesting account of literature that is fundamentally opposed to the dominant non-textualist<sup>3</sup> view that literary works are “created abstract entities of a certain kind... which depend in various ways on acts of creation and on cultural background conditions.”<sup>4</sup> In this essay, I intend to critically analyze and discuss Goodman’s views on the ontology of literature and propose a personal interpretation of the problem that aims at reconciling his extremely textualist doctrine with more mainstream ones. I will not provide a new ontology of literature —many have already tried it—, but a particular way of looking at some of the chief paradoxes of the topic. First, I will present a brief summary of Goodman’s stance as exposed in *Languages of Art*, emphasizing its main conceptual strengths; then, I will list some of my own and other authors’ objections to this theory. Finally, I will outline my alternative for appeasing the opposition between Goodman’s branch of textualism and its detractors, centering around the notion that, for literary works, the problems of their identity conditions and their ontological foundation should be answered separately.

## **Goodman’s conception: Literature as script**

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<sup>1</sup> Roman Ingarden, *The Literary Work of Art: An Investigation of the Borderlines of Ontology, Logic and the Theory of Language* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), 9-12.

<sup>2</sup> For a historical review of this subject, see: Amie Lynn Thomasson, “The Ontology of Literary Works,” in *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy of Literature*, eds. Noël Carroll and John Gibson (New York: Routledge, 2016), 349-358.

<sup>3</sup> “Textualism” is here understood as the notion that literary works exist primarily as texts: codified, fixed sequences of signs.

<sup>4</sup> Thomasson, “The Ontology,” 353.

In *Languages of Art*, Goodman raises the question of why some forms of art (like paintings) are susceptible of forgery whereas others (like musical compositions) aren't. There is, he claims, an important distinction to be made between *autographic* and *allographic* artworks—those which can and can't be forged, respectively. For the former, authenticity is dependent upon their often complex and intricate history of production<sup>5</sup>; for the latter, historical considerations are irrelevant due to the existence of “a theoretically decisive test for determining that an object has all the constitutive properties of the work in question without determining how or by whom the object was produced.”<sup>6</sup> This bullet-proof test is provided by *notation*: allographic arts are those in which a proper, functional set of inscriptions and conventional rules for combining such inscriptions (i.e., a notation) has been devised; hence, identifying a copy of a certain artwork as genuine becomes merely a question of its compliance with the traditionally established notational patterns for said work.<sup>7</sup>

Literature falls under this category. If I attempt to transcribe the text of Shelley's “Adonais” from memory, I will produce either an accurate or inaccurate, a correct or incorrect replica of the poem, but in neither case will I have forged it; furthermore, whether my transcription corresponds to Shelley's poem is a matter that can be easily—but also exclusively—settled by looking at other approved instances of the text and checking if their inscriptions coincide with mine. According to Goodman, literary artworks' sole identity condition is *sameness of spelling*: “exact correspondence as sequences of letters, spaces and punctuation marks.”<sup>8</sup> These sequences of printed or hand-written signs are not just how we come to recognize the work, though—they are the work itself. There is in this view nothing more to any poem or novel than its text.<sup>9</sup>

This wildly textualist approach has some evident virtues, namely, that it does guarantee identity through a reliable test. Other ontological accounts of literature fail in various ways when presented with the question of its identity conditions: equating the work with its physical exemplars leads to such travesties as asserting that hardback and paperback copies of *Hamlet* are somehow not the same;<sup>10</sup> posing that the work is equal to its readers' psychic experiences implies that every differing reading experience constitutes a different work; and considering it as some sort of abstract, ideal essence begets the problem of whose privileged contact with the ideal object will determine the properties upon which its identity rests.<sup>11</sup>

Goodman's conception is close to the first of the aforementioned perspectives in that it recognizes an essentially physical dimension to literature. However, he does not think of works as

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<sup>5</sup> Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art: An Approach to a Theory of Symbols* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1968), 119.

<sup>6</sup> Goodman, 122.

<sup>7</sup> Goodman, 122.

<sup>8</sup> Goodman, 115.

<sup>9</sup> Nelson Goodman and Catherine Elgin, “Interpretation and Identity: Can the Work Survive the World?” *Critical Inquiry* 12, no. 3 (1986): 573.

<sup>10</sup> This as a consequence of identifying literature with the material object that “contains” it and thus treating it as autographic, thereby making the confusion of essential and contingent features inevitable.

<sup>11</sup> For a more detailed account of these and similar criticisms, see: Ingarden, *The Literary Work*, 9-16; and Michael Mitias, “The Ontological Status of the Literary Work of Art,” *The Journal of Aesthetic Education* 16, no. 4 (1982): 42-45.

unique, particular objects, but rather as *repeatable artifacts*, whose marks are elevated to the rank of inscriptions by their syntactic function, which makes them interchangeable and equivalent.<sup>12</sup> It should be noted that this purely textual definition is peculiar to literature and not applicable to other allographic arts. “In music”, Goodman writes, “the work is a class of performances compliant with a character. In literature, the work is the character itself”.<sup>13</sup> This difference, which amounts to the fact that literature is defined *syntactically* (by its notation) and music *semantically* (by the reference of its notation), is integral to the theory of symbols presented in *Languages of Art*.

Albeit I cannot provide a thorough explanation of that theory here, it will suffice to say the following: literary texts are what Goodman calls *scripts*. “A script, unlike a sketch, is a character in a notational scheme but, unlike a score, is not in a notational system.”<sup>14</sup> A character is in a *notational scheme* if it satisfies the syntactic requirements for notation, and in a *notational system* if it meets both the syntactic and semantic requirements. Natural languages, like those of literary works, fulfill the former by having disjoint and articulate characters —no inscription belongs to two different characters and it is at least theoretically possible to tell if a given mark belongs to many or only one character.<sup>15</sup> But, even if syntactically, they are not disjoint semantically insofar as the same character can have different compliance-classes<sup>16</sup> at different times and in different contexts (*ambiguity*)<sup>17</sup> or even simultaneously; moreover, compliance-classes are not disjoint among themselves, for they can often intersect or include each other. It is worth pointing out that, more than a by-product of the unclearness that proliferates in ordinary speech, semantic non-disjointness is a basic feature of almost any language that is not artificially designed. By way of example, as long as it is feasible to speak of red clocks, the words “red” and “clock” will have intersecting compliance-classes; also, the term “mammal” completely engulfs the compliance-class of both the terms “human” and “platypus”. This organic lack of a one-to-one correlation of characters with their compliant meanings precludes literary artworks from attaining perfect identity on non-syntactic grounds. “If compliance-classes of texts constituted works, then in some cases whether an object belongs to a given work would be theoretically indeterminable”,<sup>18</sup> Goodman says.

## Objections to notationalism

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<sup>12</sup> A character, within Goodman’s framework, is a class of syntactically equivalent marks and an inscription is any atomic or compound mark that belongs to a character. See: Goodman, *Languages of Art*, 131.

<sup>13</sup> Goodman, 210.

<sup>14</sup> Goodman, 199.

<sup>15</sup> Goodman, 132-136.

<sup>16</sup> A compliance-class is, simply put, the “reference” of a notation, what it denotes. In musical scores, certain sounds are the compliants of characters. In literary scripts, the meanings of words are. Goodman does not consider the phonetic utterances of texts as their compliants, but as auditory marks which are syntactically equivalent to visual, graphic ones. This is a controversial and problematic claim which I will briefly discuss later.

<sup>17</sup> Goodman, 147.

<sup>18</sup> Goodman, 207-208.

A French symbolist poet of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century undertakes the impossible feat of re-writing *Don Quixote*. He doesn't wish to copy or transcribe it, nor to create a new version of it, but to produce on his own a text that completely matches Cervantes's on a word-by-word level. His task is to achieve the exact same textual result as the Spaniard by different means, in a different time, and through a different act of *poiesis*. This is the plot of Jorge Luis Borges's 1939 short story "Pierre Menard, author of the *Quixote*".<sup>19</sup> Not only has the story become widely commented in discussions about the ontological nature of literature but its canonical interpretation—that Menard manages to create a new artwork—has often been taken as a powerful indictment against textualism. This is, for instance, the position of Arthur C. Danto:

It is not just that the books are written at different times by different authors of different nationalities and literary intentions: these facts are not external ones; they serve to characterize the work(s) and of course to individuate them from all their graphic indiscernibility... graphic congruities notwithstanding, these are deeply different works.<sup>20</sup> Danto agrees that for two works *a* and *b* to be non-identical there must be a property *F* which they do not share; *F* need not be a *perceptual* property, though.<sup>21</sup> He cites Wittgenstein's famous example of a tribe which happens to use the same symbols that mathematicians employ in calculus as decoration for their houses to demonstrate that "certain things which exactly resemble one another may not be of the same thing, or one of them may be of something only if the right causal history is presupposed."<sup>22</sup> Nonetheless, this conclusion, which appears to erase the autographic-allographic binary, I consider erroneous: what's important is not whether the tribe's symbols actually *are* mathematical notation, but the sheer fact that identical inscriptions may be *seen* differently by a non-mathematically trained member of the tribe and by a calculus expert. And this is not only a matter of their semantic content: a mathematician will recognize a peculiar syntax in the decorative marks that someone who just stumbles upon them will not. In this situation, notation depends, not so much on casual history or intent, but on a tacit social background. Either way, it is shown that notation is not self-sufficient. Goodman himself acknowledges that "Both identity of language and syntactic identity within the language are necessary conditions for identity of a literary work."<sup>23</sup> What he does not seem to realize is that "identity of language" is a condition external to the character *qua* character, rooted instead in the subjective operations of whoever faces the text.

Goodman could nevertheless concede that a character's belonging to a notational scheme is an extrinsic property and that syntax is externally imprinted on texts. All that matters for the preservation of identity in a given work is still, he may reply, that any two of its copies can be recognized as identically spelled by someone who's aware of their fixed notational rules. Thus, by adding the condition of *knowledge of linguistic conventions* to that of *sameness of spelling*, the purely

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<sup>19</sup> See: Jorge Luis Borges, "Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*," in *Collected Fictions* (New York: Penguin Books, 1999), 88-95.

<sup>20</sup> Arthur Danto, *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace: A Philosophy of Art* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 35-36.

<sup>21</sup> Danto, 43.

<sup>22</sup> Danto, 49-50.

<sup>23</sup> Goodman, *Languages of Art*, 209. The choice of words in this passage is odd since one would reasonably expect Goodman to believe that they are not only necessary but *sufficient* conditions for identity.

syntactic definition of literature is retained; identity can still be traced to notation, independently of meaning, and Goodman's variant of textualism, which I here denominate *notationalism*, is at least partially saved. In this sense, since Cervantes's and Menard's inscriptions are both supposed to be understood in archaic Spanish, they will still count as the same text and thereby the same work.<sup>24</sup>

A more damning case against notationalism may however be derived from the tale. There is a famous passage in which Borges's narrator contrasts two identical inscriptions, one by Cervantes and the other by Menard, and lists different, contradictory properties for each of them<sup>25</sup>. The fragments are syntactically equivalent: same in spelling and same in language. But, regardless of whether they belong to the same work, the fact that the narrator can attribute these different sets of properties to them is already quite revealing, because such properties, justly or unjustly attributed, cannot be syntax-dependent. This would bear no importance if it was not only true or false but formally invalid, logically incongruent to predicate of the texts the kinds of qualities that Borges ascribes to them—but it is not. The ones he mentions are, as David Davies notes, simply *stylistic properties*,<sup>26</sup> of the kind that are usually ascribed to literary works in both common speech and academic settings.

Then, it seems, the notationalist dramatically impoverishes the discourse surrounding literature, for there are many semantic or otherwise non-syntactic traits commonly predicated of poems, novels, and plays.<sup>27</sup> And these predications need not stem from aesthetic judgments: a proposition like "Poem *x* is filled with synesthesiae" or "Poem *x* has between 5 and 8 instances of synesthesia" is not a value judgment but a factual, descriptive statement which, despite referring to the semantic dimension of Poem *x*, appears to assert something intrinsic to it.<sup>28</sup> Dismissing these empirical statements as mere interpretations, like Goodman and Catherine Elgin do,<sup>29</sup> begs the question of how can one talk about the correctness of a semantic interpretation if what it interprets possesses no semantic characteristics whatsoever. If I wanted, I could attempt to identify the class of "19<sup>th</sup> century Spanish poems with 9 instances of synesthesia" and complete my effort with a greater or lesser degree of accuracy. But such a degree of accuracy could never be explained in terms of the notational patterns of the works I would have grouped; they could have practically

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<sup>24</sup> Jesús Aguilar has pointed out that it is not as clear in Borges's original text that the two *Quixotes* are different works as authors like Danto have tried to make it seem. See: Jesús Aguilar, "Can Pierre Menard be the Author of *Don Quixote*?" *Variaciones Borges*, no. 8 (1999): 166-177.

<sup>25</sup> Borges, "Pierre Menard," 94.

<sup>26</sup> David Davies, "Works, Texts and Contexts: Goodman on the Literary Artwork," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 21, no. 3 (1991): 339.

<sup>27</sup> The use of the terms "syntactic" and "semantic" in this context differs mildly from their use in most linguistic and semiotic scholarship. Syntactic properties are those related to inscriptions and their modes of combination. Semantic properties are those related to the denotation and compliance of inscriptions. Phonetic properties can be taken as either semantic or syntactic depending on how linguistic utterances are understood. On the other hand, stylistic properties are, by David Davies's account, those which originate in how a work is perceived against its context of creation. See: Davies, "Words, Texts and Contexts," 339.

<sup>28</sup> A poem does not *denote* its synesthesiae, but possesses them in virtue of what its words denote. For instance, the sentence "your voice is blue" denotes both the classes "voices" and "blue objects"; the synesthesia, as well as its perplexing aesthetic effects, arise precisely from the null denotation that their intersection has as a class (voices are not and, moreover, *cannot* be blue). It is in this sense that I speak of synesthesia as a semantic property.

<sup>29</sup> Goodman and Elgin, "Interpretation and Identity," 570-572.



no notational features in common and still conform a semantically recognizable and cohesive class. Goodman's account nullifies any epistemic pretenses, any truth claims this industrious labor may have by abolishing the notion of literary works as fundamentally meaningful entities; hence, we become deprived of the possibility of contrasting our assertions against that (works) about which we make them.

After this analysis, the importance of Danto's original objection appears renewed: indeed, one could argue that, even if the two *Quixotes* in Borges's story remain syntactically equivalent despite their different circumstances of creation and reception, they are different works because such circumstances make them semantically inequivalent; that is, they alter *what the texts mean*, the network of meaningful associations that their words evoke as well as their general message. This, it needs be remarked, does not amount to a psychologization of literature. Meaning is not fixed, in this case, by the individual reader alone but by a social and institutional background—a community of interpreters, so to speak. I should also emphasize that the former is a claim about the *process* by which certain references become attached to certain inscriptions, which is undoubtedly historical, and not about the kind of *things*—if they are things indeed—<sup>30</sup> those references are. Elucidating this last problem is crucial for any consistent theory of literary ontology, but that is not, as I have already mentioned, my immediate objective.

Of course, any view of literary works as capable of being radically transformed by the contingent change of their semantic components falls prey to Goodman's contention that, if works are not syntactically defined, they therefore lack a standardized criterion for identity; nevertheless, the alternative that Goodman provides is not satisfactory either for reasons already explained. Imagine, for instance, that the Spanish language stayed, due to some strange historical transformations, syntactically unaltered for the next 500 years, but were semantically modified in unimaginable ways, such that all of its inscriptions remained the same, but all their references were changed. Suppose that in this situation *Don Quixote* were no longer read by anyone as a book about the hilarious misfortunes of Alonso Quijano but about the tragic quest of a good-hearted turtle named Don trying to get to the sea and reunite with his long-lost lover. For Goodman, there is only one character, one set of inscriptions, and therefore only one work which is as much about Don the unfortunate turtle as it is about Quixote the unfortunate knight. Moreover, it isn't, *sensu stricto*, about any of these things: since only syntactic properties reside in the work itself, it does not matter for the identity of *Don Quixote* as a literary artifact that the compound inscription "Don" refers to a man or to a marvelous turtle. I believe this example makes clear exactly why this position is destructive to literature.

It is also noteworthy, albeit ultimately inessential to my argument, that, even if meanings are construed as something foreign to the literary artwork, there is another kind of compliance-class that does undoubtedly belong to it; namely, that of *utterances* (i.e., sounds associated with linguistic marks). In *Languages of Art*, the possibility of considering utterances as compliants of inscriptions and identifying the work with them is explored—were that the case, texts could be

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<sup>30</sup> For a convincing argument that meanings shouldn't be reified, see: Willard Van Orman Quine, "On What There Is," in *From a Logical Point of View: Logico-Philosophical Essays* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), 11.

understood approximately as characters in notational systems<sup>31</sup>—; this idea is, however, soon rejected on the basis that “Utterances are not the end-products [in literature] as are performances in music”<sup>32</sup>. Still, there are some reasons that could be adduced to counter that assertion. Whereas, for instance, utterances of particular characters have perceptible phonetic properties that can be counted as intrinsic to works, inscriptions do not likewise possess graphic features which usually can. What’s more, even if there isn’t a material realization of the phonetic aspect of a novel when it is read, its “word-sounds”<sup>33</sup> are reproduced in the reader’s head; the only relevant difference between a score and a phonetically-taken script seems to be that one’s auditory product is physical while the other’s is mental. Why exactly and according to what criteria, it would be legitimate to ask Goodman, do physical compliances have a greater claim to the privileged category of “end-products” than mental ones? That sounds should be viewed in literature as an extension of syntax and in music as its field of reference is at least very unclear.

## Of hex and text

In light of everything previously said, I posit that:

- (1) Notation should be taken as literary artworks’ primary or even only identity condition, but not as their ontological foundation.
- (2) In relation to their meanings, texts are not to be understood as sketches, scores or scripts: they are *spells*.

My justification for (1) is that I consider true both Goodman’s objections to non-notationalist doctrines and the objections I have presented to Goodman. On the one hand, he is right to point out that only through a distinct notation can a “theoretically decisive test” for the identity of a verbally-constructed work be provided: if it were defined semantically, by the compliance-class of its words’ meanings, then the natural ambiguity of language would disintegrate the work into the multiple interpretations and understandings that different readers could have of said meanings; on the other hand, a work cannot be identified with its notation because: a) notation is not a self-sufficient entity but one endowed with order (syntax) and meaning by the acts of a conscious subject and the conventions and rules of a social context, and more importantly, b) many (if not most) of a work’s properties can never be reduced to its notation, as long as reference is absent from it. Also, c) depending on whether one considers utterances as being auditory marks that belong to certain characters or the compliance-classes of those characters, notation may or may not have a claim to a literary artifact’s phonetic properties. Nonetheless, I will not particularly concern myself with this last theoretical query because in neither case can literature be *exhausted* by its inscriptions or disregarded as simply a character in a notation. While, for the sake of practicality and throughout the rest of this discussion, I will leave non-semantic aspects of works aside, to

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<sup>31</sup> Goodman, *Languages of Art*, 207.

<sup>32</sup> Goodman, 208.

<sup>33</sup> I borrow both the expressions “word-sounds” and “mode of appearance” from Roman Ingarden, who provides a vast and useful, albeit phenomenologically-inspired, lexicon for talking about literature in philosophical terms.

focus specifically on the way in which meaning units relate to texts, my view is not incompatible with the idea that there may be other kinds of literary properties.<sup>34</sup>

Michael M. Mitias says that linguistic structure, understood as a complex of symbols, is “not only the principle of identity of the work but also the basis of its existence.”<sup>35</sup> While his wording seems to imply that these are different things, Mitias, like most authors, assumes that they are interdependent, deeply intertwined, and that a clarification of one constitutes a clarification of the other. Instead, as I hope to have shown, the more one investigates literary works’ conditions of identity, the more obscure their mode of existence becomes. A painful aporia arises from the simultaneous lack of non-notational tools for recognizing the sameness of multiple literary instances, and notation’s shortcomings as a means for describing and comprehending the fundamental substance that lies beneath said instances. Both the propositions “Work *x* can be identified *by* its text” and “Work *x* cannot be identified *with* its text” are true. I therefore hold that, to dissolve the apparent contradiction between them, they should be taken at face value: only under the presupposition that identity conditions and ontological foundations have the same origin in all cases can one get the impression that the two enunciate collide. Working under this paradigm, a choice must be made which results in either a desiccated, miserable work or an unstable, liquid one. To avoid this, literature shall be taken as one thing distinct from another—its notation— but only recognizable through it.

Goodman’s central preoccupation is the practical problem of how we ought to establish authenticity for an instance of a given artwork and group it with the class of instances to which it belongs; non-notationalists’ preoccupation is the metaphysical problem of what that artwork actually *is*, regardless of whether we can directly grasp its being. The difficulties encountered in reconciling such theoretical projects exist only as long as the *functional* purpose of the former is confused with the *ontological* interest of the other—something of which both parties are guilty. This is not to say that Goodman’s opinions are not ontologically relevant; however, they are better at explaining the “mode of appearance” of a work than its essential nature. Clearly, literary works are more than their notation: they are *formations of meaning*, inescapably semantic in nature, and thus the notationalist view appears insufficient to describe them, if accurate at all. But at the same time only the manifest properties evidenced by notation are a secure basis on which the identity of a work can rest. I therefore take it that the philosophical peculiarity of literature stems precisely from the fact that its identity conditions rest upon something other than itself.

My contention in (2) serves as a metaphor to characterize this strange phenomenon. As soon as text and work are severed, many images emerge as candidates to explain their fuzzy relationship: texts may be seen as “vehicles”, “carriers” or “containers” for works, or as conditions or causes for them. René Wellek makes it as though texts were some sort of self-prescriptive instructions for understanding their own meanings: “Thus, the real poem must be conceived as a structure of norms, realized only partially in the actual experience of its many readers”, he says.

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<sup>34</sup> Besides phonetic properties, the case can also be made for graphic properties with regards to certain types of literary manifestations, like calligrams, and, of course, for stylistic properties, as Davies has pointed out.

<sup>35</sup> Mitias, “The Ontological Status,” 51.

“Every single experience (reading, reciting and so forth) is only an attempt —more or less successful— to grasp this set of norms and standards.”<sup>36</sup> Mítias, on the other hand, conceives reading as an *actualization* of the *potential* existence of the text: “the object of literary criticism is an event, a process, a dynamic reality that comes to life in the literary experience. Outside this experience, it exists only as a potentiality awaiting realization.”<sup>37</sup>

While I don’t actively disagree with any of these interpretations, I do believe that, more than a relation of causation, prescription, inclusion, or actualization, one of “conjunction” is established between a text, taken as the aggregate of its inscriptions, and a work, taken as an elusive and convoluted web of meaning. A character in literature implies its compliance-class, but doesn’t exactly “cause” it in the traditional sense, since the compliant in some way “precedes” the character; nonetheless, it is clear that in the reading experience such compliant becomes *manifest* as a result of the perception of a mark. It also seems somewhat odd to say that characters “instruct” readers because, if the realization of their instruction is the apprehension of meaning, then it is realized by the same act that indicates it. Last, while it is true that a compliant must exist in a different fashion when it is read and when it is not, Mítias’s formulation of literature as having potential and actual modes is an outcome of his belief that it is more of an event than a thing, an assertion about its ontological status which I cannot so readily share without further investigation.

Any way meaning is to be interpreted —as a psychological fact, an ideal essence, an intersubjective or social object, perpetuated and actualized by a multitude of individual actions—, one can say that texts *summon* it.<sup>38</sup> Through the willful act of reading, phonetic or graphic inscriptions exert an effect on the world, that is, the appearance of meaningful sentences or phrases, which they do not cause, create or prescribe, but “bring forth”. In conjunction, the conjured object and the conjuring act are distinct and one is not determined in its entirety by the other; similarly, in literature, the same notation can amount to slightly (or even broadly) different configurations of meaning. Roman Ingarden called them *concretizations* and described them as “what is constituted during the reading and what, in a manner of speaking, forms... the concrete form in which the work itself is apprehended”.<sup>39</sup> He also noted what Goodman would then highlight as the main source for bafflement in meaning-oriented attempts to define literature:

In a concretization, word meanings and meaning contents of sentences can be intermingled, even in a fundamentally adequate apprehension, with meaning components that are unspecifiable and that change from case to case... Even if they produce no significant deviation in the stratum of meaning units of a given literary work, they can, in

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<sup>36</sup> René Wellek and Austin Warren, “The Mode of Existence of a Literary Work of Art,” in *Theory of Literature* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1956), 150.

<sup>37</sup> Mítias, “The Ontological Status,” 46.

<sup>38</sup> This metaphor becomes indeed fragile if we accept an ontology, like Quine’s, which is not committed to the existence of meanings as hypostasized entities; however, I do not believe my theory as a whole becomes similarly vulnerable under these conditions. My main ontological commitment is not to the ambiguous realm of meanings but to certain literary things of a yet-to-be-specified nature which have *significant* utterances, whether “significant” means that they possess some abstract property called “meaning” or simply that, as Quine suggests, they are correlated to some regular patterns of behavior.

<sup>39</sup> Ingarden, *The Literary Work*, 332.

various respects, determine intentional states of affairs or represented objectivities... more closely or differently than they are predetermined by the work itself.<sup>40</sup> Since there is no decisive criterion for the permissible variation of meaning among individual readings, nothing but notation can keep the work from diluting into an amalgam of concretizations and only notation can therefore maintain its unity. Thus, *sameness of spelling guarantees sameness of spell*: the preservation of textual identity can ensure, not that the exact same work will be made manifest to readers meaning-wise, but that the operation by which it is “invoked” is equal in every occasion; semantic flexibility, abundant in common speech and exacerbated in the case of poetic, figurative language, requires syntactic restrictiveness to redeem its own creations. My answer to the conflict between Goodman and his detractors can thus be summarized by saying that a work’s identity conditions must be borrowed from some sort of proxy object, a text, that stands in an intimate, mysterious relation to the work itself —one which I have termed a spell. (The question, I should remark, of whether syntactic properties still *belong* to literary works is inconsequential to my treatment of texts and works as being ontologically heterogenous; even assuming that they do, notation is evidently *not* the same as its corresponding literary artifact, just like an object *x* with a set of properties *A* differs from another object *y* which is defined by the conjoint property sets *A* and *B*).

“To identify the literary work with a script”, Goodman writes, “is not to isolate and desiccate it but to recognize it as a denotative and expressive symbol that reaches beyond itself along all sorts of short and long referential paths.”<sup>41</sup> I disagree and think instead that these referential paths do not go beyond the work but extend in all directions within the curiously immeasurable confines of the marks in a piece of paper and with the aid of some witchy mechanics. Even though this solution puts certain textualist views of literary ontology to trial, it does not make any *positive* claims about the ultimate nature of works of literature. My effort has just been to shed light on a distinction that proves methodologically relevant to such an enquiry. In recognizing that literary works possess some kind of *borrowed identity*, ontological investigation on the subject is freed from the tyranny of text, now understood simply as a useful way to delimit, distinguish and classify literary works of art.

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<sup>40</sup> Ingarden, 338.

<sup>41</sup> Goodman, *Languages of Art*, 210.

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# Understanding Resistance to Racial Equality: The Role of Social Structures in Colorblind Racism

Jake Wasinger

## *Bio*

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## **Abstract**

Contemporary authors have noted a change in the way individual racism operates. Because the world heavily shuns more explicit forms of racism, individual racism has morphed into what is known as “colorblind racism.” Colorblind racism has two parts; first, there is a feeling that racism is over and that individuals should avoid acknowledging color, and second, that there is a feeling that whites are actually the ones who are victims or oppressed by a society that prioritizes people of color. This essay makes three claims relevant to this contemporary understanding of individual racism. First, that narratives, rhetoric, and stereotypes should be considered kinds of social structures. Second, that racialized narratives, rhetoric and stereotypes may alter the attitudes white people have about racism and racial minorities through what is called their ‘emotional habitus.’ Third, I offer a critique to individualist accounts of racism by pointing to the difficulty of understanding colorblind racism under a framework that conceives of racism only in terms of individual feelings.

## I

Prevailing understandings of racism today point to a nuanced notion of the way racism manifests in individuals. The generally accepted standard for a “colorblind world” where skin color is insignificant in a person’s life persists in American culture and values. Far from ending racism, this standard actually transforms racism into various unconscious and subtle forms that take on a nonracial camouflage.<sup>1</sup> Scholars have pointed out two trends in this “new racism.”<sup>2</sup> First, there is an intense “colorblindness” whereby race is intentionally ignored and overlooked. Second, there is a sense of “white victimhood” where whites paradoxically place their own race at the forefront of conversations, believing themselves to be persecuted from a society that gives resources to ‘undeserving’ marginalized communities.

As Jesse Kolber rightly points out, “because the racial attitudes held by dominant group members about subordinated group members have a direct bearing on the lives [of] people of

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<sup>1</sup> I aim to take no stance on whether or not this perception of the world is one we should normatively strive for.

<sup>2</sup> Eduardo Bonilla-Silva and David Dietrich, “The Sweet Enchantment of Color-Blind Racism in Obamerica,” *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 634, no. 1 (March 2011): 190–206, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716210389702>.

color, it is imperative to closely examine racial attitudes held by white people.”<sup>3</sup> It appears that colorblind racism comes in two parts: colorblindness and white victimhood. Each part is related, as “the unique interplay of colorblindness and the denial of privilege lays a foundation for ultimately claiming white victimhood.”<sup>4</sup> Colorblindness is the refusal to acknowledge the role race plays in the condition of a particular group or individual. Whites commonly take colorblind frames of reference to justify contemporary inequality by objecting to the role discrimination plays, believing instead that inequality is due to “people of color’s unwillingness to take opportunities to succeed.”<sup>5</sup> This usage of the ideology of colorblindness to cover racist attitudes is what is known as colorblind racism.<sup>6</sup> It operates to justify unjust disparities between races by pointing out racial differences due to naturally occurring phenomena and alleged cultural deficiencies.<sup>7</sup> “White victimhood,” also referred to as “reverse racism,” is on the other hand the notion that white people “understand themselves as *innocent victims* of race relations” where they are harmed by benefits that are unfairly bestowed towards people of color.<sup>8</sup> There are a number of ways in which this victimhood occurs, from belief that certain discourses that name racism are scary and dangerous to perceiving pro-diversity messages as threatening their groups’ status by emphasizing an ‘anti-white’ bias.<sup>9</sup> Although it seems paradoxical for individuals to believe both in the persecution of the white race and to take on this colorblind frame of reference, the two actually work in tandem to undermine the reality of racial inequality and deny white privilege, both of which are difficult to accept for white people.<sup>10</sup>

I offer a structuralist account of this phenomenon, where social structures in the form of racialized narratives, stereotypes and rhetoric embed themselves in individuals and communities. This activity results in a change in an individual’s “emotional habitus” that reorients their emotions toward racial groups, causing them to maintain beliefs of victimhood and colorblindness. These social structures also make the stereotypes about communities of color *real*, in the sense that whites actually do feel afraid and anxious around Black people because they have internalized the stereotypes about Black criminality and violence. These beliefs become taken-for-granted schemas that are self-reinforcing and replicating. In order for this analysis to be *structural*, however, I must explain how narratives, stereotypes and rhetoric should be considered social structures. Once this is done, I can explain colorblind racism in terms of structural causes that influence the racial attitudes of white people in meaningful ways in my explanation of colorblind racism.

## II

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<sup>3</sup> J. Kolber, “Having It Both Ways: White Denial of Racial Salience While Claiming Oppression,” *Sociology Compass* 11, no. 2 (February 2017): e12448, <https://doi.org/10.1111/soc4.12448>, 2.

<sup>4</sup> Kolber, “Having It Both Ways,” 2.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>6</sup> Katrina Rebecca Bloch, Tiffany Taylor, and Karen Martinez, “Playing the Race Card: White Injury, White Victimhood and the Paradox of Colour-Blind Ideology in Anti-Immigrant Discourse,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 43, no. 7 (May 27, 2020): 1130–48, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2019.1648844>, 1130.

<sup>7</sup> Bonilla-Silva and Dietrich, “The Sweet Enchantment of Color-Blind Racism in Obamerica.”

<sup>8</sup> Kolber, “Having It Both Ways,” 5.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 7; Bloch, Taylor, and Martinez, “Playing the Race Card.”



There seems to be no clear and accepted definition of social structure in the literature. As Porpora (1989) points out, “there is wide disagreement about what (social structure) means.”<sup>11</sup> This disagreement persists today; Ritchie points out that “contemporary metaphysic(ians),” “structuralists in philosophy of mathematics and philosophy of science,” and sociologists all use structure in significantly different ways. Even Sally Haslanger, who uses social structure frequently in her work as a social constructionist, has altered her definition over time. In 2007 she used social structure to refer to “a general category of social phenomena, including, e.g. social instructions, social practices and conventions, social roles, [and] social hierarchies,” but more recently considers social structures to be “best understood in terms of a network of practices, and practices, in the relevant sense, consist of behavior that conforms to *cultural schemas* in response to *resources*.”<sup>12</sup> This produces a bit of a problem if my claim is to argue that narratives, rhetoric and stereotypes should be considered social structures. Given the diversity of definitions, I could simply choose whichever definition best supports my claim instead of engaging with the literature. This is especially the case when my claim goes against certain authors in the field; Diekman, Eagly and Johnston consider attitudes and stereotypes to be “social cognitive elements.”<sup>13</sup> Thus, I must make a good argument for the benefits of including narratives, stereotypes and rhetoric as social structures by selecting a definition that stands on its own. I would argue that Katherine Ritchie’s definition of social structure in her piece “Social Structures and the Ontology of Social Groups” is an appropriate definition here.

Ritchie defines social structures as those structures “that (are) constitutively dependent on social factors.”<sup>14</sup> For a structure to be “constitutively dependent,” one of the following must be the case. First, “in defining what it is to be [the structure] reference must be made to some social factors.”<sup>15</sup> Second, “social factors are metaphysically necessary for [the structure] to exist.”<sup>16</sup> Or, third, “social factors ground the existence of S.”<sup>17</sup> In the case of narratives, rhetoric and stereotypes, the second condition is certainly satisfied. For narratives or stereotypes about *anything* to exist, there must be people engaging with those structures while also being in some relationship to the objects they describe. A world in which there were stereotypes about humans that are purple with blue dots – say, that they were poor drivers – would cease to be *actual* stereotypes since no one has any relationship to anyone who fits that description. In fact, even if there *was* someone who satisfied the condition, the stereotype still would not have an impact since no one would have *internalized* the stereotype about them. Narratives and stereotypes can only exist as such when they

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<sup>11</sup> Douglas V. Porpora, “Four Concepts of Social Structure DOUGLAS V. PORPORA,” *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour* 19, no. 2 (June 1989): 195–211, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-5914.1989.tb00144.x>.

<sup>12</sup> Sally Haslanger, “Distinguished Lecture: Social Structure, Narrative and Explanation,” *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 45, no. 1 (2015): 1–15, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00455091.2015.1019176>.

<sup>13</sup> Amanda B. Diekman, Alice H. Eagly, and Amanda M. Johnston, “Social Structure,” in *The SAGE Handbook of Prejudice, Stereotyping and Discrimination* (Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE Publications, 2010).

<sup>14</sup> Katherine Ritchie, “Social Structures and the Ontology of Social Groups,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 100, no. 2 (March 2020): 402–24, <https://doi.org/10.1111/phpr.12555>, 7.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

occupy a space within a relationship between people, and as such, constitute social structures.<sup>18</sup> One might suspect that, intuitively, narratives might be more akin to social objects instead of *structures*. In fact, I'm sure Liao and Huebner's work *Oppressive Things* could be used to articulate an ontology of narratives that claims narratives can be oppressive social objects. Ultimately, however, this understanding of narratives would fail in lieu of an essential aspect to narratives: the relationship between the audience, who the narrative is about, and whoever is spreading or creating the narrative. Narratives are networks that forge certain kinds of social relations among people. They operate entirely in the minds of people and the relationships between them. Take for example an oppressive narrative about welfare recipients. It might go something like this:

Welfare recipients receive aid from the government so that they may 'get back on their feet.' However, many aid recipients wish to receive government aid without work or effort. Instead of finding jobs or working for themselves, they spend years collecting government checks and being lazy.

Here, there are a few 'nodes' in the network created by this narrative. Assuming that it has been dispersed throughout a population, the narrative has a particular audience, presumably lower middle class to middle class working people who might feel at risk when their tax dollars are being spent towards 'lazy' people. The narrative also has the subjects of which it discusses, namely welfare recipients. The content of the narrative forges a relationship between these two nodes; working class people and welfare recipients. The former does not have to necessarily ever meet someone who is on welfare or know anything else about them. This is because the narrative has already altered their attitudes towards welfare recipients, distilling a particular image of who they are and how they operate. Does this image qualify as a "relationship" between working families and welfare recipients? Certainly. If "authority, privilege, subordination, and other power relations" are considered relations to justify a structure, then having a particular attitude or image that embodies these power relations would seem to qualify regardless of personal interaction.<sup>19</sup> The relationship between working families and welfare recipients, then, is as follows:

Working families who internalize the narrative about welfare recipients above are related to welfare recipients by believing that they are 'lazy.'

The narrative becomes more akin to Ritchie's "complexes, networks or 'latticeworks' of relations" when there are multiple relations involved.<sup>20</sup> This welfare narrative seems to forge a network among working families, welfare recipients, and the narrator's disseminator. Each group connects to other groups in meaningful ways. Disseminators can alter the image of welfare recipients in the eyes of working families. Working families can adopt these alterations and advocate for policy change that affects welfare and its recipients. Welfare recipients would be victims of harsh policy change as result of an altered image of themselves in the eyes of working families and select politicians.

If we understand that narratives, rhetoric and stereotypes are social structures, then it becomes easy to explain how they can be used as a structural explanation for individual behavior

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<sup>18</sup> Aaron M. Griffith, "Individualistic and Structural Explanations in Ásta's Categories We Live By," *Journal of Social Ontology* 5, no. 2 (February 6, 2020): 251–60, <https://doi.org/10.1515/jso-2020-2003>, 7.

<sup>19</sup> Ritchie, "Social Structures and the Ontology of Social Groups," 4.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

or attitudes. In fact, it seems almost to be an inverse of what Haslanger does in her work “Social Structure, Narrative and Explanation.” In it, she argues that “an adequate account of how implicit bias functions must situate it within a broader theory of social structures and structural injustice.”<sup>21</sup> Instead of starting with individual attitudes --in the form of implicit bias-- and then situating it in a broader theory of social structures, I begin with a particular social structure and then use it to explain an array of individual attitudes. This also seems to fall in line with Haslanger’s description of how a social structural explanation might operate. In the case of individual action, like a royal subject rising when the Queen walks in, Haslanger differentiates between *triggering* and *structural* causes.<sup>22</sup> Triggering causes are simple: They determine if some cause creates a certain effect.<sup>23</sup> Structuring causes determine why that cause, say C, causes effect E, instead of E’. Determining which question we ask will decide which explanation we use. For instance, Haslanger uses the example of Clyde standing when the Queen walks in to illustrate the importance of different kinds of causes depending on the kind of answer we are looking for. If one was interested in at what time Clyde stood up, i.e. why did he stand up *then*, then one would be asking about a triggering cause. If one was interested in figuring out why Clyde himself, as opposed to others, stood when the Queen entered, we would be asking for a structuring cause. When I ask “Why do colorblind individuals operate this way?” I am asking a question more like the latter, and as such, I am asking for a structural cause. The answer lies in understanding certain objects, or ‘nodes,’ and the relation they have to other objects within a system. To properly explain the individual mental processes within colorblind individuals, we must understand their relationship to other objects and agents within their social environment.

Now that I have established that narratives, rhetoric and stereotypes can be considered social structures with different groups of people occupying nodes in a network, and that these social structures can be used to articulate a structural explanation for particular kinds of attitudes and behaviors, I can move on to establishing this structural explanation of colorblind racism that relies upon Debora Gould’s work in *Moving Politics*.

### III

Debora Gould describes in her work *Moving Politics* that the emotional habitus “provides (individuals) with an emotional disposition, with a sense of what and how to feel, with labels for their feelings, with schemas about what feelings are and what they mean.”<sup>24</sup> This emotional disposition operates unconsciously and grants these feelings an aura of obviousness. That is, the emotions generated by emotional habitus become commonsensical and unquestioned. The emotional habitus operates by taking affects, undirected energies throughout the body, and

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<sup>21</sup> Haslanger, “Distinguished Lecture,” 1.

<sup>22</sup> Sally Haslanger, “What Is a (Social) Structural Explanation?,” *Philosophical Studies* 173, no. 1 (January 2016): 113–30, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11098-014-0434-5>.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, 120.

<sup>24</sup> Deborah B. Gould, *Moving Politics: Emotion and ACT UP’s Fight against AIDS* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009), 34.

redirecting them towards objects in the form of emotions.<sup>25</sup> Thus, the emotional habitus creates and regulates the emotions people experience.

Power structures play a key role in determining the emotional habitus, whether by creating societal norms that dictate how people should feel (for instance, people should feel disgust when encountering pedophilia) or by encountering rhetoric from authority that describes objects under a particular light to generate certain feelings. Gould herself points out that “power is exercised through and reproduced in our feelings, and it is forceful and effective precisely because of that.”<sup>26</sup> In this way, the emotional habitus becomes a dangerous tool for power structures to control behavior through emotion. Gould uses the example of how an emotional habitus that generates a fear of terrorism increases state power.<sup>27</sup> When an emotional habitus takes hold in a particular community, it can become self-reinforcing. The community can regulate its own emotions through its discipline and education system. For instance, a mother can instruct her child to not venture into a Black neighborhood because it is ‘dangerous.’ When the child ignores her instructions, then the mother may punish the child. This may alter the child’s emotional habitus in such a way as to bestow feelings of danger, anxiety and fear when encountering members of an opposing race.

I argue this is how racialized social structures operate. Racialized narratives, rhetoric and stereotypes embed themselves in the unconscious minds of individuals and their communities. Once embedded, they alter the emotions of individuals in such a way as to make their beliefs about minorities appear commonsensical. Communities self-regulate the emotional habitus, leading it to control the emotions that community members experience. This analysis, and the importance of emotions more broadly, becomes clear when we consider Bloch et al.’s analysis of online conservative discourses about race. There are a few trends from their analysis that are particularly important. First, there is the frequent use of personal experiences, especially ones of loss, that are used to explain some wider phenomenon. One online writer described a circumstance where he was denied a university job because he was white, using that experience to prove that “American white people can rarely do anything about this...This is how we have given up our national sovereignty, with ‘white people not allowed’ academic admissions policies.”<sup>28</sup> It seems that this writer was upset emotionally by this loss of work and sought an ulterior explanation for why he must have suffered this loss. Another refers to his own experiences in “see[ing] many Hispanics play the race card way too much and it is sickening.”<sup>29</sup> This again indicates a personal connection between Hispanics playing the race card and the mental state of the writer; it seems there have been cases where the Hispanic’s use of the “race card” has been seen as an explanation for the writer’s own loss.

Second, there is intense defensiveness around being called a racist. One writer suggests that although it is time for America to be colorblind completely, “White America” cannot take the lead

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 10, 29.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 39.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 40.

<sup>28</sup> Bloch, Taylor, and Martinez, “Playing the Race Card,” 1137.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

because they'll be "branded 'racists' anyway".<sup>30</sup> Certainly it is the case that being called a racist is an insult. But the use of the "racist" insult as stated by one of the writers above is not a specific case where someone is using the phrase towards an individual. Instead, it is a generalized form of unwarranted attack against a group of people, white people, because of their whiteness. This phenomenon is part of a wider ideology where whites perceive themselves to be oppressed by their helplessness against accusations of racism due to their own whiteness.<sup>31</sup> The intense sensitivity to accusations of racism for their entire race as well as the use of personal experiences of loss show the essential role emotions play in the discourse of this new racism.

#### IV

I hope that my arguments up until this point have been persuasive and straightforward. A thoughtful reader might agree that narratives, rhetoric, and social structures may in fact be considered social structures but ask why this is significant. They may point out that the structural theory for colorblind racism above can be articulated successfully without including the position on social structures. Certainly, the idea that media can alter the attitudes and beliefs of populations is not something that is original or is necessarily "structural." So then, what is the benefit of adapting a structuralist frame-of-view by labeling narratives, rhetoric and stereotypes social structures?

There are a few implications to my argument. The first and most straightforward one is that the literature --or at least several authors-- have taken for granted the status of narratives, rhetoric, and stereotypes as "social cognitive elements" instead of social structures.<sup>32</sup> If I am correct in defining these terms as social structures, it means that the explanation above would just naturally lend itself to a structuralist framework even if this framework does not have clear important implications. However, correcting the literature seems to be a meaningful goal in itself. We should probably aim to be correcting the literature whenever we can, even if we see no clear benefits at first.

More persuasively, however, explaining the role of social structures emphasizes the role of the structural elements of racism instead of hearkening on individual attitudes and beliefs. This emphasis is essential for two reasons. First, if the explanation is correct, then the priority for redress should be on reforming the way we discuss racial minorities and not on the colorblind individuals themselves. If the racist social structures remain in place, then these structures will continue to alter the way white people view race and racial minorities. Furthermore, any form of redress that is individual-centered would be difficult considering the unconscious nature of racism; a significant feature of colorblind racism is the rejection from its believers that it is racist to begin with. Second, it incorporates the explanation into a wider body of theory on structural explanations of racism. Instead of cutting against the grain, the explanation seeks to fit within the consensus of the

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Bloch, Taylor, and Martinez, "Playing the Race Card," 1137.

<sup>32</sup> Diekman, Eagly, and Johnston, "Social Structure."

literature about how racism operates. This not only means that the explanation is simply *more accurate* since it is a part of an accurate scheme for understanding racism, but it also benefits from new research into the field.

By emphasizing social structures in this explanation, we can also distinguish it from individualist conceptions of racism, specifically those that understand racism as consisting in particular attitudes, behaviors, etc. This conception of racism fails to adequately capture the recent phenomenon of colorblind racism. This is due to the unconscious aspect of colorblind racism. If racism was just an outward expression of explicit racist attitudes, then colorblind racists would not count as racists because their attitudes are explicitly *non-racist*, in the sense that they proclaim to not be racist by avoiding the acknowledgement of race entirely. In this way, it appears as though we do not have good access into the mind of the colorblind racist to determine whether their attitudes, on the individual level, express racist sentiment. It is not easy to access these attitudes when they operate unconsciously and under non-racial expressions. When we cannot access these attitudes, it becomes incredibly difficult to classify someone as ‘racist’ under this individualist conception. Thus, an individualist conception of racism does not encompass the kind of racism which is relevant here.

## V

I have attempted to make three claims relevant to new research around colorblind racism in this essay. First, that narratives, rhetoric, and stereotypes should be considered social structures. Second, that racialized narratives, rhetoric and stereotypes may alter the attitudes white people have about racism and racial minorities. This structural explanation may highlight some of the unique dimensions of colorblind racism, including its common-sensical and unconscious nature. Third, I offer a criticism of individualist accounts of racism by exploring their inability to account for unconscious or conflicted racist attitudes. This criticism also emphasizes the importance of the *structural* aspect to my explanation by looking towards social structures as the problem to be reformed.

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