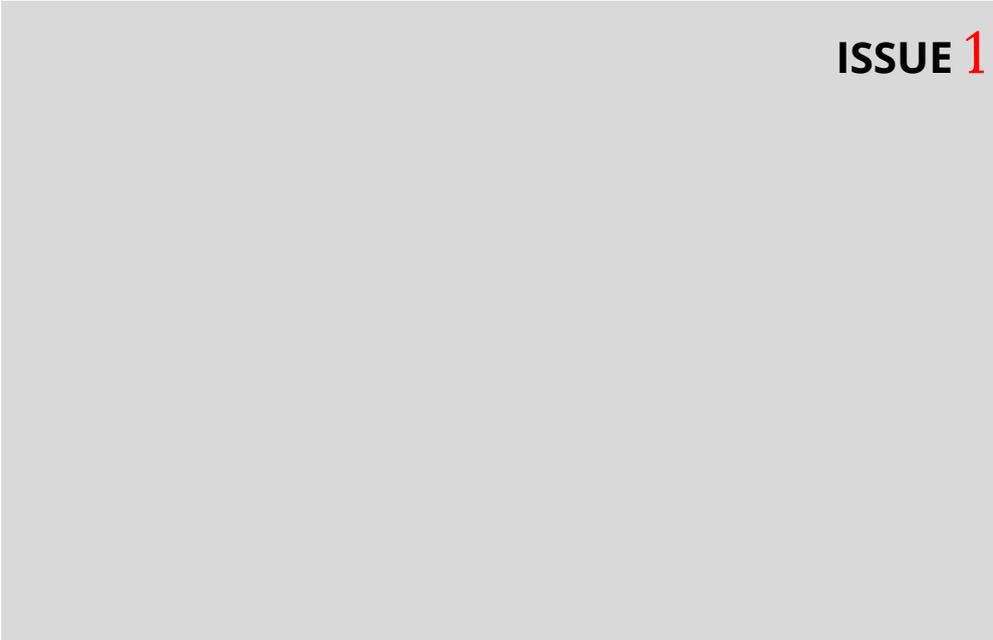
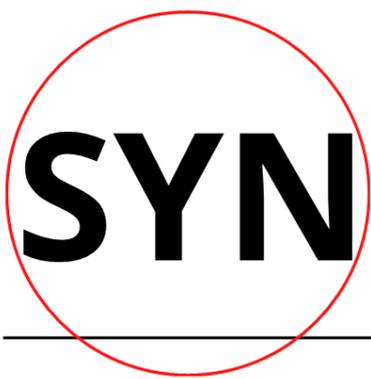




**SYNTHESIS**  
Journal for Philosophy

---



**ISSUE 1**

*This page intentionally left blank*

# SYNTHESIS

Journal for Philosophy

1

---

## Non-Existence: Error and Fiction

---

December 2021

## **Editors in-chief**

*Francesco Aronadio*  
*Francesco Fronterotta*

## **Editorial Board**

*Enrico Berti*  
*Annalisa Coliva*  
*Paolo Crivelli*  
*Erminia Di Iulio*  
*Matteo Favaretti Camposampiero*  
*Franco Ferrari*  
*Gabriele Galluzzo*  
*Laura Anna Macor*  
*Jenny Pelletier*  
*Federico Maria Petrucci*  
*Alice Ragni*  
*Nicholas D. Smith*  
*Ernest Sosa*  
*Achille Varzi*  
*Giovanni Ventimiglia*

## **Editorial Assistant**

*Marco Picciafuochi*

## List of contributions

The Paradox of Falsehood and Non-Being: Parmenides, Plato, Russell, and the <i>Tractatus</i> by <i>Simone Nota</i>	7
Before Any Possible Error: A Platonic Argument in Realism by <i>Lorenzo Giovannetti</i>	47
Non-Existence: On the Representability of Nothings by <i>Osman Gazi Birgül</i>	69
Errore, menzogna e finzione tra Nietzsche e Derrida by <i>Maria Cristina Fornari</i>	87
The Antinomy of Omissions by <i>Mario De Caro</i>	97
The Logic of Fictional Existence by <i>Louis Rouillé</i>	111



Simone Nota  
(Trinity College Dublin)

## **The Paradox of Falsehood and Non-Being: Parmenides, Plato, Russell, and the *Tractatus*\***

**Abstract:** How can we think or say what is not? If we equate what-is-not with nothing, then a thought of nothing is no thought at all; if we don't, we are condemned to admit that what-is-not is, seemingly incurring in self-refutation. This paradox – the paradox of falsehood and non-being – has a long and venerable history, part of which I address here as the story of a double patricide: the one committed by Plato against Parmenides, and the one committed by the early Wittgenstein against Russell. I argue that these thinkers – in attempting to solve the problem posed by the thought of the non-existent – all appeal to a relational theory of intentionality, by which whenever we think, we are in a relation to something existing. However, this solution comes into two general variants. A radical one (Parmenides) by which we simply cannot think of the non-existent, and thereby falsehood is impossible; and a moderate one (Plato, Russell, early Wittgenstein), by which thought of the non-existent is to be analysed in terms of existing entities. The moderate variant is essentially aimed at making falsehood explicable, yet only Wittgenstein offers a workable account, as both Plato and Russell remain stuck in the “problem of participation”.

**Keywords:** *Paradox, Falsehood, Non-Being, Russell, Wittgenstein*

*“Thought must be something unique”. When we say, and mean, that such-and-such is the case, we—and our meaning—do not stop anywhere short of the fact; but we mean: this—is—so. But this paradox (which has the form of a truism) can also be expressed in this way: Thought can be of what is not the case. – L. Wittgenstein*

### *Introduction*

How can we think or say what is not? If we equate what-is-not with nothing, then a thought of nothing would seem to be no thought at all;<sup>1</sup> if we don't, we are condemned to admit that what-is-not is, seemingly incurring in self-refutation.<sup>2</sup> The story of this paradox – namely that of false thought or

---

\* This essay is dedicated to the memory of Salvatore Veca, without whom it would have been non-existent.

<sup>1</sup> See *Parmenides* 132b and *Theaetetus* 189a.

<sup>2</sup> See *Sophist* 239a and 241b.

## SYNTHESIS

thought of what is not – goes back to the very inception of Western metaphysics with Parmenides, and runs throughout the history of Western philosophy, reaching Wittgenstein (and beyond). In this paper, I shall address a significant part of it as the story of a double patricide: the one committed by Plato in his *Sophist* at the expense of «father Parmenides» and his strict vision of Being, and the one committed by the early Wittgenstein at the expense of Bertrand Russell – his philosophical mentor or father – and his multiple relation theory of judgement.

The paper is divided into four sections (one per author), yet its aim is to build a unifying narrative linking all four authors through a modal account of their notion of object(s) of thought, worked out in the framework of a relational theory of intentionality. According to a relational theory of intentionality, whenever we think we are in a relation to something existing. I will however distinguish two general variants of such a theory: a radical variant (Parmenides), by which we simply cannot think of the non-existent, and a moderate variant (Plato, Russell, early Wittgenstein), by which thought of the non-existent is to be analysed in terms of existing entities.

My discussion is as follows. In section one, I argue that Parmenides endorses (a view that I call) *hyper-necessitism*, by which *Being* is the one, necessary “object” of thought, and thereby falsehood – qua thought or expression of what-is-not – is impossible. In section two, I provide an interpretation of the core of Plato’s *Sophist*, which silences Parmenidean worries by accounting in some detail for the possibility of thinking of what-is-not in terms of a web of necessary forms, especially the form *Other* or *Non-Being*. I offer a conjecture of my own on how the form *Other* blends with false discourse for Plato; but ultimately, (what I take to be) Plato’s solution to the problem of falsehood leaves open the notorious “problem of participation”. Section three is a presentation of the development of some of Russell’s thoughts on truth and falsehood, from his “Parmenidean” 1903 stance, by which literally everything that is thinkable must be, to his multiple relation theory of judgement and its Platonic metaphysics of forms, which is meant to offer a more reasonable account of false thought or judgement by analysing the logical possibility of (the thought of) non-existing complexes in terms of actual entities. Finally, in the fourth section, I go through some of the young Wittgenstein’s objections to Russell’s multiple relation theo-

ry. I claim that Wittgenstein sees how, by endorsing a Platonic metaphysics of forms, Russell too remains stuck in the problem of participation; thus, Wittgenstein endorses an Aristotelian view instead, by which forms are immanent to “objects” (cf. Pears 1977: 187–8). Further, I argue that Wittgenstein’s “objects” are logically necessary existents – logic being transcendental for him – and that the forms of “objects” are necessarily contained in thoughts and their expression in language, given a logico-transcendental isomorphism between thought, language, and the world. The conjunction of these two claims is arguably sufficient to provide a workable solution to the paradox of falsehood and non-being.

### 1. *Parmenides*

At the beginning of his poem *On Nature*,<sup>3</sup> after having led him «upon the far-fabled path of the divinity, which carries over all cities the knowing man» (fragment 1), the Daughters of the Sun guide Parmenides to the halls of Night, where the ethereal and towering gates of the paths of night and day stand. When the gates are finally opened, and indeed when Parmenides crosses their threshold on his chariot, we learn that a Goddess is waiting on the other side. The Goddess welcomes Parmenides, and, following a few introductory remarks, she begins her immortal revelation:

Come now, I shall tell—and convey home the tale once you have heard—  
just which ways of inquiry alone are there for understanding:  
the one, that [it] is and that [it] is not not to be,  
is the path of conviction, for it attends upon true reality,  
but the other, that [it] is not and that [it] must not be,  
this, I tell you, is a path wholly without report:  
for neither could you apprehend what is not, for it is not to be accomplished,  
nor could you indicate it. (fr. 2)

The Goddess distinguishes two ways of inquiry for understanding: (1) *it is and it is not not to be*; (2) *it is not and it must not be*. Surprisingly, right after having introduced the second way, she restrains Parmenides from it. Indeed, later in the poem, she will go as far as saying that the second way is «no true

---

<sup>3</sup> Quotes from the poem are, unless otherwise stated, from the translation contained in Palmer (2009).

way at all» (fr. 8; verses 17–18). Why, then, does she include it in the ways of inquiry that «alone are there for understanding»? The question is crucial—addressing it is necessary before one can proceed on the first way of inquiry, the path of conviction that attends upon true reality.

It might be thought that the second way of inquiry (*it is not and it must not be*) must initially be taken into account on logical grounds. After all, the Goddess herself will state that either «it is or it is not» (fr. 8; 16), and surely this peculiar formulation of the principle of the excluded middle deserves to be investigated.<sup>4</sup> The first difficulty here is to establish the subject hiding behind the Parmenidean “it”.<sup>5</sup> Since the subject must be assumed to be the same in both “it is” and “it is not”, let us briefly begin with the phrase “it is”, in order to then turn to “it is not” and see what happens.

If Parmenides were to address us with the nude statement “it is”, we would plausibly reply with a natural question: “What is there?”<sup>6</sup> What would Parmenides answer in turn? I am inclined to think, with Quine, that he would answer “Everything”, exactly as everyone else (Quine 1948: 21). This way, “it is”

---

<sup>4</sup> I say “peculiar”, since Parmenides’ formulation of the logical principle of the excluded middle also seems to exhibit an ontological aura. While this might sound queer or alien to many of us nowadays – used as we are to neat distinctions between logic and metaphysics – it probably did not sound thus in antiquity. For example, as argued by the Polish logician Jan Łukasiewicz, Aristotle maintained that the logical principle of contradiction –  $\neg(\alpha \wedge \neg\alpha)$  – and the logical principle of the excluded middle –  $\alpha \vee \neg\alpha$  – are at the same time ontological (1971: 489; 1987: 69). Here, I want to suggest that a limit-version of the (onto)logical principle of the excluded middle – “[either] it is or it is not” – is at least *put to the test* for the first time by Parmenides.

<sup>5</sup> I talk here of the Parmenidean “it”, notwithstanding in the Greek original the verb “is” is unaccompanied. That, in fact, is no reason to assume Parmenides’ poem has no subject matter!

<sup>6</sup> It might be thought that a more natural question to ask is rather “What is it?”. This question, however, is completely empty of content, if it asks for the essential nature of the “it” (that is said to be) in abstraction from what there is, and thereby in abstraction from the question: “What is there?”. The question “What is it?” has the further drawback of creating the grammatical illusion that we are looking for a certain thing or substance, as is clear if we formulate the question thus: “What is this thing that is said to be?”. At this stage, however, the assumption that we are looking for a thing is completely unwarranted, and rather reflects modern preoccupations, such as those of Descartes (“What am I?” – “A thing that thinks”). This is not to say that the question “What is it?” is illegitimate or sterile, but rather that our investigation should *start* elsewhere: not from reference to an alleged substance which possesses the alleged property of being, but rather, to use Oliva Blanchette’s words, from what there is «in a comprehensive yet concrete sense» (1991: 273). This is what Parmenides sometimes calls τὸ ἕόν (ibid). In the continuation of this section, I simply employ, following Quine, the word “Everything”. For the priority of the question “What is there?” over “What is it?” see also Varzi (2011).

would promptly translate into the more manageable “Everything is”.<sup>7</sup> Crucially, if *Everything* is the subject behind the Parmenidean “it”, then the principle by which “It is or it is not” will read: “either Everything is or Everything is not”—a statement which sounds very much like Parmenides’ own at fr. 8, verse 11: «It must either be altogether or not at all».

But now let us try to entertain for a moment the thought that “Everything is not”. Evidently, this thought cancels itself out, for if Everything is not, then not even the (pseudo) thought that “Everything is not” is. In fact, if Everything is not, we are left with *nothing*, so to speak. Small wonder that the second way of inquiry ultimately constitutes no true path of inquiry at all, since there would be literally nothing to be thought of as object of the inquiry, and, indeed, even the inquiry itself (which is to be conducted by means of thought or language) could not be in the first place.<sup>8</sup> It is perhaps through this chain of reasoning, or at any rate something quite like it, that Parmenides concludes that «not to be said and not to be thought is it that it is not» (fr. 8; 8–9), for trying to say or think of this results in self-refutation. If the second way of inquiry is called a way for understanding, then, it can only be because trying to embark on it will prompt the understanding that «a single tale of a way remains, that it is» (fr. 8; 1–2).

In effect, now that we have managed to establish that “Everything is not” represents no feasible way of inquiry, and since for Parmenides *tertium non datur*, there remains only one alternative, namely the natural one that faced with the question “What is there?”, answers “Everything (is)”. However, and again as noted by Quine, this answer is so general that there could still be much room

---

<sup>7</sup> Francesco Berto aptly calls the thesis that “Everything exists” the Parmenidean Thesis (2013: 4). However, Berto also suggests that attributing this thesis to the *historical* Parmenides may be misleading, since for the historical Parmenides, Berto claims, «almost nothing exists!» (2013: 3; see also 2010: 5) This claim is motivated thus by Berto: «[the historical] Parmenides relegates the multiplicity of objects of our ordinary experience – houses, mountains, people – to the realm of the fallacious δόξα, the deceptive appearance» (ibid.). Contrary to Berto’s view, I shall however argue below that, while the apparent “multiplicity of objects of our ordinary experience” is indeed deceptive for Parmenides, that which appears is nonetheless *something* (and surely not nothing). If so, “appearances” could be ultimately accounted for in terms of *Being*. In this way, the thesis that “Everything exists” (or “Everything is”, given that Parmenides was surely oblivious to alleged distinctions between existence and being) may be attributed to the historical Parmenides, and not just to a fictitious Parmenides, as Berto does.

<sup>8</sup> Or for that matter the enquirer.

## SYNTHESIS

for disagreement, for example on what the term “Everything” should encompass, and how.

Let us then turn our attention to the domain of the things that are for Parmenides (for now, it will be convenient to speak in the plural). First of all, what is the minimal requirement to *be* something? Parmenides’ answer to this question, it seems to me, is contained in his notorious fragment 3:

because the same thing is there for thinking and for being.<sup>9</sup>

Famously, or perhaps infamously, there are many possible ways to translate fragment 3. Many will translate along the lines of “for the same thing can be thought and can exist”<sup>10</sup>; this translation, however, seems to suggest that something might *fail* to exist for Parmenides.<sup>11</sup> Other translators, instead, prefer something more obscure, along the lines of “thinking and being are one and the same thing”<sup>12</sup>; this translation, however, would problematically make Parmenides into an absolute idealist *ante litteram*.<sup>13</sup> Perhaps the simplest way out of this conundrum is to interpret the fragment as telling us that everything that can be thought of is, and thus as individuating in *thinkability* the minimal criterion for being. In this interpretation, thinking and being are one and the same not literally (so that all being would be reducible to thought), but rather since they share the same space: *all that is thinkable is*. If this is really Parmenides’ stance in fragment 3, as major interpreters believe,<sup>14</sup> what then could be the rationale behind it? Why should everything that is thinkable *be*?

---

<sup>9</sup> τὸ γὰρ αὐτὸ νοεῖν ἐστὶν τε καὶ εἶναι. Translation by Gallop (1984: 57). On this score, Williams (2006: 18).

<sup>10</sup> This is Tarán’s translation. On this score, also Diels-Kranz. Cf. Gallop (1984: 56-57).

<sup>11</sup> I argue against this view in some detail below.

<sup>12</sup> On this score, Vlastos, and many others following him. Cf. Gallop (1984: 56-57).

<sup>13</sup> This is in fact how Hegel understands Parmenides (1995: 253). Conversely, in the analytic tradition, Bernard Williams (2006: 5), and following his lead Myles Burnyeat (1982: 4), have denied that idealism was present in Ancient Philosophy. This goes to show that making Parmenides into an absolute idealist *ante litteram* is at least controversial. For a critique of idealist readings of fragment 3, see also Palmer (2009: 120-121).

<sup>14</sup> For example, Owen (1966: 95).

The answer lies in the notion of object of thought,<sup>15</sup> and indeed in a dilemma that seems to affect it. Every act of thought must have an object: on this proposition, most would immediately agree. Now, for any such act, there seem to be two possibilities: either its object is, or it is not. Intuitively, we want to maintain that some objects of thought are not, such as Pegasus (the winged horse of the Greek myth) or a flying man. Yet if they are not in any sense at all – if they do not have being, and if they are not analysable or reducible in terms of being(s) – then how could we think of them? Should we say we think of nothing at all? This seems impossible. Should we say that there are objects that are not, and that we think of those? This seems contradictory. We are thereby stuck in what, partly following Tim Crane (2013), we might call *the problem of non-existence*—one at the very core of the paradox of false thought (as should be clear from our introduction).

One type of solution to this problem is to appeal to a relational theory of intentionality, by which whenever we think, we ultimately think of – or are related in thought to – something that is or exists.<sup>16</sup> I distinguish between two general variants of this solution, namely a radical and a moderate variant. Either literally everything that is thinkable is, and thereby we absolutely cannot think of what-is-not (radical variant); or else we can think of what-is-not, if only in a watered-down or relative sense, by which (thought of) what-is-not must be *analysable or reducible in terms of what there is* (moderate variant). This consideration is fundamental for our purposes, as I have begun to argue that Parmenides endorses the more radical claim, whereas I shall argue that Plato, Russell, and the early Wittgenstein endorse the moderate one. Throughout the paper we will thereby be concerned with this type of solution to the problem of non-existence, in its two different variants. For now, let us return to Parmenides alone, by asking the next natural question: What can we think of (or can count as an object of thought)?

Everything, Parmenides would say, if our discussion above is not mistaken. But what does the word “Everything” stand for? Nowadays, some people

---

<sup>15</sup> The notion of “object of thought” is inherently ambiguous (and that may well be what gives rise to the paradox of falsehood in the first place). I will, however, exploit this ambiguity for now, and only disambiguate the notion in § 3 below, as it is very likely that the (or at any rate, most of the) Greeks were not explicitly aware of the ambiguity itself.

<sup>16</sup> For the notion of relational theory of intentionality, see e.g. Caston (1998: 253) and Benoist (2007).

in philosophy would answer in turn: “primarily states of affairs or facts”, i.e. combinations of objects.<sup>17</sup> Parmenides, however, could not avail himself of Wittgenstein’s categorial distinction between facts and objects. For a Greek, the world was the totality of things (i.e. every-thing), not of facts (cf. Mourelatos 1969: 742). On the other hand, this should not mean that the Greeks had no states of affairs or facts to think of in their ontology, such as a lunar eclipse. Rather, they believed the moon’s being eclipsed – which *we* call a state of affairs – to be an object (of thought) in quite the same sense in which Socrates is.<sup>18</sup> This much was maintained by Montgomery Furth (1968), who meticulously argued that the Greeks had a *fused notion of being*, one – that is – equally accounting for both the ideas of predication (being *thus-and-so*) and existence (being *simpliciter*).<sup>19</sup>

Once it is provisionally accepted that for Parmenides both objects proper and states of affairs would equally count as thinkable objects – and thereby as objects that *are* – we should turn to the *modality* of being of these objects, in order to delve deeper into the metaphysical core of the poem. That is, we know now that thinkable objects are according to Parmenides; but we do not know yet in which way they are or exist (whether necessarily, contingently, merely possibly, or some mix of these). Or do we?

The solution to this riddle was already contained in the Goddess’ revelation, where we read that «it is and it is not not to be», i.e. that *it must be*. In the analytic tradition, it is a merit of John Palmer to have stressed that the modal clause of this verse cannot – as is often done – be ignored or downplayed, and thus that the verse itself specifies a mode of being, namely *necessary being* (Palmer 2009: 97-99). It does thereby follow, according to our interpretation so far, that for Parmenides “Everything necessarily is”.<sup>20</sup> Surprisingly, however, Palmer himself does not reach this conclusion, rather arguing that Parmenides

---

<sup>17</sup> See for example Armstrong (1993).

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Kahn (2007: 45)

<sup>19</sup> A partial anticipation of Furth’s view is to be found in Kahn (1966).

<sup>20</sup> Notice that the modality of necessity is here attached to Everything (“Everything necessarily is”), and not to the proposition that *Everything is* (as in “necessarily Everything is”). In other words, I take Parmenides to be concerned with *de re* necessity (necessity pertaining to things), and not with *de dicto* necessity (necessity pertaining to linguistic statements). That is because most ancient philosophers, such as Aristotle, were arguably concerned with *de re* necessity; cf. Grayling (2014: 54-55). Indeed, as far as I know, the distinction between *de re* and *de dicto* necessity was not explicitly thematized until the Middle Ages (though Aristotle himself might have had a hunch about it).

also endorsed the modality of *contingent being*, so that not Everything necessarily is (or is a necessary being), but rather something exists in this mode and something else does not (2009: 106-118).

Palmer's alternative conclusion is reached, to be sure, through the consideration of the text, which seems to account for contingent being(s) as well. In effect, in fragment 6, the Goddess seems to introduce a *third way* of inquiry, namely that of mortals, who believe in ever-changing *appearances* by «suppos[ing] that it is and is not the same and not the same», i.e. that it is and it is not (what it is). If, however, one takes seriously Parmenides' principle of the excluded middle – “it is or it is not” – then surely “it is *and* it is not (what it is)” results in a contradiction,<sup>21</sup> and indeed Parmenides himself informs us that «the path of all of these [mortals] turns back on itself» (fr. 6; 9).

This last expression will become clearer once we consider the following. Parmenides is adamant that «*nothing else* [is] except What is» and that «it is *all* replete with What Is» (fr. 8; 36-7 and 24; my emphasis). Thus, if we are not to conclude that the totality of being is contingent (“Everything is contingently”), a conclusion that Parmenides would have found repugnant – and that clearly contradicts his injunction that *it must be* – then the allegedly contingent appearances in which mortals believe are ultimately to be upgraded to necessary being (if they are not to be downgraded to nothing at all). After all, the Goddess appears to tell Parmenides this much, right after having mentioned the untrustworthy opinions of the mortals for the first time: «Still, you shall learn these things too, namely how the things-that-seem *had* to have genuine existence, being indeed the whole of things».<sup>22</sup>

It is therefore the case that for Parmenides “Everything *necessarily* is”. Something in the spirit of this Parmenidean idea has been recently advanced by Timothy Williamson, in his *Modal Logic as Metaphysics*. There, Williamson defends *necessitism*, which he presents as the thesis that «it is necessary what there is», or equivalently that «necessarily everything is necessarily something» (2013: 2).<sup>23</sup> However, being possible for him to avail of the Wittgensteinian dis-

---

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Furth (1968: 120).

<sup>22</sup> Owen's translation (1966: 88; my emphasis).

<sup>23</sup> Notice that Williamson immediately clarifies that the necessity at stake in necessitism is not attached to «what can or cannot be known or thought or said of what there is»; rather, it is *meta-*

inction between states of affairs or facts (*how* things stand) and objects (*what* there is), Williamson could also preserve the intuition that «things could have been otherwise» (2013: 1). For example, a necessitist could suppose that although the things there are are necessarily, their actual combinations in states of affairs are contingent. (As we shall see, this will be the key to Wittgenstein’s insightful solution to the paradox of falsehood and non-being).

We should keep in mind, however, that Parmenides could avail himself of no such conceptual machinery. For him, a state of affairs was yet another object (of thought), in the exact same sense in which Socrates or a chair are. Therefore, if for Parmenides “Everything necessarily is”, *Everything*, quite literally, is *necessarily*. Literally *nothing* is contingent. We might call this view *hyper-necessitism*, and assert with some plausibility that it is a view that almost no one in his or her right mind would maintain.<sup>24</sup> Ultimately, in this view, all things collapse into one eternal, changeless and monolithic mass, held together tight by *necessity* (see fr. 8; esp. 30–31).<sup>25</sup> The distinctions between beings (whether of place, of time, of colour, etc.) reveal themselves to be illusory, as all things indistinctly and necessarily *are*. In fact, it is not even possible for anything to be *F* and not-*G*: «for this may never be made manageable, that things that are not are» (fr. 7; 1). Plurality melts thus into Oneness. Whenever we think of something – say, a chair or a lunar eclipse – our ultimate object of thought is none other than the one undifferentiated and necessary *being*, the only true *form* that is right to name (see fr. 8; 53–4).

And here is the most startling consequence of all: in this view falsehood is impossible. We perpetually inhabit the all-pervading dimension of necessary reality or truth (*alētheia*), with no possibility of ever escaping it.<sup>26</sup> Whatever we

---

*physical* necessity (2013: 3). Put otherwise, just like Parmenides, Williamson is not concerned with *de dicto* necessity, but rather with *de re* necessity. For the distinction between *de dicto* and *de re* necessity, see note 20 above.

<sup>24</sup> To my knowledge, the only hyper-necessitist after Parmenides was Emanuele Severino, who defended the view with remarkable coherence (see his 1964). Of him, it was perhaps true what Plato says in the *Phaedrus* (at the beginning of the discourse on the fourth kind of madness): «He stands outside human concerns and draws close to the divine; ordinary people think he is disturbed and rebuke him for this, unaware that he is possessed by god» (*Phaedrus*, 249d).

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* N 2 (1089a).

<sup>26</sup> Consider in this light Parmenides’ otherwise obscure fragment 4: «And it is all one to me / Where I am to begin; for I shall return there again».

think, if we are to think at all, we must think of something that is necessarily – that cannot but *be*. Whatever we say, if we are not to produce mere babbling, we must say it of something that is necessarily – that cannot but *be*. Yet, intuitively we think or say a falsehood whenever we think or say, of something that is, that it is not, or else of something that is not, that it is.<sup>27</sup> Both these options are prohibited by Parmenides.

## 2. Plato

Towards the end of the last section, I have ventured to assert that virtually nobody in his or her right mind would commit to the Parmenidean view that literally Everything is necessarily (hyper-necessitism). This, however, should not be taken to mean that Parmenides' view is inconsistent or illogical. As it happens, there is a sense in which quite the opposite is true. Out of a few basic logical principles, such as the principle of the excluded middle and the principle of sufficient reason,<sup>28</sup> Parmenides generates a powerful a priori argument in support of his metaphysical thesis. This is remarkable in itself, whether or not we think the argument succeeds in establishing its conclusion. Indeed, we should not be surprised that a philosopher like Plato had a tremendous respect for Parmenides,<sup>29</sup> since Parmenides' poem is the first true piece of metaphysical reasoning (if by "metaphysics" we mean an a priori investigation into the essential nature of reality according to rules).

It is all the more significant, then, that Plato sets for himself the task of revealing that and how Parmenides' view is untenable. Crucially, he will refute Parmenides' view not on theoretical charges, or at any rate not merely on these, but rather on *pragmatic* ones. Committing to Parmenides' teachings would in fact result either in a mindless silence, or else in useless repetitions. In a mindless silence, if we take thought and language to be activities; they would in fact act upon their object, thereby changing it – an impossible consequence if the

---

<sup>27</sup> This is the traditional conception of falsehood, to be found in Plato's *Sophist* (e.g. 241a), and famously in Aristotle's *Metaphysics* Γ (1011b25), as part of his conception of truth.

<sup>28</sup> As noted by Bernard Williams (2006: 18), Parmenides makes an elegant use of the principle of sufficient reason in order to prove the eternal nature of Being: for «what necessity would force it, sooner or later, to come to be, if it started from nothing?» (fr. 8; 9-10; William's translation).

<sup>29</sup> See *Theaetetus* 183e.

totality of being is changeless (*Sophist*, 248 d–e). Even if we do not concede this argument,<sup>30</sup> the alternative result would hardly be more compelling from a pragmatic standpoint: we would be condemned to think and speak of one and the same truth again and again, i.e. *it is and it must be*, without the possibility of ever uttering falsehoods. Though not being logically impossible, Parmenides' view seriously threatens the pragmatic requirements of meaningful discourse. Thus, as noted by Luca Castagnoli, «it is the extreme undesirability of the non-philosophical (and indeed non-human) life to which [this view] would lead if coherently followed that requires every effort to fight [it]» (2010: 224).

The upshot of all this is that, if the possibility of falsehood is to be vindicated, the letter of Parmenides' teachings must be abandoned. That, however, does not mean that their spirit should be abandoned too. The various Forms that Plato famously envisioned, although not reducible to Parmenides' one true form (*Being*), are in fact best characterized as beings of a Parmenidean type,<sup>31</sup> i.e. beings that retain the fundamental characters of Parmenides' Being, only in the plural: they are necessary and changeless theoretical entities,<sup>32</sup> known by reasoning rather than sense-perception, and thereby contrasted with perceptible appearances. The contrast between a plurality of theoretical entities and a plurality of perceptible appearances proves however extremely problematic for Plato, as it opens a stark *dualism* between a formal order of reality and a material one, and the problem of the relationship between the two, known as *the problem of participation*.<sup>33</sup>

It is no doubt fitting that in the dialogue *Parmenides*, when the young Socrates presents this rather canonical version of Plato's theory of forms, Parmenides himself objects with a battery of logical arguments against it (including the famous third man argument). Yet it is a true stroke of genius, once consid-

---

<sup>30</sup> For one, Hegel would not concede it, as the argument takes for granted that cognition is akin to an instrument that modifies the object to which is applied. See Hegel (1977: Intro, §§ 73–4).

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Kahn (2007: 36–7) and Harte (2008: 192).

<sup>32</sup> Harte (2008: 193) rightly writes that «Forms are theoretical entities in the sense that they do some theoretical work». Example of such theoretical work will soon be given below.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Allen (1960: 161). Notice that the “problem of participation” was not a problem for Parmenides, for whom even appearances were to be reduced, so to speak, to the one necessary Being. No dualisms needed.

ered the similarities mentioned above, that Plato's Parmenides should continue his *logos* thus:

“Yet on the other hand, Socrates”, said Parmenides, “if someone, having an eye on all the difficulties we have just brought up and others of the same sort, won't allow that there are forms for things and won't mark off a form for each one, he won't have anywhere to turn his thought, since he doesn't allow that for each thing there is a character that is always the same. In this way he will destroy the power of dialectic entirely. But I think you are only too well aware of that”. “What you say is true”, Socrates said. “What then will you do about philosophy?” (*Parmenides*, 135b-c)

Here Parmenides, right after having presented some devastating objections to the canonical theory of forms, stands nonetheless as the ultimate defender of forms. Without forms and their definition – he claims – our thoughts would be objectless, presumably since no features common to things qua things (say, *Being* and *Oneness*) could be then singled out (and, at that point, what would our thought be a thought of?). In that way – Parmenides continues – the ability for meaningful discourse would be entirely destroyed, and with it philosophy itself (presumably, qua advanced modality of meaningful discourse).<sup>34</sup> Thus, with a truly surprising twist, Plato's Parmenides is willing to go beyond his own doctrine by accepting a plurality of forms, if that means protecting the possibility of meaningful discourse and of philosophy at large.

Protecting meaningful discourse is however impossible if one does not allow for falsehood. Indeed, that was the reason why the Parmenidean letter had to be abandoned in the first place. But surely the same goes for philosophy as well. For how is one to protect philosophy, as an enquiry aiming at the truth,<sup>35</sup> if not by allowing the possibility to spot falsehoods and those who utter falsehoods? And with this remark, we finally come to Plato's *Sophist*.

In this dialogue, Theaetetus and a Stranger coming from Elea (Parmenides' *polis*) embark on a hunt for the sophist, or better for the right definition of the sophist. The sophist is a craftsman of falsehoods, yet one that is not easily characterizable as such, as he himself *denies* the possibility of falsehood, in doing so appealing to the letter of Parmenides' teachings. Thinking or saying a false-

---

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Politis (2021: 182-3).

<sup>35</sup> At least for the Greeks.

## SYNTHESIS

hood – the sophist would say – should mean thinking or saying something that is not; but surely something that is not, as Parmenides saw, is nothing at all, and thus one cannot think or say a falsehood in the first place.<sup>36</sup>

Clearly, if this argument is to be stopped, the uncompromising Parmenidean equation of What-is-Not with Nothing must be challenged. This is exactly what happens at the turning point of the *Sophist* (241d), when the Eleatic Stranger prays Theaetetus

S: Not to think that I'm turning into some kind of patricide. T: What do you mean?  
S: In order to defend ourselves [from the sophist] we're going to have to subject father Parmenides' saying to further examination, and insist by brute force both that *that which is not* somehow is, and then again that *that which is* somehow is not.

The final aim of this sort of enquiry is therefore to leave aside the intractable notion of an absolute Non-Being, rather focusing on a *relative* notion of Non-Being, by which *what is not* somehow is, and correspondingly *what is* somehow is not. If this can be done coherently, then the possibility of falsehood can be coherently defended.

It would be impossible here to present all the nuanced steps of Plato's argument. The essential point, however, is that we must allow other fundamental forms beyond that of *Being*, and that not only each of these forms must have an essential nature of its own, but also that they must necessarily «weave together with», or «partake in», some others.<sup>37</sup> For example, these further forms must partake in the form *Being*, for otherwise they would not be at all. Among them, Plato lists the form *Other*, which by its very nature is *other-than-the-form-Being* (255c-d).<sup>38</sup> Yet being essentially *other-than-the-form-Being* ultimately means being (the form of) *non-Being*, and thus Plato finds in the form

---

<sup>36</sup> According to Palmer (1999: 141), collapsing the distinction between what-is-not and what-is-not-at-all (i.e. nothing) is the *characteristic move* of the sophist, one that reveals an evident Parmenideanism, or at any rate a certain interpretation of Parmenides.

<sup>37</sup> Plato metaphorically describes the relationship between forms as a “weave” or “blend” (*symploké*), as “participation” (*metaschesis*, *methexis*), and as “communion” (*koinōnia*). Still, the nature of this relation is not itself straightforward. I shall leave this question open here.

<sup>38</sup> At *Sophist* 255c-d we read that *Being* and the *Other* must be «completely distinct», for the *Other* can only be such relatively to something other than itself, whereas *Being* can – and must – be also by itself.

*Other* the relative notion of non-Being he was looking for. Indeed, on the one hand the form *Other* or *non-Being* is (by partaking in *Being*), but on the other hand it is not (by its very nature) the form *Being*. Furthermore, although by partaking in *Being* all beings are, by partaking in the *Other* there will be a relative sense in which each being is not the form *Being* (256d-e), or any of the other beings that partake in it.<sup>39</sup> In other words, thanks to the form *Other*, there is a sense by which it is possible that something is other than, or different from, What Is by its very nature (namely, *Being*), and indeed different from all the other things that are by partaking in What Is. The Parmenidean injunction is thus violated.

It goes without saying that this is Plato's key to address the paradox of falsehood. Thinking or saying a falsehood, in effect, is thinking or saying something other than, or different from, what as a matter of fact is—something which however must possess a being of some kind for Plato. As Theaetetus says early on in the dialogue: «that [the things] that are not are in a way, [this] has to be, if anyone is ever going to be even a little bit wrong» (240e). We should not therefore be surprised when the Eleatic Stranger later asserts that «the weaving together of Forms is what makes speech possible for us» (259e). In fact, the Form *Other* or *non-Being*, which is by weaving together with *Being*, must be found in (meaningful) false discourse and thought, for

if it doesn't blend with them then everything has to be true. But if it does then there will be false belief and false speech, since falsity in thinking and speaking amount to believing and saying those [things] that are not. (260c)

Unluckily, Plato is not crystal clear as to how this blending of thought and speech with *non-Being* – which is to make falsehood possible – is to take place. He does provide, however, two notorious examples, out of which we can advance a reasonable conjecture.

The two examples come in the form of two elementary sentences, namely “Theaetetus sits” and “Theaetetus flies”, of which the first is true while the second is false (263a-b). The sentences are analysed by means of a distinc-

---

<sup>39</sup> Thus, for example, the Eleatic Stranger can say: «each [form] is different from the others, not because of its own nature but because of sharing in the type of the *Other*» (255e). Plausibly, anything whatsoever (including sensible particulars) is different from other things for the same reason.

tion between name and verb. The name is said to refer to a certain object, namely Theaetetus. The two verbs (“sits” and “flies”) are said to indicate actions that are allegedly performed by this object—that allegedly *hold of it*. Nowadays, we would likely call these *properties*.<sup>40</sup> In the second example, however, the property indicated by the verb “flying” does not *really* hold of the Theaetetus. Indeed, the state of affairs by which Theaetetus flies does not actually exist. How, then, can we meaningfully think or express it for Plato?

Here’s my conjecture. Theaetetus and the property or form *Flying*, taken individually, do exist.<sup>41</sup> If we are to judge that “Theaetetus is flying”, then we must not only be related to Theaetetus and *Flying* individually, but we must also combine them in judgement (cf. 262e)—we must succeed, that is, in saying that *Flying* is with respect to Theaetetus,<sup>42</sup> or equivalently that the state of affairs by which Theaetetus is flying *is*.<sup>43</sup> However, if we are to succeed in doing this, then we must also be related to the form of *Being*, which should already pertain not only to Theaetetus and *Flying* taken individually, but also to the combination of Theaetetus and *Flying* (Theaetetus-instantiating-*Flying*). Indeed, to anticipate what I will say about Russell below, for a realist like Plato no amount of thinking or judging could bring together Theaetetus and *Flying* if it were not already possible for them to be combined *in reality* in some way. (In judging that “Theaetetus is flying” we do not magically bring a possibility into being).

Now, the trouble is that, since the property or form *Flying* is different from those that actually hold of Theaetetus, such as *Sitting*, the combination of Theaetetus and *Flying* does not *actually* exist.<sup>44</sup> If so, *Being* cannot directly per-

---

<sup>40</sup> While a *token-action* (such as this man’s sitting) is hardly characterizable as a property, a *type-action* (say, sitting in general) may be characterized as a property or kind/form; cf. Crivelli (2012: 224, 238). In the following, I assume that verbs like “sitting” and “flying” refer to properties (or kinds/forms).

<sup>41</sup> Arguably, this is the main consequence of Plato’s analysis of speech, by which a name and a verb refer to different elements. See Denyer (1991), Chapter 9 (esp. § “The Distinction as Semantics”).

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Crivelli (2012: 249), who argues that «the central claim of Plato’s definition of sentence is that a speech act performed by uttering a [elementary] sentence is directed to two things, one of which (the action signified by the verb) is said about the other (the object signified by the name)».

<sup>43</sup> Recall, the Greeks had a fused notion of being (at least according to Kahn and Furth).

<sup>44</sup> This might also be expressed by saying that flying is a form – both in an ordinary and a technical sense – of non-sitting, *and* that the latter is different from what is with respect to Theaetetus. Notice that Plato allows for negative forms in the *Sophist*, and further claims that they essentially constitute the form *Other* or *non-Being* (257c – 258c).

tain to it. And yet exactly because it is different from, or other than, the obtaining one, the combination of Theaetetus and *Flying* must partake of the *Other* or *non-Being*. Furthermore, since the *Other* partakes in *Being* in turn, it will result that, through the mediation of the form *Other*, a kind of “indirect” being must pertain to the combination above, which is none other than the state of affairs by which Theaetetus is flying. In other words, this state of affairs is, although its (modality of) being consists in being *different* from the states of affairs that are in an immediate or actual sense—in being, that is, merely possible. Thereby, we can meaningfully and falsely think or express it through the judgement “Theaetetus flies”.<sup>45</sup>

If I am right, in his attempt to coherently accommodate falsehood and trap the sophist, Plato commits to a moderate-variant relational solution to the problem of non-existence, by which we must analyse (the thought of) the non-existent in terms of what there is. In this view, the false thought or speech that “Theaetetus flies” would be mainly accountable in terms of a web of existing Forms to which we are related, including *Flying*, *Being*, and *Other* or *non-Being*. However, here is the problem. Clearly, Theaetetus as well (qua sensible particular) must be related to this web of Forms, if the proposition is to be both meaningful and false. But how is he, if he belongs to a completely different order of reality from the formal one? As we have seen, this issue – the problem of participation – was already raised in the form of devastating objections by Parmenides, in the dialogue that bears his name. In the *Sophist* it is raised once again (248a-b), but then put aside, as if Plato was concerned more with what Kahn called a transcendental logic of Forms (2007: 49), rather than with the actual metaphysical plausibility of the doctrine of participation. If by a Platonic transcendental logic of Forms, however, we mean the study of those necessary logical relationships among mind-independent heavenly Forms that make possible

---

<sup>45</sup> I realize that the opposition immediate vs. indirect – and thereby the opposition between actual states of affairs, that have being in an immediate sense, and possible states of affairs, that have being only in an indirect sense – might sound imprecise to the reader. Here, however, words fail me, and I can find no better way of expressing (what I take to be) Plato’s solution, if not through this “pictorial language”. The state of affairs by which Theaetetus flies has an “indirect” being, in that its participation in *Being* requires a detour: it must be mediated by the form *Other* or *Non-Being*.

thought and discourse (*both true and false*), then the problem of participation will still loom large. And it is doubtful whether Plato ever solved it.<sup>46</sup>

### 3. Russell

One rather striking feature of philosophical problems, that perhaps they share with historical contingencies, seems to be their periodicity. To paraphrase Vico's famous take on History, we might talk of philosophical «corsi and ricorsi» (i.e. occurrences and recurrences), since the very same problems return, in slightly different forms, in very different times. Among the advocates of such a cyclical view of philosophy there might well be Bertrand Russell. Indeed, this statement would seem to be confirmed by Russell's treatment of Parmenides in his *History of Western Philosophy*. As he writes:

The essence of [Parmenides'] argument is: When you think, you think of something; when you use a name, it must be the name of something. [...] Whatever can be thought or spoken of must exist [...]. (HWP: 68)

As we have seen in the first section, the idea that every thought must be the thought of something that is (or exists) was plausibly part of Parmenides' real stance. Most importantly, however, this is an idea that Russell himself entertained at one definite stage of his philosophical development. In his 1903 *Principles of Mathematics*, Russell writes in fact:

Being is that which belongs to every conceivable term, to every possible object of thought—in short to everything that can possibly occur in a proposition, *true or false* [...] Numbers, the Homeric gods, relations, chimeras and four-dimensional spaces all have being, for if they were not entities of a kind, we could make no

---

<sup>46</sup> I should further stress here that “the problem of participation”, which I have generally characterized as the problem of the relation between a material (spatiotemporal) order of reality and a formal (non-spatiotemporal) one, is a problem for Plato's theory of judgement in general, and *consequently* for his theory of *false* judgement. In effect, if we are to take the *Sophist* seriously, for a typical Platonic judgement to be possible, *whether true or false*, at least two conditions must be met: (i) we (human beings in space and time) need to be in a relation not only with objects in space and time, but also with mind-independent eternal forms; (ii) we need to be able to express by means of our judgements *that* some object in space and time (particular) falls under a mind-independent eternal form (universal). Both these conditions pose the “problem of participation”, to which, I have suggested, Plato had no satisfying final answer. But if so, Plato had no satisfying final answer to the problem of falsehood either (as I have also suggested above).

propositions about them. Thus being is a general attribute of everything, and to mention everything is to show that it is. (PoM, § 427; my emphasis)<sup>47</sup>

Clearly, at this stage of his career Russell wants to endorse a radical-variant relational solution to the problem of non-existence, which was already endorsed by Parmenides, and by which literally everything that is thinkable is. There is, however, also an important difference that separates Parmenides from the 1903 Russell. Following his own theoretical assumptions to their extreme logical conclusion, Parmenides seems to leave no space for falsehood at all. Russell, on the other hand, insists in the passage above on the importance of accounting for both true and false propositions. But how can one account for falsehood, if the objects mentioned (or seemingly mentioned) in true and false propositions alike must exist?

Already in his 1905 ‘On Denoting’, Russell implicitly acknowledges this problem, by abandoning the Parmenidean claim that to mention everything is to show that it is, in favour of the analysis of «the logical status of denoting phrases that denote nothing» (OD: 490), such as “The present King of France”. The idea is that, if one were to say “The present King of France is bald”, the *absence* of an object which is the present King of France will make the sentence false (ibid.). However, in this way the problem is merely postponed. In effect, the present King of France might not exist, and yet it seems that when we judge that he is bald, we must surely be judging *something* as opposed to nothing at all. Or so one wants intuitively to maintain. It is no surprise, then, that Russell’s view of propositions at this stage was such that propositions are *real* (mind-independent) entities, to which we are in relation whenever we think or judge something.<sup>48</sup> In other words, a proposition is the real object of any thought or judgement whatsoever, whether it be true or false (cf. NT1905: 492, 494). Yet once again, if this is so, how can one account for false judgements in the first place?

The problem starts to become clearer through the investigation of what Russell meant by “proposition” and “judgement”. According to Russell, a proposition is a real and fact-like complex entity, composed out of simpler real entities

---

<sup>47</sup> Compare also PoM, § 47.

<sup>48</sup> I here equate thought and judgement, as opposed to e.g. perception. Russell himself makes the distinction between thought and perception in OD (479), and between judgement and perception in NT1906 (47).

(terms or *constituents*), such as particulars and universals. For example, the proposition *Theaetetus flies* will have as its constituents *not* the words “Theaetetus” and “flies”, but rather Theaetetus himself (considered as sensible particular) and the universal *Flying* (see PoM, § 51). One would expect that, when I judge that *Theaetetus flies*, I am simply in a relation with Theaetetus and *Flying*, qua constituents of the proposition. And yet, as Peter Hylton has shown, at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the complex nature of a proposition could not play a decisive role in Russell’s account of judgement. This was for ideological reasons: given his revolt against idealism, and thereby against the synthesizing powers of the (Kantian kind of) mind, Russell had no way of accounting for the way in which constituents come together to form a proposition (Hylton 2005: 16-17). As a result, over the first years of the century, Russell simply «treats judgement [...] as a relation between a person and a proposition» (ibid.), the latter being considered as a single object (NT1910: 174). This is Russell’s so-called Dual Relation Theory of Judgement.

Now, Russell’s dual relation theory has a host of problems, first among which is its ambiguity with respect to three analytically distinguishable (though deeply interrelated) senses of the phrase “object of thought”: (1) what we think *about* (intentional object); (2) what we are related to in thought (*relatum*); (3) what we think, judge or assert (proposition).<sup>49</sup> To be fair, Russell *nearly* came to a satisfying distinction between (1) and (2) already at this stage, arguing that the notion of ‘about’ is different from that of ‘constituent’ (OMD: 328). Thus, my judgement that *Theaetetus flies* is about Theaetetus, and not about *Flying*, which

---

<sup>49</sup> The distinction between objects of thought as (1) what we think about and as (3) what we think (namely propositions) has been popularised by Prior (1971). While popular, the distinction should not however be taken as absolute: one might maintain that we may think *about propositions*, as we are doing, perhaps, through this article; cf. Crane (2001: 337). Only, as rightly noted by David Bell (1987: 38), it better not be that we *always* think about propositions or thoughts. «Clearly, not all thinking can be reflexive» (ibid.). While not equally popular, the distinction between objects of thought as (1) what we think about and as (2) *relata* of thought could turn out to be equally important. If I want an inexpensive burgundy, it is at least a defensible relational view that one of the *relata* of my thought, beyond burgundy, is the property ‘being inexpensive’. However, the object my desire is *about* is surely not a property: I want *a burgundy* (of a certain kind, etc.), not a property (this example is taken from Crane (2013: 12) and suitably modified for my purposes here). In my view, the distinction between (1) and (2) is especially important for Russellian accounts of false judgement, since a Russellian could coherently maintain that, in judging falsely that *the present King of France is bald*, I must be related to the property ‘being King of France’, without thereby maintaining that my judgement is *about* that property. Indeed, no properties can have or lack hair!

latter is still however a constituent of the proposition (as is Theaetetus). Since, however, for Russell at this stage, whenever I judge I am in a relation with a proposition treated as a single object, then the fact that, in judging or asserting a proposition, I must be related to the constituents of the proposition—in our example, the fact that I must be related to Theaetetus and *Flying* in judging that *Theaetetus flies*—becomes hardly distinguishable from the fact that I entertain or judge the proposition itself. Put otherwise, Russell does not demarcate sharply between (2) and (3). This may be the source of a pernicious confusion, as Russell ended up believing that, in judging or asserting propositions, we “assert” complex and real objects of thought, namely the propositions themselves. But if, in asserting a proposition, we “assert a complex object”, and this complex object is treated as a single real thing, then we must “assert” the component parts of that complex object too.<sup>50</sup> In which case, in judging or asserting that *Mont Blanc is 4000 meters high*, I would be asserting Mont Blanc itself!<sup>51</sup>

But by far the greatest problem of Russell’s dual relation theory of judgement is that it makes falsehood both incredible and inexplicable. Incredible, for if a false judgement is a relation between a person and a real proposition, then there must exist somewhere (perhaps in a Platonic heaven) propositions which may be described as objective falsehoods—objective non-facts, such as the non-fact that Theaetetus flies. Inexplicable, for if true judgements as well must be relations between a person and a real proposition, then one cannot make sense of the difference between a true judgement and a false one, and thereby he is condemned to admit that truth and falsehood are ultimate qualities belonging

---

<sup>50</sup> Compare Russell’s letter to Frege, in which, in reply to Frege’s belief that «Mont Blanc with its snowfields is not itself a component part of the thought that Mont Blanc is more than 4000 metres high» (1980: 163), Russell wrote: «I believe that in spite of all its snowfields, Mont Blanc is itself a component part of what is actually asserted in the sentence [Satz] ‘Mont Blanc is more than 4000 metres high’. We do not assert the thought [Gedanke], for this is a private psychological matter: we assert the object of thought, and this is, to my mind, a certain complex (an objective proposition, one might say) in which Mont Blanc is itself a component part. If we do not admit this, then we get the conclusion that we know nothing at all about Mont Blanc [itself]» (Frege 1980: 169; translation slightly emended). For a discussion of this letter, see also Glock (2013: 246–7).

<sup>51</sup> Notice that this is a confusion not only of (2) and (3), but also of (1) and (3), since, assuming a relational theory of judgement, Mont Blanc is not only an object to which I should be related in judging that *Mont Blanc is 4000 meters high*, but it also happens to be that which I think about in judging this.

to the object of judgement (proposition), indeed qualities for which we can give no account at all (cf. NT1906: 48).

Retrospectively, Russell understood that the dual relation view of judgement is untenable exactly for these reasons, which are masterly laid down in the revised version of his 1906 essay 'On the Nature of Truth', appeared in 1910. "Un-tenable", however, should not mean "illogical". In the revised version of his essay, Russell is in fact adamant: the fact that the dual relation view compels us to admit objective falsehoods (mind-independent false propositions) in our ontology does not make that very view logically impossible (NT1910: 176). Rather, the dual relation view should be opposed since it is not theoretically virtuous, and indeed since it runs against our feeling for reality,<sup>52</sup> upon which so much of our daily lives is based. Once again, alongside theoretical reasons, we have a theory that should be refuted also on pragmatic grounds.

If the dual-relation view of judgement is untenable, and if one does not want to commit to the paradoxical view that false judgements have no object whatsoever, then how can she account for falsehood? Russell's answer to this question is pretty much straightforward: «We must therefore abandon the view that judgements consist in a relation to a single object» (NT1910: 177), and embrace the view that whenever we judge, either truly or falsely, we must be in a relation with a multiplicity of items, namely those items that Russell had called the *constituents* of the proposition. This is the essence of Russell's so-called Multiple Relation Theory of Judgement.

The move from the dual relation view of judgement to the multiple relation one is perhaps best described as the last step in Russell's departure from a radical-variant relational solution to the problem of non-existence, in the direction of a full endorsement of a moderate one (the first step being the rejection of his 1903 stance, by which any grammatically correct subject pointed to the being of a corresponding real object). Indeed, this move prompted the abandonment of Russell's earlier exotic metaphysics of propositions (propositions now being described as the *unreal* meanings expressed by judgements<sup>53</sup>), in favour of

---

<sup>52</sup> «[W]e feel that there could be no falsehood if there were no minds to make mistakes» (NT1910: 176; my emphasis).

<sup>53</sup> ToK: 108-9.

a *metaphysics of facts*<sup>54</sup> (facts being what Russell had previously called true propositions<sup>55</sup>).

Russell's first formulation of his new theory of judgement clearly lets us see the transition from claims about the being of true and false propositions, to the analysis in terms of the beings which *can* make up facts in the world, such as particulars and universals:

When we judge [truly] that Charles I died on the scaffold, we have before us, not one object, but several objects, namely, Charles I and dying and the scaffold. Similarly, when we judge [falsely] that Charles I died in his bed, we have before us the objects Charles I, dying, and his bed. These objects are not fictions: they are just as good as the objects of the true judgment. (NT1910: 177)

It is plausible to interpret Russell as saying the following: Charles I, dying, and his bed are objects in the world that might have been combined in such a way as to produce the fact that Charles I died in his bed. That this combination did not actually exist or obtain (indeed, Charles I died on the scaffold) does not mean that we cannot represent “it”<sup>56</sup> through the false judgement “Charles I died in his bed”. It will be sufficient to have before our minds the aforementioned objects, so that we can combine them in a mental act of judgement.

Roughly speaking, Russell calls this being presented with – or being directly *related* to – objects “acquaintance” (KAKD: 108), and thus he endorses the general principle that in order to entertain or understand a thought/proposition, a thinking subject must be acquainted with the objects named in the

---

<sup>54</sup> Cf. Ricketts (2002: 232).

<sup>55</sup> NT1906: 48.

<sup>56</sup> One must here suppress the illusion that behind the “it” there *must* be a logically possible state of affairs (i.e. that Charles I died in his bed), which is shy of existence, but which nonetheless has some kind of being. While Russell talks of logically possible complexes, he is also clear that «the notion of what is ‘logically possible’ is not an ultimate one, and must be reduced to something that is *actual*» (ToK: 111). As I interpret Russell, this means that non-existing complexes (e.g. that Charles I died in his bed) are ultimately to be reduced to existing entities. What this “reduction” amounts to Russell does not say. It is plausible – as conjectured by Sanford Shieh (2019: 394) – that Russell would have analysed *possibilia* as logical constructions. That said, it does not follow that for Russell we are automatically authorized to infer that there are *no* such logically possible states of affairs (here the parallel is with objective falsehoods, which, as we have seen, Russell did not rule out as logically impossible). Rather, I take it that Russell's point would be that there are no advantages in countenancing them in our ontology (insofar as they can be reduced to actual entities), but only disadvantages (such as the accumulation metaphysical lumber). This is essentially connected with Russell's employment of Ockham's razor, on which see Levine (2018).

judgement expressing the thought/proposition (cf. Levine 2013: 179–180). Importantly, Russell’s new view also brings back a synthesizing (Kantian) element that was earlier avoided for ideological reasons: it is in fact the mind that, in an act of judgement, knits together in a unitary judgemental complex the objects with which it is acquainted at a given moment (PoP: 73–4; see also NT1910: 178). A judgement will then be true if there is a corresponding unitary complex in reality (fact), independently of the judgement itself; false, if there is no such unitary complex in reality (PoP: 74). For example, “Charles I died on the scaffold” is true since Charles I indeed died on the scaffold; “Charles I died in his bed” is false because of the lack of the corresponding fact.

Soon enough, however, Russell realized that this view needed refinement in order to satisfyingly account for falsehood (without slipping into idealism). Given that Theaetetus does not fly, and since for a realist like Russell no amount of thinking and synthesizing could unite Theaetetus and *Flying* in reality, then to unite these elements in judgement we must at least know *how* they are supposed to be combined<sup>57</sup>—how they would have to be combined in reality if the proposition “Theaetetus is flying” were true. This problem – that José Zalabardo dubbed the *mode-of-combination problem*<sup>58</sup> – was addressed by Russell through the introduction of further objects of acquaintance *beyond* constituents such as particulars and universals—objects of a «logical acquaintance» or experience, that are required to understand any empirical proposition whatsoever, and that Russell called *forms*. (I stress the word “beyond” here, since a form cannot be a further propositional constituent. For if it were, *how* would this constituent be linked to the others? Another form would be needed, for which however the same problem would arise, and so on *ad infinitum*.<sup>59</sup>)

We can describe forms, Russell believed, as the result of the outmost generalization of empirical propositions (ToK: 97–98). For example, the outmost generalization of “Theaetetus is flying” yields “x is  $\alpha$ ”, namely the form of all subject-predicate complexes. The outmost generalization of “Plato loves Parmenides” will instead yield “x  $\varepsilon$  y”, i.e. the form of all binary complexes (cf. ToK: 98). Yet forms are not only logical fictions or abstractions: they are *something*, if it is

---

<sup>57</sup> ToK: 116.

<sup>58</sup> Zalabardo (2015: 27).

<sup>59</sup> See ToK: 98.

true that we are acquainted with them.<sup>60</sup> If we ask “What are forms, then?”, Russell’s clearest answer is that they are facts of a peculiar kind: *logical facts*, or else absolutely general facts (ToK: 5 and 129). Indeed, according to Russell, we should call a form «the fact that there are entities that make up complexes having the form in question» (ToK: 114).<sup>61</sup> This way, the subject–predicate form is none other than the logical fact «something has some predicate» (ibid.); the binary–complex form is none other than the logical fact «something has some relation to something [else]» (ibid.). These logical facts, Russell believes, we know as self-evident truths about the world (cf. ToK: 132).

At this point, we are ready to turn to Wittgenstein.

#### 4. Wittgenstein

In 1981, Bernard Williams suggested that «Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus*, a metaphysical work comparable in both boldness and abstractness to Parmenides’ [poem], takes its start from a question which implies the converse of Parmenides’ principle: ‘How can we say what is not?’» (2006: 19). For her part, Elizabeth Anscombe – after having substantiated Williams’ words, and intentionally echoing those of Alfred Whitehead on Plato – concluded that there is a narrow sense in which «philosophy is footnotes on Parmenides» (1981: xi). If this is so, surely Russell had many footnotes to add to our philosophical narrative. Not by chance, “How can we say what is not?” is a question that Wittgenstein directly inherits from Russell’s theories of judgement, especially the multiple relation theory presented in the 1913 manuscript *Theory of Knowledge* (namely, the one involving forms). Famously, however, Wittgenstein harshly criticized Russell’s multiple relation theory, committing our second philosophical patricide.

Unluckily, the nature and target of Wittgenstein’s objections to Russell’s (1913) multiple relation theory is itself much disputed. Indeed, there is a copious literature on them. While it would take another essay to discuss even a fraction of it in some depth here, I should at least remark what follows. *Roughly speaking*, interpreters tend to divide into two main camps: those who believe that Witt-

---

<sup>60</sup> «Whatever we are acquainted with must be something» (PoP: 69).

<sup>61</sup> As Russell immediately recognizes, «this sounds circular» (ToK: 114). However, he also adds that «what is intended is not circular» (ibid.). I leave it to the reader to assess Russell’s claim.

Wittgenstein's objections were mainly targeted at Russell's theory of types; and those who believe that Wittgenstein's objections were mainly targeted at Russell's account of the unity of a judgement/proposition,<sup>62</sup> which is cashed out in terms of his (Russell's) forms.<sup>63</sup>

Now, I am inclined to side with the second camp, since it is arguable that the problem of the unity of the proposition—or: of the form(s) of the proposition<sup>64</sup>—is far more central in Wittgenstein's early philosophy than any criticism of Russell's theory of types.<sup>65</sup> Besides, in being concerned with the unity of the proposition, and thereby with forms, Russell was exactly concerned with the issue of the possibility of falsehood, which, as rightly noted by Williams and Anscombe, is definitive of Wittgenstein's early philosophy. In what follows, I will thus discuss some of Wittgenstein's objections to Russellian forms, and their relevance with respect to the paradox of falsehood. I will however do this by way of an unconventional route,<sup>66</sup> arguing that Russell had based the possibility of entertaining a judgement/proposition onto *contingent* facts. And this was completely unacceptable to Wittgenstein, for whom logic was rigorously *a priori*.

To see this, we need to take a brief step back. As we have seen in the last section, according to Russell a judgement or proposition – whether true or false – had to be synthesized by the mind in accordance to a certain *form* or mode of combination, such as the subject-predicate form or the relational form. Forms were objects of a “logical acquaintance”, though not propositional constituents, characterized by Russell as logical (general) facts, such as the fact that some-

---

<sup>62</sup> Representatives of the first “camp” are for example Somerville (1980) and Griffin (e.g. 1985/6), whereas representatives of the second one are for example Hanks (2007) and Zalabardo (2013 and 2018). However, keep in mind that talk of “camps” in this context is just meant as a rough approximation. In fact, as noted by Michael Beaney (2009: 458), there might be disputes within each “camp”, and there might be authors that do not readily fall into one “camp” or the other.

<sup>63</sup> See Zalabardo (2018).

<sup>64</sup> I cannot resist a cursory reference to Kant, who had called the forms of judgements “functions of unity” in his first *Critique* (A69/B94). For some parallelisms between Kant and the early Wittgenstein, see below.

<sup>65</sup> For a brilliant account of the centrality of the problem of the unity of judgement in Wittgenstein (and Kant, and Frege) see Bell (1979), Introduction and Ch. 4, §§ 7-8. Significantly, Bell also argues that the problem of the unity of judgement makes its first appearance in Plato's *Sophist* (1979: 8).

<sup>66</sup> That is also because the relationship between Wittgenstein's interests in the unity of the proposition, Russellian forms, and falsehood, has already been recognized and discussed in the literature on Wittgenstein's objections to Russell's multiple relation theory; see e.g. Zalabardo (2013). Here, I wish to discuss it under a different light.

thing has some relation to something else. Russell considered the existence of such logical facts as a self-evident truth, and maintained that, in order to produce or understand any empirical judgement at all, we must be acquainted with them. Now, Wittgenstein's first attack is exactly directed at Russell's notion of self-evidence here. As he writes in his wartime *Notebooks*:

Does the subject-predicate form exist? Does the relational form exist? Do any of the forms exist at all that Russell and I were always thinking about? (Russell would say: "Yes! That's self-evident." Well!). (NB, 3.9.14)

If the existence of the subject-predicate *sentence* does not show everything needful, then it could surely only be shewn by the existence of some particular fact of that form. And acquaintance with such a fact cannot be essential for logic. (NB, 4.9.14)

Wittgenstein came to see that a Russellian form – that Russell himself conceived of as a general fact necessary to understand propositions – always presupposes the existence of a particular fact of that form. Thus, Russell's relational form, namely 'something has some relation to something else' presupposes that, well, something (say, *a*) does have a relation to something else (say, *b*). Yet this is clearly contingent, as we might imagine for theoretical purposes a world in which there obtains only one fact, and that the fact in question contains only one particular, instead of two (say, there obtains only *Fa*, as opposed to *aRb*). Indeed, how many objects are actually combined in which and how many facts would seem to be a matter of empirical investigation. And why should this matter to logic? Surely logic – which among other things deals with the *possibility* of our entertaining and understanding propositions – cannot be based on experience, Wittgenstein will write in his *Tractatus* echoing Kant. Least of all, a Russellian logical experience concerning something being the case:

The "experience" that we need in order to understand logic is not that something or other is the state of things, but that something is: that, however, is not an experience.

Logic is prior to every experience—that something is so.

It is prior to the question "How?", not prior to the question "What?". (T, 5.552)

## SYNTHESIS

How the world is – how many objects are actually combined in which and how many facts – is for Wittgenstein completely contingent, a matter of experience.<sup>67</sup> *That* the world is – that there are objects that can and do combine into facts – this is not contingent, but rather known a priori.<sup>68</sup> For otherwise there would be nothing at all, not even logic (cf. WWK: 77). But now *what* are “objects” for Wittgenstein? And what is their role with respect to the paradox of falsehood and non-being?

Let us proceed with order. Following his critiques to Russell, Wittgenstein had a problem, the formulation of which is important for our purposes:

This is the difficulty: How can there be such a thing as the form [of the proposition] p if there is no situation of this form? And in that case, what does this form really consist in? (NB, 29.10.14)

The difficulty is one we have already presented: Wittgenstein wanted a proposition to have sense independently of there being facts possessing the same form of the proposition, for otherwise logic would be contingent. In other words, Wittgenstein thought, a proposition must have logical form – it must be possible for it to make sense – independently of *how* things stand in the world. In effect, if I utter the proposition “my lamp is on the table”, it seems that it possesses a sense irrespective of whether my lamp is actually on the table, or for that of whether *a* is on *b*. That is: the proposition can be understood, and indeed represents a situation «as it were, off its own bat» (NB, 5.11.14). The question then becomes: How is this possible? How can a proposition have logical form independently of how things stand in the world? And «what does this form really consist in?»

The solution to these problems exactly lies in Wittgenstein’s notion of “object”. Russell had argued for a Platonic theory of forms, since forms (*modes of combination*) were real objects of acquaintance for him, but they were not possible constituents of facts (such as particulars), nor were they made out of or integrated into constituents; thereby, Russellian forms had to exist in some platonic heaven, ready to be “logically experienced” (whatever that may mean).

---

<sup>67</sup> This means that for Wittgenstein there is no such thing as Kripke’s (1980) “necessary a posteriori”.

<sup>68</sup> For the view that Wittgenstein’s “objects” are known a priori, see Levine (2013: 192).

This, however, had brought Russell straight back to the problem of participation. For how could he justify the connection between forms and the spatiotemporal world, without simply assuming it to be self-evident? As argued by David Pears, Wittgenstein was well aware of the problem, and opted for an Aristotelian solution instead: incorporating forms into his “objects”, qua their *possibilities of combination* with each other in states of affairs (Pears 1977: 187–8). «A state of affairs», Wittgenstein writes in fact, «is a combination of objects» or things (T, 2.01), and «it is essential to things that they should be possible constituents of states of affairs» (T, 2.011). More precisely, every object has its own combinatorial possibilities – spatial, temporal, chromatic<sup>69</sup> – in states of affairs written into itself, as its essential features (T, 2.012 and 2.0123). What objects are, however, Wittgenstein does not specifically say, rather relegating the question of the *What* to the horizon of the mystical or ineffable (see T, 3.221 and 6.522).

One might maintain that Wittgenstein is simply elusive here. This might be true. However, I also think there is a sense in which “What is a Wittgensteinian object?” is the wrong question to start with. True, at a certain stage, Wittgenstein supposed that particulars as well as universals count as objects (NB, 16.6.1915). Yet by the time of the *Tractatus* objects are *not* self-standing entities like Russellian particulars and universals<sup>70</sup>: they are rather incomplete or unsaturated—essentially in need of each other.<sup>71</sup> For this reason, if one wants to get a sense of Tractarian objects, and of the role they play in solving such problems as the one of falsehood, she should focus first on their combinatorial potentials, i.e. forms. Or rather she should consider objects under a formal respect (as opposed to a material one), as bearers of combinatorial *possibilities* (independently of the combinations/configurations of objects that happen then to

---

<sup>69</sup> See T, 2.0251.

<sup>70</sup> Russell explicitly writes that particulars are self-standing (PLA: 525). While he does not say so explicitly for universals – possibly since acquaintance with at least some universals is parasitic upon acquaintance with particulars – he does say that particulars are not components of universals, and that the particular/universal distinction is exhaustive, i.e. that which is not a particular is a universal (KAKD: 112). From this, we can more or less safely assume that Russellian universals are self-standing entities as well.

<sup>71</sup> Famously, Frege entertained a similar thought before Wittgenstein, only *not* with respect to objects, which like Russell he thought are self-standing, but rather to concepts; see Frege (1971: 34, fn. 13).

## SYNTHESIS

materially obtain in reality).<sup>72</sup> We might call objects, qua bearers of combinatorial possibilities, *formal objects*. After all, Wittgenstein himself talks of the «shifting use of the world “object”» (T, 4.123), and he is adamant that objects constitute the unalterable *form* of every thinkable or logically possible world, including the actual one (T, 2.022–3).

This last consideration is especially important for us. Famously, Wittgenstein also expresses it thus:

Objects are what is unalterable and subsistent; their configuration is what is changing and unstable. (T, 2.0271)

The idea is this: what can change from world to world are not objects or their possible combinations in states of affairs, but rather their *actual* configurations in states of affairs (which are contingent). Indeed, for Wittgenstein, the formal objects there are in the actual world are quite the same formal objects there are in every thinkable or possible world. Brian Skyrms calls this a fixed-domain account of possible worlds, meaning that objects are necessary existents. (1981: 199 and 201). Williamson would call this a form of necessitism. However, the necessity by which formal objects exist unalterably in every possible world is not metaphysical. In fact, Wittgenstein clearly stresses that «[t]he only necessity that exists is *logical* necessity» (T, 6.37). And since, as he writes, «Logic is transcendental» (T, 6.13), we are hereby dealing with a transcendental necessity—the kind of necessity, that is, that pertains to a priori conditions of the possibility of representation of the world. Only qua necessary conditions of the possibility of representation, then, objects should be able to account for the possibility of thinking or saying what is not.<sup>73</sup>

It would be impossible to fully present here Wittgenstein’s account of logico-linguistic representation, by which thoughts and propositions work as *pictures* of reality. Luckily for us, given our purposes, it will be sufficient to state the problem Wittgenstein wishes to address, and the main insight behind its so-

---

<sup>72</sup> Cf. T, 2.0231.

<sup>73</sup> The view that Wittgenstein’s objects are “transcendental” has been advanced, among others, by Stenius (1960: 223), Hintikka (1984: 453) and Borutti (2010: 132). Possibly, Frank Ramsey was the first to hold it, since he believed that, according to Wittgenstein, the Subject must be acquainted with objects in a “transcendental sense” (1991: 146).

lution. The problem, it seems to me, goes as follows. It is a given that we represent the world, and thereby that «we think about things – but how do these things enter into our thoughts?» (BB: 38). Wittgenstein’s strategy to solve this problem was both clever and elegant. He saw that in order to represent reality it is by no means necessary for objects to be materially contained into thoughts or propositions as their constituents, as Russell had once supposed. Rather, thought, language and reality had just to share the logical *form* of objects, or if you prefer *formal objects*.

This logical isomorphism between representation and reality is characterized by Wittgenstein in many ways, for example as a harmony between thought, language and reality, or indeed as a formal mirroring.<sup>74</sup> I believe the most interesting characterization, however, is exactly framed in terms of *containment*. Indeed, according to Wittgenstein «objects contain the possibility of all situations» under the guise of their forms (T, 2.014), and these very forms must be found into every legitimate thought or proposition, for «a thought contains the possibility of the situation of which it is the thought» (T, 3.02). The last remark, of course, will also apply to thoughts or propositions picturing situations that do not actually exist. That is why Wittgenstein can *retrospectively* write in his *Blue Book*:

Supposing we asked: “how can one imagine what does not exist?”. The answer seems to be “if we do, we imagine non-existent [i.e. merely possible] combinations of existing elements”. (BB: 54)<sup>75</sup>

Here, Wittgenstein is indicating that, at the time of the *Tractatus*, he believed that if we are to represent what is not, it is necessary that there be objects («existing elements»), whose forms pervade all thinkable worlds (cf. T, 2.022–23). In effect, Wittgenstein retrospectively suggests, it is these objects that can be *imagined* or *pictured* as combined in ways that do not actually exist («non-existent combinations»). But if we can indeed picture such non-existing combinations of objects, then not only we must be *related* to the existing objects which

---

<sup>74</sup> Cf. T, 4.121, as well as the retrospective PG § 95 and §112–3, and PI § 429.

<sup>75</sup> By the time of the *Blue Book*, Wittgenstein had long rejected the Tractarian solution to which he refers back in this passage (that is why I have stressed the word “retrospectively”). This, however, need not concern us here.

contain the possibilities of non-existent combinations (as well as of existing combinations), but our language must itself already *contain* these combinatorial possibilities. For only if language always already contained the forms of existing objects—in virtue of a *projective thought-relation* which correlates *a priori* linguistic signs to such objects<sup>76</sup>—it would be guaranteed that our propositions could act as *projections* or pictures of possible situations (see T, 3.11), including situations which do not exist. Thus, for example, the propositional sign “a b” could *represent* the possible situation by which object *a* is to the left of object *b*, even if there is no such existing situation in reality, because name “a” is related to object *a*, name “b” is related to object *b*, and name “a” can – and does – stand to the left of name “b” (cf. T, 4.0311).

It is therefore the fusion of a logico-transcendental necessitism with a logico-transcendental isomorphism between thought, language, and reality, that constitutes the early Wittgenstein’s moderate-variant relational solution to the problem of non-existence, and thereby to the paradox of falsehood and non-being.

### *Concluding Remarks*

In this paper I have discussed the problem of false thought or judgement – the paradox of falsehood and non-being – in the philosophies of Parmenides, Plato, Russell and the early Wittgenstein. I have construed a unifying narrative that brings together these four authors, insofar as, in addressing the paradox, they all appeal to a relational theory of intentionality. However, I have also distinguished between two general variants of this theory: a radical variant (Parmenides), and a moderate variant (Plato, Russell, early Wittgenstein). In agreement with Plato – and in a Russellian tone – I have argued that, while perhaps not logically impossible, Parmenides’ radical-variant account is pragmatically untenable. However, I have then argued in a Wittgensteinian tone – and somewhat inspired by Plato’s Parmenides – that both Plato and Russell’s moderate-variant accounts of false judgement are untenable too—though this time because of the metaphysical problem that goes under the name of “problem of

---

<sup>76</sup> T, 2.151ff and T, 3.11-3.

participation". In the last section, I have then presented some insights behind Wittgenstein's early account of judgement, arguing that his own moderate-variant account overcomes this *impasse* by means of a curious mixture of Aristotelianism (forms are immanent to objects) and Kantianism (objects are necessary conditions of the possibility of representation of the world, the forms of which language contains). In this way, I believe to have shown that the early Wittgenstein's account, while surely not exempt from difficulties, constitutes at least a viable relational solution to the paradox of falsehood and non-being.

I should however remind the reader that, at the beginning of the paper, I have remarked that the narrative above is one among many possible ones with respect to the paradox of falsehood and non-being, further stressing in § 1 that our four thinkers offer *one* type of solution (though coming in different variants) to the problem at the heart of the paradox, namely the problem of non-existence. Thus, I make no claim to completeness in the present work. In effect, a relational theory of intentionality is far from being the only possible way to go if one wants to address the paradox of falsehood and non-being. For one, the later Wittgenstein will abandon his commitment to (transcendentally) necessary objects, and his (Russell-inspired) view of truth and falsehood as agreement and disagreement between a proposition and a state of affairs, in favour of the view that it is the linguistic agreement or disagreement *among human beings* to establish the truth or falsehood of propositions. And this, Wittgenstein will write, is an «agreement in forms of life» (PI, § 241).

Perhaps even more importantly, there is a different tradition in Western thought – another narrative strand if you will – addressing the problem of non-existence through a *non*-relational theory of intentionality. In this theory, there is no need for the ultimate object(s) of thought to be existing entities (though some objects of thought will be correctly characterized as existing). Arguably, this theory of intentionality goes back *at least* to Kant,<sup>77</sup> according to whom the ultimate intentional object of all conscious representation is «the transcendental object = x», which is not an object in the real sense (Kant 2005: 245), but rather «a mere thought entity» (A565-6/B593-4), an ideal of reason, which we use as

---

<sup>77</sup> But it may stretch as far back as Aristotle. See Caston (1998: 261-6), who explicitly argues that Aristotle rejected a relational account of intentionality, by means of his theory of *phantasmata*.

## SYNTHESIS

pure correlate for our representations (see A250). Strong echoes of this theory are to be found in Husserl,<sup>78</sup> and indeed in Crane.<sup>79</sup>

That said, I rest content to have explored one narrative strand alone within the confines of this paper, and to have mentioned (or even just hinted at<sup>80</sup>) other ones, with the aim of exploring those, and their connection with the relational strand discussed here, in further work.<sup>81</sup>

---

<sup>78</sup> Cf. Husserl (1931: § 131). On the ideality of the object in Husserl, see Luft (2007: 381).

<sup>79</sup> Crane (2013). Cf. Jocelyn Benoist's review of Crane's book (2016: 7-8)

<sup>80</sup> I have cursorily appealed, in text and in footnote, to the views of authors such as Aristotle and Hegel, whose philosophies bear on the problem of falsehood. However, I have avoided to discuss them in any real depth, since that would have meant enlarging the paper to an almost unmanageable extent, and indeed since the already complex subject matter of the paper would have become much harder to survey with clarity. I rely here on the patience of the reader, who hopefully will understand that, given these circumstances, it could have been counterproductive to discuss at some length further authors and their views.

<sup>81</sup> I am grateful to Jim Levine, Andrea Sereni, Bruno Cortesi, Vasilis Politis, the audience of a work in progress seminar at the Trinity Plato Centre (Trinity College Dublin), as well as to two anonymous referees, for their instructive comments on previous drafts of this essay.

## References

### List of abbreviations

#### **Parmenides**

Fr. 'On Nature', in Palmer, J. (ed.), *Parmenides & Presocratic Philosophy*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2009.

#### **Plato**

(All dialogues below have been quoted from *Plato: Complete Works*, edited by Cooper, J. M., Indianapolis/Cambridge, Hackett Publishing Company, 1997.)

*Parmenides; Phaedrus; Sophist; Theaetetus.*

#### **Russell**

HWP *History of Western Philosophy*, London, Allen & Unwin, 1948.

NT1905 'The Nature of Truth', in *The Collected Papers of Bertrand Russell*. IV. London, George Allen & Unwin, 1994.

NT1906 'On the Nature of Truth', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 7, 1906, 28-49.

NT1910 'On the Nature of Truth and Falsehood', in *Philosophical Essays*, New York, Longmans, Green&Co., 1910.

KAKD 'Knowledge by Acquaintance and Knowledge by Description', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 11, 1910 - 1911, 108-128.

OD 'On Denoting', *Mind*, 14, 56, 1905, 479-493.

OMD 'On Meaning and Denotation', in *The Collected Papers of Bertrand Russell*. IV. London, George Allen & Unwin, 1994.

PLA 'The Philosophy of Logical Atomism', *The Monist*, 28, 4, 1918, 495-527.

PoM *Principles of Mathematics*, New York, W. W. Norton & Company, 1996.

## SYNTHESIS

PoP            *The Problems of Philosophy*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1998.

ToK            *Theory of Knowledge*, London, Allen & Unwin, 1984.

### **Wittgenstein**

BB            *The Blue and the Brown Books*, New York, Harper Collins, 1965.

NB            *Notebooks 1914–1916*, New York, Harper & Row, 1961.

PG            *Philosophical Grammar*, edited by Rhees, R., translation by Kenny, A., Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1974.

PI            *Philosophical Investigations*, English translation by Anscombe, G. E. M., Oxford, Basil Blackwell.

T            *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, translation by Pears, D. F. & McGuinness, B. F., London, Routledge, 1974.

WWK         *Wittgenstein and the Vienna Circle*, edited by McGuinness, B., Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1979.

### *Secondary Literature*

Allen, R. E., (1960), 'Participation and Predication in Plato's Middle Dialogues', *The Philosophical Review*, 69, 2, 147-164.

Anscombe, G. E. M., (1981), *From Parmenides to Wittgenstein*, Oxford, Blackwell.

Aristotle, (1971), *Metaphysics*, Oxford, Clarendon Press.

Armstrong, D. M., (1993), 'A World of States of Affairs', *Philosophical Perspectives*, 7, 429-440.

Beaney, M., (2009) 'Russell and Wittgenstein on the Nature of Judgement: Book Review', *Mind*, 118, 470, 453-459.

Bell, D., (1979), *Frege's Theory of Judgement*, Oxford, Clarendon Press.

Bell, D., (1987), 'Thoughts', *Notre Dame Journal of Formal Logic*, 28, 1, 36-50.

Benoist, J., (2007), 'Two (or Three) Conceptions of Intentionality', *Tijdschrift voor Filosofie*, 69, 1, 79-103.

- Benoist, J., (2016), 'The Objects of Thought by Tim Crane. Book Review', *European Journal of Philosophy*, 24, 4, 1-8.
- Berto, F., (2010), *L'esistenza non è logica*, Roma-Bari, Laterza.
- Berto, F., (2012), *Existence as a Real Property*, Dordrecht, Springer.
- Blanchette, O., (1991), "Are There Two Questions of Being?", *The Review of Metaphysics*, 45, 2, 259-287.
- Borutti, S., (2010), *Leggere il Tractatus logico-philosophicus di Wittgenstein*, Como, Ibis.
- Burnyeat, M., (1982), 'Idealism and Greek Philosophy: What Descartes Saw and Berkeley Missed', *The Philosophical Review*, 91, 1, 3-40.
- Castagnoli, L., (2010), *Ancient Self-Refutation*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Caston, V., (1998), 'Aristotle and the Problem of Intentionality', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, LVIII, 2, 249-298.
- Crane, T., (2001), 'Intentional Objects', *Ratio*, XIV, 336-349.
- Crane, T., (2013), *The Objects of Thought*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- Crivelli, P., (2012) *Plato's Account of Falsehood*, Cambridge, CUP.
- Denyer, N., (1991), *Language, Thought and Falsehood in Ancient Greek Philosophy*, London & New York, Routledge.
- Frege, G., (1971), 'On the Foundations of Geometry', in *On the Foundations of Geometry and Formal Theories of Arithmetic*. New Heaven & London, Yale University Press.
- Frege, G., (1980), *Philosophical and Mathematical Correspondence*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell.
- Furth, M., (1968), 'Elements of Eleatic Ontology', *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 6, 2, 111-132.
- Gallop, D., (1984), *Parmenides of Elea*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press.

## SYNTHESIS

Glock, H. J., (2013), 'Judgement and Truth in the Early Wittgenstein', in *Judgement and Truth in Early Analytic Philosophy and Phenomenology*, London, Palgrave MacMillan.

Grayling, A. C., (2014) *An Introduction to Philosophical Logic*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, Oxford, Blackwell.

Griffin, N., (1985/6), 'Wittgenstein's Criticism of Russell's Theory of Judgement', *Russell*, 5, 132-145.

Hanks, P., (2007), 'How Wittgenstein Defeated Russell's Multiple Relation Theory of Judgement', *Synthese*, 154, 1, 121-146.

Harte, V., (2008), 'Plato's Metaphysics', in *The Oxford Handbook of Plato*, Oxford, OUP.

Hegel, G. W. F., (1977), *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Hegel, G. W. F., (1995), *Lectures on the History of Philosophy. Vol. I: Greek Philosophy to Plato*, Lincoln and London, University of Nebraska Press.

Hintikka, J., (1984), 'Are There Non-Existent Objects', *Synthese*, 60, 3, 451-458.

Husserl, E., (1931), *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*, English Translation by W. R. Boyce Gibson, London, George Allen & Unwin.

Hylton, P., (2005), 'The Nature of the Proposition and the Revolt Against Idealism', in *Propositions, Functions, and Analysis*, Oxford, Clarendon Press.

Kahn, C. H., (1966), 'The Greek Verb 'To Be' and the Concept of Being', *Foundations of Language*, 2, 3, 245-265.

Kahn, C. H., (2007), 'Why is the Sophist a Sequel to the *Theaetetus*?', *Phronesis*, 52, 33-57.

Kant, I., (1998), *Critique of Pure Reason*, edited by P. Guyer and A. Wood, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press. Abbreviated in text as 'A/B'.

Kant, I., (2005), *Notes and Fragments*, edited by P. Guyer, Cambridge, CUP.

Kripke, S., (1980) *Naming and Necessity*, Cambridge (MA), Harvard University Press.

Levine, J., (2013), 'Logic and Solipsism', in Potter, M. & Sullivan, P. (eds.), *Wittgenstein's Tractatus: History and Interpretation*, Oxford, OUP.

Levine, J., (2018), 'Russell and Wittgenstein on Occam's Razor', in *The Philosophy of Logical Atomism: a Centenary Reappraisal*, London, Palgrave MacMillan.

Luft, S., (2007), 'From Being to Givenness and Back: Some Remarks on the Meaning of Transcendental Idealism in Kant and Husserl', *International Journal of Philosophical Studies*, 15, 3, 367-394.

Łukasiewicz, J., (1971), 'On the Principle of Contradiction in Aristotle', *The Review of Metaphysics*, 24, 3, 485-509.

Łukasiewicz, J., (1987), 'On the Principle of the Excluded Middle', *History and Philosophy of Logic*, 8, 1, 67-69.

Mourelatos, A., (1969), 'Comments on "The Thesis of Parmenides"', *The Review of Metaphysics*, 22, 4, 735-744.

Owen, G. E. L., (1966), 'Eleatic Questions', *The Classical Quarterly*, 10, 1, 84-102.

Palmer, J., (1999), *Plato's Reception of Parmenides*, Oxford, OUP.

Palmer, J., (2009), *Parmenides & Presocratic Philosophy*, Oxford, OUP.

Pears, D., (1977), 'The Relation between Wittgenstein's Picture Theory of Propositions and Russell's Theories of Judgment', *The Philosophical Review*, 86, 2, 177-196.

Politis, V., (2021), *Plato's Essentialism*, Cambridge, CUP.

Prior, A., (1971), *Objects of Thought*, Oxford, OUP.

Quine, W. V., (1948), 'On What There Is', *The Review of Metaphysics*, 2, 5, 21-38.

Ramsey, F. P. (1991), *Notes on Philosophy, Probability and Mathematics*, Napoli, Bibliopolis.

Ricketts, T., (2002), 'Wittgenstein against Frege and Russell', in E. H. Reck (ed.), *Perspectives on Early Analytic Philosophy*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Severino, E., (1964), 'Ritornare a Parmenide', *Rivista di Filosofia Neo-Scolastica*, 56, 2.

## SYNTHESIS

Shieh, S., (2019), *Necessity Lost*, Volume I, Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Skyrms, B., (1981), 'Tractarian Nominalism', *Philosophical Studies*, 40, 2, 199-206.

Somerville, S., (1980) 'Wittgenstein to Russell (July 1913)', in *Language, Logic, and Philosophy*, Vienna, Hölder- Pichler- Tempisky.

Stenius, E., (1960), *Wittgenstein's Tractatus*, Oxford, Blackwell.

Varzi, A., (2011), 'On Doing Ontology Without Metaphysics', *Philosophical Perspectives*, 25, 407-423.

Williams, B., (2006), 'The Legacy of Greek Philosophy', in *The Sense of the Past*. Princeton, Princeton University Press.

Williamson, T., (2013), *Modal Logic as Metaphysics*, Oxford, OUP.

Zalabardo, J., (2015), *Representation and Reality in Wittgenstein's Tractatus*. Oxford, OUP.

Zalabardo, J., (2018) 'The Tractatus on Unity', *Australasian Philosophical Review*, 2, 3, 250-271.