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The “Ontological Difference” Again. A Dialetheic Perspective on Heidegger’s Mainstay

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Abstract: This paper intends to offer a new assessment of the “Ontological Difference” (OD), one of Martin Heidegger’s mainstays, in the light of the metaphysical view called “dialetheism”. In the first paragraph I briefly summarize the main argument of Heidegger’s contradiction of Being, where OD is present as a premise. In the second paragraph I introduce dialetheism, indicate two kinds of dialetheic solutions to the paradox and explain why they face comeback troubles from OD. The third paragraph is devoted to a review of Heidegger’s uses of OD and underlines the crucial role of negation in it. In the fourth paragraph I investigate the philosopher’s account of negation and show similarities with the account provided by the paraconsistent logic called “Logic of Paradox”. The fifth paragraph puts forward two possible readings of OD, the first based on the classical notion of negation and the second on the notion of negation pointed out in the previous paragraph. The second reading is proved suitable for dialetheists and in accordance with the exegesis of some textual passages from Heidegger’s late works.

Keywords: Martin Heidegger, ontological difference, dialetheism, Logic of Paradox

1 Introduction

Analytic philosophy’s adjudication to set aside old hates and resentments and to establish contact with Martin Heidegger’s philosophy is quite a recent phenomenon in the philosophical literature¹. Casati and Wheeler² have shown examples of this productive engagement in the fields of metaphysics and philosophy of mind. The topic of this paper intrudes on the former.

Some philosophers agree that Heidegger’s attempt to “work out the question of Being”³ led him to confront a paradox⁴, which compelled the Heideggerian project to fall prey of contradiction(s) – proved insurmountable within his philosophical framework: among them, Dahlstrom⁵, Witherspoon⁶, Priest⁷,

¹ For a recap of the critical reception of Heidegger’s thought in the analytic tradition, see Braver, “Analyzing Heidegger: A history of analytic reactions to Heidegger.”

² Casati and Wheeler, “The Recent Engagement Between Analytic Philosophy and Heideggerian Thought: Metaphysics and Mind.”

³ GA 2, 19. Works by Heidegger are quoted in the text by GA (Gesamtausgabe) *number of volume*, page. For instance, GA 2, 25 indicates Gesamtausgabe 2 [“Being and Time”], page 25. The page refers to the English translation or to the German original in case of translation by the author.

⁴ Some other interpreters deny the existence of such a paradox. Among them, Dreyfus, Wrathall, Livingston, Käufer and Schear.

⁵ Dahlstrom, “Heidegger’s method: philosophical concepts as formal indications”; “Thematization, Mediation, and the Formal Indication: Between Poetry and Theology.”

⁶ Witherspoon, “Logic and the Inexpressible in Frege and Heidegger.”

⁷ Priest, “Heidegger and the grammar of being”; “Sein language.”

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Moore⁸ and Casati⁹. Even though in slightly different terms, they have put the emphasis on the existence of a paradox, at least involving language. It is possible to roughly summarize their stances in the following argument¹⁰:

- 1) Being is not an entity
- 2) Everything we speak about is an entity
- 3) We speak about Being
- 4) Being is an entity

∴ Therefore, Being is not an entity and Being is an entity (⊥)

Premise 1) is motivated by one of the theoretical cornerstones of Heidegger's thought, naming the 'Ontological Difference' (OD). OD states the distinction between Being and entities, according to which Being, "that which determines entities as entities"¹¹, is not an entity itself. It is not clear whether Heidegger has treated OD as an axiom or has ever concluded it on the basis of an argument, but I will not deal here with such a question. Nevertheless, I will return on OD later. Premise 2) encapsulates Heidegger's account of assertion. He presumably believed that each assertion presupposes the entity it is about. However, not all the interpreters consent and the matter is controversial. I think that ascribing to Heidegger this account of assertion is wholly fair and consistent. Anyway, I will not take an issue with the justification of premise 2) in this paper and I definitely accommodate it. Premise 3) expresses the phenomenological evidence that we *do* speak about Being, that Heidegger *does* make assertions on Being. The intermediate step 4) obtains from 2) and 3). From these premises, it validly follows that Being is not an entity and is an entity. Contradiction.

2 The dialetheic solutions

Interpreters have seen different solutions provided by Heidegger or have provided solutions themselves, showing what the philosopher should have done in order to manage the paradox. For a reconstruction of the main arguments, see Casati¹².

Among the possible solutions to the paradox, I am personally sympathetic with the dialetheic solutions. *Dialetheism* is the metaphysical theory claiming that some (but not all) contradictions are true. A *dialetheia* is a proposition, A, such that both it and its negation, ¬A, are true. The contradiction involving Being described above – to which I will hereinafter refer with the name of *contradiction of Being* – would be one of these true contradictions and, therefore, a dialetheia.

At this stage I would rather stall and enter into details about the dialetheic solutions. Indeed, it could be helpful to distinguish two kinds or ways of solution, which I call the (α) *prescriptive* way and the (β) *descriptive* way. Let have a look at them:

(α) the *prescriptive* way. Dialetheic solutions that can be gathered under this kind address Heidegger's contradiction of Being by holding what the philosopher *should* have done to handle it. According to this kind of solutions, Heidegger was conclusively stuck into that paradox and has envisioned a possible answer in abandoning metaphysics and its language. As is well known, the philosopher has made forays in non-representative or non-objectifying languages like art and poetry, in order to undermine (or give

⁸ Moore, "The Evolution of Modern Metaphysics: Making Sense of Things," 459-492.

⁹ Casati, "Heidegger and The Contradiction of Being."

¹⁰ I owe this argument to Casati "Heidegger and The Contradiction of Being." I do believe that all mentioned authors would be fine with this reconstruction, although their differences.

¹¹ GA 2, 25.

¹² Casati, "Heidegger and The Contradiction of Being."

up) premise 2)¹³. Prescriptive solutions offer possible way-outs to linger on Heidegger’s metaphysical language and manage such a contradiction. Examples of the prescriptive way are Priest¹⁴ and Casati¹⁵.

(β) the *descriptive* way. Descriptive dialetheic solutions try to show – with all due caution – that Heidegger purported a solution for the contradiction of Being, such that it winks at dialetheic stances. For instance, Casati and Priest¹⁶ have argued that there is some textual evidence¹⁷ which suggests that the philosopher has considered the possibility to reject the Principle of Non-Contradiction and to accept true contradiction(s) about Being¹⁸.

If one accepts a dialetheic solution, regardless of the way he intends to go through, a further problem arises. Given that Being both is and is not an entity, the dialetheic solution challenges the premise 1) of the argument above, *scilicet* the Ontological Difference. As a matter of fact, in a dialetheic framework, Being is surely not an entity, likewise *it is an entity*, and this violates the claim of OD, according to which Being is not an entity itself. Since OD is throughout present and never doubted in Heidegger’s *Gesamtausgabe*, it would amount to a pivotal notion within his thought and, by consequence, hard to reject.

Opponents of dialetheic solutions will then have the chance to object. I will argue that they do not. In order to make my point, a more accurate examination of OD is required.

3 Entering the Ontological Difference

A meticulous inspection of the several occurrences of “*ontologische Differenz*” in Heidegger’s works brings to light two main meanings which he ascribed to the lemma, fundamentally interwoven and at the bottom of numerous corollaries. I will examine them in turn, together with their paramount consequences.

(A) *Meta-ontological claim* (MOC): OD is the distinction between Being and beings¹⁹.

(MOC) expresses the traditionally overworked idea that Being “is” something different from beings. Since Being “is” what determines beings as beings, it must not be a being itself (in order to avoid the infinite regress). Being must be something different from beings. It is crucial to recognize that the inverted commas of “is” preserve from falling prey of the contradiction described above: something is iff it is an entity, so

¹³ Heidegger’s insistence on the fundamental role of art, poetry and silence (*die Sighetik*) in revealing Being (and its truth) seems to support the claim above. These kinds of non-objectifying and, therefore, non-metaphysical forms of thinking would prevent from literally speaking about Being and would allow to give up premise 2). However, I believe that much more has to be said about how art, poetry and silence work and, most of all, about how they can refer to Being, deal with it without taking it as entity. Therefore, a discussion of these performative solutions to the paradox of Being would require a detailed study, which falls outside the topic of this paper and is thus left aside here. A good place to start is Okrent, “Heidegger’s Pragmatism,” 259–297.

¹⁴ Priest, “The Answer to the Question of Being.”

¹⁵ Casati, “Heidegger’s Grund: (Para-)Foundationalism,” 291–311. See also the introduction of the volume, Bliss and Priest, “The Geography of Fundamentality. An Overview,” 1–33.

¹⁶ Casati and Priest, “Heidegger and Dogen on the ineffable.”

¹⁷ In particular from the late works. By Heidegger’s late works I mean all those writings published (also posthumously) after *Was ist Metaphysik?*, so from the beginning of the Thirties. I also refer to them with the settled *iunctura* “second Heidegger”.

¹⁸ Good reasons to believe that Heidegger really endorsed dialetheism are also found in Casati, “Heidegger and The Contradiction of Being.”

¹⁹ Consider some examples of (MOC): “What does it signify that Being ‘is’, where Being is to be distinguished from every entity?” (GA 2, 272); “We call it the *ontological* difference-the differentiation between being and beings” (GA 24, 17); “We can also characterize the new problem with reference to the ontological difference. This difference has to do with the distinction between beings and being. The ontological difference says: A being is always characterized by a specific constitution of being. Such being is not itself a being.” (GA 24, 78); “All this is expressed in the fact that we give a thematic name to the problem of the distinction between being and beings: we call it the problem of the ontological difference. What ‘difference’ means here is initially clear: precisely this distinction between being and beings” (GA 29/30, 358). Others can be found in GA 5, 6.2, 14 and more. I faithfully use “beings” or “entities” without distinction.

one missed the point of OD by saying that “Being is”, because he would treat Being as an entity. Therefore, a plausible rephrasing of (MOC) is “Being is *not* an entity, a being”, and such formulation will funnel the inquiry since, as I will explain, it motivates and grounds other senses of OD. Moreover, this first explanatory instance of OD has to be taken as a *meta-ontological* claim, for it ranges over the “ontological” domain and the “ontic” domain, by ensuring a distinction among them: indeed, the one between Being and beings.

The most diffused and significative corollary of OD read as (MOC) is what I call the *epistemological claim* (ELC): OD makes ontology and metaphysics possible as (separated) sciences²⁰. By separating Being from beings, OD succeeds in defining the reference environment of both ontology and metaphysics. In other terms, it provides the *epistemological* criterion that distinguishes ontology, the inquiry on Being, and metaphysics, the science of beings as such. It becomes now clear why Heidegger is committed to an “overcoming of metaphysics”. Throughout the Western history of philosophy, metaphysicians have unconsciously taken part in “a failure to master the basic problem of Being”²¹, so metaphysics has been downgraded to a science and, in the latest time, converted into technique. The historical unnoticed – up to Heidegger – mistake of metaphysics relies in its confusion between Being and beings, i.e. in the “oblivion” of OD. This forgetfulness has been variously and inaccurately hidden in the history of metaphysics, which has always played the role of an *onto-theo-log*y²², since it has mistaken Being for the *stable* founding being of all beings (in a spoiled ontological way) or for the supreme being addressed by the totality of beings (as in the case of the theological God). Yet, both directions fail to master and maintain OD.

(B) *Ontic claim* (OC): OD is the distinction between Dasein and beings (of other kinds).

(OC) “vulgarizes” the distinction of Being and beings, by claiming that it applies to all the ontological different ways of Being: there is an ontological difference between Dasein and ready-to-hand entities (*Zuhanden*), between lives (like animals or plants) and present-at-hand entities (*Vorhanden*), between abstract objects (like numbers) and Dasein. Since they enjoy different kinds of Being, there is an ontological differentiation among them²³. In this sense, (OC) can be reformulated in “Dasein is *not* a ready-to-hand entity” (and in all other combinations, like “Dasein is *not* a present-to-hand entity”, “Life is *not* an abstract object”, and so on).

Moreover, this last explanatory claim is meant to express a peculiarity of Dasein, namely its understanding of Being. I will call this fact the *epistemic claim* (EC): OD makes Dasein’s understanding of Being possible. In the Freiburg course entitled *Einleitung in die Philosophie*, held by Heidegger in the winter semester 1928/29, he says: “The decisive phenomenon we have met is the original fact in the essence of Dasein itself, the fact that we understand something as Being or, more clearly, that we make distinction between beings and Being of beings. Understanding of Being (*Seinsverständnis*) is nothing else than the possibility of realization of this distinction between beings and Being or, shortly, the possibility of the ontological

²⁰ Instances of (ELC) are: “If the ontological difference which appears here is the most dangerous matter for thinking, it is because it always represents Being, within the horizon of metaphysics, as a being. Now, the question of beings as beings, that is, the metaphysical question, means something other than the question of Being as Being.” (GA 15, 22); “The possibility of ontology, of philosophy as a science, stands and falls with the possibility of a sufficiently clear accomplishment of this differentiation between Being and beings and accordingly with the possibility of negotiating the passage from the ontical consideration of beings to the ontological thematization of Being.” (GA 24, 227). More in GA 6.2, 9, 29/30.

²¹ GA 2, 88.

²² “The wholeness of this whole is the unity of all beings that unifies as the generative ground. To those who can read, this means: metaphysics is onto-theo-log” (GA 11, 54).

²³ Heidegger truly employs this watered version in distinguishing between Dasein and other entities (consider the footnote below), but I believe that my further extension to other entities is fair with his ontology. As a matter of fact, the philosopher endorsed the Aristotelian slogan about sense-multiplicity of Being, like in “We call many things “existent” [*seiend*], and in different senses. Everything we talk about, mean, and are related to is in Being in one way or another. What and how we ourselves are is also in Being. Being is found in thatness and whatness, reality, the objective presence of things [*Vorhandenheit*], subsistence, validity, existence [*Da-sein*], and in the “there is” [*es gibt*]” (GA 2, 5). See also McDaniel, “Ways of being,” 290-319. Nevertheless, it is worthy to remind that this differentiation is “ontological” insofar as we speak of different modes of *Being*, but is however drawn among different entities, so it is “*ontically*” driven. This is why I call it the “ontic claim”.

difference”²⁴. OD shows the distinction between Beings and being, which allows Dasein to understand Being in the proper sense. Understanding is one of the *Existential* that belongs to the Dasein’s ontological constitution (GA 2, §32) and makes explicit the mode of Being of Dasein, which is *existence*. In Heidegger’s reading of the notion, *existence* means “being outside oneself (from the Latin *ek-sistere*), “staying in the outside”, therefore *to transcend*. OD links Being and Dasein via understanding and transcendence, thanks to which the difference is revealed.

Although (MOC) and (OC) are slightly different definitions of OD, they are surely related. Indeed, I tend to believe that (OC), together with all the corollaries of OD like (ELC) and (EC), is *parasitic* on (MOC), which justifies other claims: it is because we have a meta-ontological difference between Being and beings that we can trace boundaries between different ontic domains²⁵ and fields of research or acknowledge the ontic-ontological priority of Dasein in understanding Being. So, Heidegger’s theoretical building seems to be grounded on (MOC), namely the distinction between Being and beings. If this is the case, and it is highly plausible to believe it, then we must pay attention to what “Being is not an entity” means, that is to how the *negation* here involved works. In other terms, a better understanding of OD seeps through grasping the role of negation in Heidegger’s thought.

Not surprisingly, the definition of OD given by the philosopher in the Preface to *The Essence of Ground*, added in 1949, heads towards such intuition: “The ontological difference is the “not” between beings and Being”²⁶. Therefore, grasping the behaviour of the negation, of “not” in Heidegger’s thought becomes crucial. Dialetheists have here the chance to raise their voice.

3.1 Negation: Heidegger’s Contributions to Philosophy and dialetheism

Answering which is Heidegger’s account of negation is a substantially awkward task. First of all, the heterogeneity and the fluctuating incoherence of an entire philosophy, like Heidegger’s one, oppose any attempt to identify a stable notion of negation. Secondly, one can always advocate one of the favourite objections employed by Heidegger’s rivals: it is hard to understand where his commentary of other philosophers ends and where his own thought begins. Thirdly, Heidegger has never purposely written something about negation, neither in logical nor in other terms. So, whenever one tries to figure out his account of negation, a minimal hermeneutical effort is required, with all due caution.

One more preliminary remark must be added. This paper is intended to offer a possible way-out to dialetheists who face comeback troubles because of OD. Generally speaking, dialetheists are prudent enough to remind that a dialetheic reading of Heidegger’s philosophy (and, in particular, of the “second Heidegger”) is *not incompatible* with other possible readings, more traditional or not²⁷. Heidegger’s late works are a building yard of a thought in constant progress which, according to the philosopher himself, develop the new, “other beginning” represented by the *Contributions to Philosophy (of the Event)*, written between 1936 and 1938 but posthumously published. The *Contributions*, together with writings of the same period mentioned by Heidegger himself²⁸, encapsulate all the main themes of the late works and are sifted by dialetheists in order to find the critical evidence in their favour. By the way, the *Contributions* hint at an account of negation, which is fruitful to point out.

In chapter 90 of the *Contributions*, entitled *From the first to the other beginning. Negation*, Heidegger writes: “How few understand ‘negation’, and how seldom is it firmly grasped by those who do have some understanding of it! Negation is spontaneously taken to be sheer rejection, dismissal, disparagement, and

²⁴ GA 27, 223, translation is mine. See also “Ens – ego: ontological difference (Transcendence)” (GA 28, 248, translation is mine).

²⁵ In different ontic domains, entities have different ways of Being. In order to enjoy such ways, they have to be, that is to say that they must be entities. But this means that they have to be distinguished from Being. On this point, see McManus, “Ontological Pluralism and the Being and Time Project.”

²⁶ GA 9, 97.

²⁷ See footnote 13.

²⁸ *Mindfulness* (GA 66), *Metaphysik und Nihilismus* (GA 67), *History of Being* (GA 69) and *The Event* (GA 71).

even disintegration”²⁹. Two traditional accounts of negation, like *rejection* and disintegration (or, more commonly, *cancellation*) are likely to be discarded by Heidegger, insofar as Being is involved³⁰.

According to the philosopher, negation works in such a way that neither $\neg A$ rejects A nor $\neg A$ deletes the content of A . In other words, the “not” does not dismiss what it negates (like in rejection) and does not deprive the content of what is negated, too (like in cancellation). Therefore, we must put aside two possible readings of OD:

- the “*not-as-rejection*” reading. “Being is not an entity” does not mean the rejection, the ruling out of “being an entity”;
- the “*not-as-cancellation*” reading. “Being is not an entity” does not imply the deletion of the content of the proposition.

Which is Heidegger’s account of negation, then? Some lines after the previous quotation we find the enigmatic answer: “The no is the great leap *away from*...this leaping-away-from ‘affirms’ that from which it leaps”³¹. Negation of the *Contributions* does not “take distance” (in whatever sense) from what negates, but affirms, says yes, to that which is negated. Thus, it seems that negation works in a much peculiar way here, at least whenever Being as *Ereignis* is at stake. The “not” is likely to say both yes and no to what is put behind. However, one can be more flexible about the interpretation of Heidegger’s obscure passage, if he believes that the one offered feathers my own nest. For sure, the kind of negation employed here has nothing to do with any form of *exclusion*. In talking about the *Ereignis*, where Being oscillates between being an entity and not being an entity, negation *does not exclude* one of the sides: saying that “Being is not an entity” is not enough to rule out its “being an entity” (*Seiendenheit*). On the other way round, this does not imply that Being is *just* an entity, but precisely because of the nature of Being, which is not *only* a non-entity and not *only* an entity, the related negation can both affirm and deny.

Consider one more passage, again from the *Contributions*:

Finally, what is the origin of the “yes” and the “no” and also of the distinction and opposition between them? To put it in a different way: who founded the distinction between the possibility of affirmation and negation, the “and” of the affirmable and the negatable? Here all “logic” fails, and metaphysics does so a fortiori, since these indeed grasp beingness only on the basis of *thought*.

The counter-turning must lie in the essential occurrence of *Beyng*³² itself, and the ground is ap-propiation as the refusal which is an assigning. Then the “no” and the “not” would precisely be what is more originary in *Beyng*³³.

Even here Heidegger doubts the “distinction and opposition” of “yes” and “no”, of “true” and “false”³⁴ and wonders about the “and” that should separate them. He states that the task of grasping this “and” is missed by logic, which fails because its inquiry on Being occurs “on the basis of *thought* (Heidegger’s italics, author’s note)”. The thought Heidegger has in mind is the one grounded on the *laws of logic* (*Grundsätze*): the Principle of Non-Contradiction (PNC), the Principle of Identity (PI), the Principle of Excluded Middle

²⁹ GA 65, 140.

³⁰ In the sense of *Ereignis*. In a handwritten note on a margin of the *Letter to Humanism*, Heidegger sanctioned: “For *Ereignis*, event of appropriation, has been the guiding word of my thinking since 1936” (GA 5, 241). What the philosopher has in mind with this concept is hard to understand and explain. Nevertheless, *Ereignis* marks *Seinsverständnis* in light of the “other beginning” clarified by *Contributions* and is here received in the dialetheic reading, according to which it expresses Being’s “oscillation” (*Erzitterung*) between not being and being an entity. See Casati, “Heidegger and The Contradiction of Being.”

³¹ GA 65, 140.

³² “*Beyng*” is the archaic form of “Being”, which is supposed to translate Heidegger’s move from “*Sein*” to “*Seyn*” (the archaic German form), made to (try to) get rid of the metaphysical remains of expressing Being. Starting from *On the question of Being* (*Zur Seinsfrage*, in *Wegmarken*, GA 9), published in 1955, the philosopher employs the form under erasure, in which the word is crossed out.

³³ GA 65, 194.

³⁴ Given, in a naïve sense, that a proposition is true if, asked about that proposition, we would answer “yes”, and vice versa for falsity. Intuitively one can get the point from the following example: the proposition “The Tour Eiffel is in Paris” is true if, whenever we are asked the question: “Is the Tour Eiffel in Paris?”, we would answer “yes”.

(PEM) and the Principle of Reason (PR)³⁵. Such thought cannot but fail in grasping the *Ereignis* of Being, which is “ap-propriation as the refusal which is an assigning”. If negation does not rule out affirmation, if “no” does not rule out “yes”, then a thought based on a logic which allows for PNC³⁶ is unsuitable to grasp such negation and the behaviour of “not”. Therefore, it is unsuitable to grasp Being as *Ereignis*.

If such a reconstruction of Heidegger’s account of negation is right, a suitable logical system could help to model it in very simple terms. The system I am concerned with is the *Logic of Paradox* (LP), one of the simplest but even most handy paraconsistent logics³⁷ a dialetheist can embrace. Here it is not the case to introduce the whole logical machinery of the system³⁸, so I will focus on its truth values and its account of negation³⁹.

In LP the class of true propositions and the class of false propositions overlap. Thus, a proposition can be *true*, or better, *true only*, *false*, or better, *false only*, or *both*, *both true and false*. We have then three truth values: true only, false only and both true and false. Negation works in the following way: if a proposition A belongs to the class of true propositions only, then its negation $\neg A$ belongs to the class of false proposition only, and vice versa; yet if a proposition C belongs to the overlapping class of true and false propositions, so if C is both true and false, then its negation $\neg C$ still belongs to the same class, so $\neg C$ is both false and true.

The system is graphically shown below:

According to LP’s reading, negation is *exhaustive* but *not exclusive*: it always switches the “sign” of a proposition (like in classical logic), but it does not always exclude the truth value which is negated (differently from classical logic). Thus, if a proposition A is true only, then its negation $\neg A$ excludes the truth of $\neg A$ (and conversely), whereas if a proposition C is (also) true, its negation $\neg C$ *does not* exclude the truth (also) of $\neg C$.

If Heidegger’s negation works as we have seen before, then its behaviour is quite similar to that of negation in LP. Moreover, a dialetheist is safe in supplying his metaphysical view with such a logical system. Combining dialetheist solutions with such an account of negation looks promising. Given this, all that remains is to see what happens to OD.

³⁵ The Principle of Reason is inserted in the laws of logic by Heidegger. Nowadays it is not.

³⁶ One could object that we have to accommodate PNC and rejects PEM instead. This would be incorrect: Heidegger is suggesting a “refusal which is an assigning”, so the possibility to say both “yes” and “no”, not the insight of saying neither “yes” nor “no”.

³⁷ Paraconsistent logics are logical systems that refuse the *principle of explosion* or *principle of Pseudo-Scotus*, according to which any statement follows from a contradiction (or from an inconsistent set of premises). So, let $\vdash$ be any relationship of logical consequence. Such $\vdash$ is said explosive if it satisfies the condition that for all α and β , we have that $\alpha, \neg\alpha \vdash \beta$: in the Latin formulation, *ex contradictione quodlibet* (ECQ). Thus, paraconsistent inferences are by definition non-explosive.

³⁸ See Priest, “The logic of paradox.”

³⁹ LP’s paraconsistent negation is one possible candidate to model such an account of negation. A different strategy is appealing to relevant logics. See Routley and Routley, “Negation and Contradiction.” In this paper, they also discuss the behavior of “negation-as-cancellation” and “negation-as-rejection”.

3.2 The ontological difference revised

The kind of negation traced from Heidegger's *Contributions* cannot but affect the notion of ontological difference. In a more refined way, it affects our *understanding* of OD. Regardless of the meaning we choose for OD, so regardless of considering it a meta-ontological claim or an ontic claim (and regardless of all the corollaries, too), what matters is that it is grounded on a distinction, and this distinction can be expressed in terms of *negation*: "Being is *not* a being" in the case of (MOC), "Dasein is *not* a being (of different kind)" in (OC). Not only it has been shown that (OC) is grounded on (MOC), but it is also indisputable that Heidegger has been concerned with the latter all over his thought. Therefore, I will focus on (MOC) in this last part of the paper.

At this stage, it should be clear that the negation involved in "Being is *not* an entity" is not easily manageable. The kind of negation previously pointed out compels a review of OD, that means we must travel through Heidegger's use of the notion again. If one goes through all the occurrences of OD in Heidegger's body of work (thus has been done to collect the possible meanings of OD in the previous section), then what he finds out is that OD *does never rule out* Being's being an entity. This does not amount to a violation of OD itself, as it has been thought before, because it still holds, thanks to the behaviour of such negation.

The consideration encourages a *theoretical* manoeuvre that brings to read OD in the light of the *non-exclusive* account of negation laid out before. More perspicuously, the theoretical move allows to distinguish between two nuances of exclusion, which illuminate the possible readings of OD:

(A) *Strong exclusion*. Claiming that Being is not an entity means that Being is not an entity *at all*. The kind of negation here involved is (classically) both exhaustive and exclusive: something is either an entity or not, but if something is not an entity, then it is a non-entity (and vice versa). On this view, which is traditionally received, Being is just not an entity or, in an involute rephrasing, Being is a non-entity *only*;

(B) *Weak exclusion*. Claiming that Being is not an entity means that Being is *not just* not an entity. The kind of negation here involved is exhaustive but not-exclusive: something is either an entity or not, but if something is not an entity, then this *does not imply* it is a non-entity (and vice versa). On this view, which can be endorsed by dialetheists about the contradiction of Being, what is negated is Being's being an entity *only*, Being's being *simply* an entity. Therefore, Being remains different from an entity and its paradoxical nature of both being and not being an entity is preserved.

Obviously, the acceptance of (B) allows proponents of dialetheic solutions to reject objections about their accounting for OD. Moreover, all Heidegger's formulations of OD are never attached with a *strong exclusion* clause, that is, OD does never appear with an "only" about Being's non-being an entity. On the basis of textual evidence concerning the occurrences of OD and the passages on negation, the theoretical manoeuvre offers a *prescriptive* way-out for dialetheic stances: in order to save Heidegger's mainstay, proponents of dialetheic solutions *should* read it in the light of the retraced non-exclusive account of negation.

Opponents of dialetheist stances might turn to a last quibble, yet. They can resort to the counter-intuition that if Heidegger has never employed the "only" clause, then this does not mean that he has endorsed (B). It would be preposterous to ascribe (B) to Heidegger just because no occurrence of OD contains an "only" clause. Granted the point, such a remark cannot get far. Doubts are dispelled by those occurrences of OD which belong to Heidegger's works about the "other beginning" and late works, where *descriptive* dialetheic way-outs, purported by the philosopher himself, can be tracked down in the literature.

The "second Heidegger" is definitely aware of the complications that follow OD. In *Metaphysik und Nihilismus* the philosopher states:

In the attempt to think the differentiation [*Unterscheidung*⁴⁰], that means firstly to represent the elements of the distinction, beings and Being, an embarrassment and a fatality arise. The *embarrassment* obtains from the fact that Being remains non-representable, whereby to represent means to create a picture of it and to have it before basically as a being, that is to find Being downright as a thing present somewhere. The differentiation breaks on one side and falls into emptiness, so to speak. Only the side of beings is left, beings however understood; this mountain, that tree, this man. The *fatality*, on the other hand, having in advance the intention to represent, consists in the fact that Being is equalized to being and, therefore, the differentiation is already abandoned before its completion, by the employment of the completion itself. A persevering meditation cannot show but this: the differentiation is not possible insofar the elements of the distinction that take part are represented. Does it depend on the mode of representing, or does it depend on what has to be caught in a difference? It depends on both, because both belong to each other.⁴¹

Insofar as we think OD according to the received view, and so, according to the *strong exclusion* view, OD backfires: not only Being is (linguistically) *represented* in the formulation of it, in a way that we “create a picture of it” and “have it before basically as a being”, saying that is *something* which is not an entity, but we also rush into a deeper trouble. Representative (objectifying, metaphysical) language testifies the difference because *there is* a difference and, simultaneously, *there are* the elements of the distinction. The “mode of representing” and “what has to be caught in the difference”, namely the elements of distinction, “belong to each other”, because the representation expresses the distinction of the elements and the elements of the distinction are grasped in the representation. Since there must *be* the elements of the distinction to (ontologically) have the difference and to (representationally) trace it, if Being is one of these elements, and it is, then Being is, so it becomes an entity. Therefore, OD fails to convey its own meaning.

“Soon the discourse about the difference and the differentiation holds little and yet drags Being in the domain of beings”⁴², acknowledges the philosopher. He is even clearer: “In the differentiation, that is in all metaphysics, Being stands on *one* side (as one of the elements of distinction, author’s note) and so it becomes dependent from beings and, finally, what is added to beings”⁴³. Given the inadequacy of the standard, strongly exclusive reading of OD, Heidegger calls a re-thinking of it, on the basic notion of the “other beginning”, of the second Heidegger, the *Ereignis*:

However, as the *Ereignis* (the dif-ference [*der Unter-schied*]), Being firstly lets beings diverge (...) It can be said that Being and beings are infinitely different – namely, abyssally different [*ab-gründig verschieden*] – that is that they are divided one from the other by an Abyss [*Abgrund*], which is Being itself. And yet again: Being is the Being of beings: beings in their Being (...) In the light of what we have (improperly) called differentiation, metaphysics projects the beingness [*Seiendenheit*] of beings, without founding it. From this beingness, metaphysics determines the essence of Being (as a being, author’s note) (...) Things are different in the other beginning: the Divergence [*Austrag*] is itself, as the deployment [*Wesung*] of Being, the Abyss of the In-between [*Inzwischen*].⁴⁴

This long quotation suggests the path of Heidegger’s re-thinking, thanks to some exegesis. Metaphysics betrays OD, because Being is determined as a being. However, Being and beings are infinitely different, according to the true sense of OD. Being and beings “*diverge*” in a sense that there is an Abyss which divides them, but this Abyss is Being itself. In the *Austrag*, the “Divergence” that constitutes the final step of the re-thinking of difference and differentiation, Being is the Abyss standing in between Being itself (which is not an entity) and beings (which are entities). Being can differentiate itself from beings, it can diverge from beings only if it stands in between being an entity and not-being an entity, that is only if it is both an entity (as a member of the distinction) and not an entity (as infinitely different from beings).

Something extremely similar appears in the *Contributions*:

⁴⁰ The move from “difference” as *Differenz* to “differentiation” as *Unterscheidung* marks Heidegger’s step in (re)thinking OD, “taken as a demand, but left obscure in its origin” (GA 67, 73).

⁴¹ GA 67, 74, translation is mine.

⁴² GA 67, 76, translation is mine.

⁴³ GA 67, 77, translation is mine.

⁴⁴ GA 67, 77-78, translation is mine.

This distinction has been understood ever since *Being and Time* as the ‘ontological difference’, and the aim has been to keep the question of the truth of Beyng safe from all admixture. But this distinction is immediately applied to the path from which it originated. For there beingness comes to validity as *οὐσία*, as *ἰδέα*, and, in its train, as objectivity qua the condition of the possibility of an object. Accordingly, the effort to go beyond the first approach to the question of being as it was instituted in *Being and Time* and in the works, which radiated out from it (“On the Essence of Ground” and the Kant book) required various attempts to master the “ontological difference” and to grasp its origin itself, i.e., its genuine unity. Therefore, the endeavour had to be made to get free of the “condition of possibility” as a merely “mathematical” retrogression and to grasp the truth of Beyng out of the latter’s own essence (*Ereignis*). That explains why this distinction has been so tormenting and discordant. [...] In other words, it is precisely this distinction that becomes the genuine barrier obstructing the taking up of the question of Beyng, insofar as the attempt is made, while presupposing the distinction, to go beyond it and ask about its unity.⁴⁵

The passage proposes again the same idea. OD has hardly brought justice to “the truth of Beyng”: the distinction “has been so tormenting and discordant” because what determines being as beings, Being, so beingness, has come “to validity as *οὐσία*, as *ἰδέα*, and, in its train, as objectivity qua the condition of the possibility of an object”, so as an entity. OD has failed to be mastered because Being has been reduced to a simple member of the distinction, so just to a being. Therefore, “it is precisely this distinction that becomes the genuine barrier obstructing the taking up of the question of Beyng”. Nevertheless, nothing is compromised, since the key to grasp the “truth of Beyng out of the latter’s own essence”, the *Ereignis*, is the attempt, “while presupposing the distinction, to go beyond it and ask about its unity”. In order to catch the true meaning of OD, our understanding of the difference must pass through the unity of the elements of distinction, whereby the unity⁴⁶ encapsulates their being both elements of the distinction, so beings.

This passing through is a moving around from unity to difference and back again that expresses the coexistence of unity and difference in OD, the *overlapping* of “yes” (Being is an entity) and “no” (Being is not an entity) and, therefore, that justifies the *weakly exclusive* reading of OD. Such reading is condensed in the notion of *Austrag*, “Divergence”. As a matter of fact, we read:

Being in the sense of the unveiling Handing down and beings as such in the sense of the veiling Advent are essentially the elements of distinction from the Same, the difference. This firstly gives and holds apart the Between, where Handing down and Advent are hold one in front of the other, where they are brought to diverge one from the other and to converge one in the other. The difference between Being and beings is the same as the difference between the Handing down and the Advent, the un-veiling Divergence of both. In the Divergence the disclosing Clearing of what closes itself by hiding dominates – a dominion that places the diverging and converging of Handing down and Advent⁴⁷.

The Handing down and the Advent interchangeably appear in the reflection of one in the other. Speaking in terms of the difference, this means: the Divergence is a circular movement, the circling of Being and beings one around the other⁴⁸.

The difference read through the notion of *Austrag* makes clear the *literary plausibility* of the weakly exclusive reading of OD, insofar as we address Heidegger’s late works. The *Austrag* expresses the double circular movement of OD, according to which Being and beings diverge, differ – because they are necessarily different⁴⁹ – and simultaneously converge, concur – because as members of the distinction, they are both entities.

⁴⁵ GA 65, 197.

⁴⁶ Confront also GA 67, 210: “Whence the extreme restriction here to the one and to the other and thus the either-or? Out of the uniqueness of Beyng there follows the uniqueness of its appertaining ‘not’ and thus the uniqueness of the other.”. Heidegger suggests we should not necessarily sever the *aut-aut* (“either-or”) between Beyng and “the other”, being, but that we should maintain the difference (the “appertaining ‘not’”) and the “uniqueness” together.

⁴⁷ GA 11, 71: “*Sein im Sinne der entbergenden Uberkommnis und Seiendes als solches im Sinne der sich bergenden Ankunft wesen als ie so Unterschiedenen aus dem Selben, dem Unter-Schied. Dieser vergibt erst und halt auseinander das Zwischen, worin Uberkommnis und Ankunft zueinander gehalten, auseinander-zueinander getragen sind. Die Differenz von Sein und Seiendem ist als der Unter-Schied von Uberkommnis und Ankunft: der entbergend-bergende Austrag beider. Im Austrag waltet Lichtung des sich verhullend Verschließenden, welches Walten das Aus- und Zuein- ander von Uberkommnis und Ankunft vergibt*”.

⁴⁸ GA 11, 75. “*Uberkommnis und Ankunft erscheinen wechselweise ineinander im Widerschein. Von der Differenz her gesprochen, heißt dies: Der Austrag ist ein Kreisen, das Umeinanderkreisen von Sein und Seiendem*”.

⁴⁹ According to Heidegger. It would be interesting to understand why.

Not only the *strong version* of OD is graphically never employed by Heidegger, but there is also literary evidence in favour of the *weak version*, which turns out to be a *descriptive* way-out for dialetheic stances.

4 Conclusion

This paper has offered an attempt to save Heidegger’s ‘Ontological Difference’ in a dialetheic framework. Beside a *prescriptive* move in the sense of the second section, according to which we *should* read occurrences of OD in the light of the account of negation traced in the *Contributions*⁵⁰, I have presented a *descriptive* way-out that is reasonably *endorsed* by the philosopher himself, as shown with passages from the crucial works of his late thought. Nevertheless, still lot of work is required to make the dialetheic stance about Heidegger’s philosophy even more perspicuous, starting from the notion of *Ereignis* itself⁵¹ and continuing with the reasons that brought the philosopher to claim and defend OD throughout his thought. Further developments I here hint at I must leave for another occasion.

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⁵⁰ Of course, if I am right in interpreting the negation of the *Contributions* in such a way.

⁵¹ Which seems to require a dialetheic treatment, as indicated in Casati, “Heidegger and The Contradiction of Being.”

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