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# Editorial Introduction for the Topical Issue “The New Metaphysics: Analytic/Continental Crossovers”

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The fifteen new essays collected in this topical issue have in common, first, that they concern broadly “metaphysical” topics, and second, that each draws on themes, methods, or figures associated with the traditions of both “analytic” and “continental” philosophy. The second of these common features, unlike the first, points to a division that is both historically and philosophically superficial. As has been widely noted, the general perception of an essential distinction in kind between, on the one hand, the “analytic” philosophy descending from the logical atomism of Russell and the early Wittgenstein, the logical empiricism of Carnap and Schlick, and the “Ordinary Language” philosophy of Ryle, Austin, and late Wittgenstein, and, on the other, the “continental” philosophy that, variously and vaguely, groups diverse traditions of phenomenology, existentialism, Marxism, hermeneutics, and much else, arose only in the 1960s. Even in its heyday, moreover, the distinction was never either exhaustive or exclusive, and it has never had any clearly articulated methodological, thematic, or overall philosophical justification that would be assented to by practitioners on both sides of it. Nevertheless, it continues to orient much philosophical research today, significantly constraining the methodologies and practices of leading projects and impeding productive and mutually illuminating communication between them. If it is reasonable to hope for a historically informed but also innovative continuation of twentieth-century philosophy into the twenty-first – one that both develops and also transforms the characteristic methods of twentieth-century philosophy, on both sides of the divide – then methodologically and thematically synthetic work of the kind represented here may prove to be an important part of this development. Equally, one may look to this kind of work to recognize and articulate some of the wide variety of philosophical problems that have been pursued, in common, by both analytic and continental philosophers in the twentieth century, thereby contributing to the further development and critical articulation of these problems today.

The concerns underlying many of these problems fall among those designated, by an older tradition, as those of “metaphysics”: what Aristotle understood (although he never used the term itself) as the science, or knowledge, of being “qua being,” or of whatever is, insofar as it is. Aristotle himself further understood the problems of this science as those of the characterization of the unchanging “first causes” of things; and treated, in the book that came to bear the name, topics and questions that might today, variously, be grouped under the headings of logic, ontology, epistemology, philosophy of mind and language, and philosophy of science, in addition to “metaphysics” itself. In the twentieth century, metaphysics, as a subject matter or a purported one, has often been understood in contradistinction to science: it is then the purview of metaphysics, or it is supposed to be, to treat questions and topics – if there are any such – that, for principled reasons, exceed or precede empirical inquiry into the facts and truths of nature, or rational inquiry into their logical form and structure. Metaphysics is then, on this conception, the attempt to say how things are, in a general way, but one that is not just limited to their empirical description. This might include not only questions of the substance and essence of things, but also such questions as those of the nature or reality of the divine, of the “self” or “soul”, or of the world as a whole and as such.

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If it is understood in this way, it is natural to raise, as part of metaphysical or meta-metaphysical inquiry, the question of the coherent possibility of an investigation of these topics, or of the specification of any appropriate methodology for such an investigation. If, in particular, one has reason to suppose that the methods that relate our thought to being are importantly limited by the essential structure of that thought, it is also reasonable to suppose that the nature of this relationship must first be investigated, before the purported project of metaphysical inquiry itself can be pursued. For this reason, the question of the possibility of metaphysics is one that arises directly once almost any of the methodological innovations which have characterized the development of philosophy in the twentieth century are adopted or envisaged.

In the twentieth century, the “linguistic turn” that decisively reshaped many philosophical projects, in different ways, on both sides of the analytic/continental divide, has sometimes, for example, seemed to preclude or obviate the possibility of a metaphysical inquiry into being, in this sense. If there is an overall analysis of language and its logic that is such as to reveal how it achieves referential bearing on, and predicative comprehension of, the ordinary and empirical objects, facts and circumstances that are the typical subject matter of declarative sentences, then it is reasonable to think that such an analysis also precludes the purported bearing of the same language on the “special” topic or topics that were supposed, by the traditional metaphysical project, to comprise its distinctive field of inquiry. The attempt to “do” metaphysics as a special inquiry into super-empirical being then looks like it can be nothing more than an adventitious foray into rationally and empirically ungrounded speculation.

This was the basis, at any rate, of the sharply defined critique of “metaphysical” thinking developed by the logical positivists in the 1920s and 30s, and continued in Quine’s critical and finally eliminativist arguments against modality, intentionality, and propositional meaning. And in an almost inverse, but actually formally similar fashion, Husserl’s phenomenology, in its attempt for a radical return “to the things themselves,” sought to submit all “metaphysical” claims and methods to their prior demonstrative basis in the evidence of subjective lived experience, thus excluding those that essentially exceed any possibility of such demonstration. Along similarly phenomenological lines, Sartre, in the opening pages of *Being and Nothingness*, celebrated the progress of contemporary thought in reducing the being of the object to the infinite structure of its partial appearances, thus exposing as illusory the philosophical attempt to discover, behind the world of phenomena, the secret or hidden structure of their “true” being. Formulating the “question of the meaning of being” along the guideline of the interpretation of time, Heidegger introduced the idea of the “ontological difference” between entities, as such, and the ground of their sense or intelligibility in being itself. In articulating the distinction, he sought radical terms by which to resist the metaphysical tradition’s typical identification of being, as it is in itself, with constant, standing presence. In his later work, metaphysics is thus critically regarded as the “Onto-Theological” attempt to characterize entities, in their basic constitution and overall character, from a position that is itself seen as immune from temporality and change. This attempt, for Heidegger, characteristically involved “treating being as an entity:” assuming, that is, some overarching standard for beings as a whole, itself drawn from among entities.

Beyond these early and mid-century projects, subsequent methodological developments of both analytic and continental philosophy have continued to raise the question of the possibility of metaphysical inquiry as such and in general, even as they have begun to suggest new approaches which partially inherit specifically modified aspects of metaphysical inquiry, as it is traditionally understood. On the analytic side, after the heyday of Quine’s critical arguments against modality and meaning, new developments in the 1960s of modal logic and semantics were seen, by some at least, as demonstrating the possibility of a more metaphysically realist account of possibility and necessity, a suggestion that culminated in David Lewis’s attitude of global realism about possible worlds. Combined with ideas about reference and natural kinds, considerations about reference and *a posteriori* necessity were seen, also beginning in the 1960s, as allowing for the possibility of a renewed essentialism, consistent with a “scientific” metaphysics of empirical kinds and their modal properties and relations. But even when these developments in the theory of modality, reference, and essence have thus suggested the possibility or actuality of metaphysical inquiry into the substantial reality of things in themselves or the structure of their possibilities, semantic and logical considerations have remained central. In this way, the idea of an inquiry into the ways things are in

themselves remains deeply inflected by constitutive considerations about the form of thought’s relationship to them overall.

In “continental” philosophy, the pursuit of metaphysics, even when it has been actively embraced, has nevertheless remained inseparable from its historical and conceptual self-critique. Here, too, issues of the semantics of language and the possibility of sense continue to play a determinative role. Thus, for example, in the closely argued analyses of *Difference and Repetition* and *The Logic of Sense*, Gilles Deleuze, who once called himself a “pure metaphysician,” extends the implications of Saussure’s linguistic structuralism to the metaphysical structures of difference, change, and being “in itself.” But the aim is that of replacing identity with a metaphysically underlying difference, enduring substance with essentially differential repetition, and the static temporality of presence characteristic of metaphysics in the onto-theological mode with a “virtual” one of endless differentiation and becoming. These critical inversions and overturnings indicate, for Deleuze, the active critical possibility of a contemporary metaphysical thought which is, as a matter of its fundamental orientation with respect to the thought-being relation, diametrically opposed to traditional metaphysics’ orienting “image of thought”: namely that of a “good sense” of thought harmoniously aligned with the metaphysical structure of reality in itself, and a “common sense” assuring the mutual accessibility of this structure to the faculties constitutive of human thought as such.

The question of the possibility of substantive inquiry into the facts or phenomena of a certain domain can often usefully be put as the question of “realism” about that domain. Thus, for example, ethical realism may be taken as the position that there are distinctively ethical facts, truths, or realities, whereas a non-realist or anti-realist position maintains that these purported facts or truths are in fact constructions, projections, or mere phenomena dependently produced by our thinking itself. More broadly, while global positions of anti-realism often take the form of idealism, or the claim of the dependence of the structure of the world or its facts on the thought or agency of a constitutive subjectivity, both local and global varieties of realism may be formulated as the position that this structure, or these facts, are as they are, in themselves, independently of this thought or agency. To adopt this realist position about the overall structure of facts and objects is not, necessarily, to adopt a “metaphysically” realist position about it, on which that structure is itself just another (larger-scale) fact or object, albeit one of a “metaphysically” binding sort. For the relevant structure might, rather, be formally determinable as “logical”, or in a broader relevant sense “semantic,” in that it configures the overall structure of the sense or meaning of things, without that structure being simply subjective, or mind-dependent.

In the last decade, a variety of projects recognizably continuous with twentieth-century “continental” philosophy have formulated versions of what have been called “new” realism. These include, among others, a revived process philosophy, speculative realism, speculative materialism, ecological metaphysics, vital materialism, feminist metaphysics, and object-oriented ontology. These projects typically, though perhaps not invariably, see themselves as overcoming or reversing an attitude which is understood as having characterized a variety of prominent 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century idealist and constructivist projects, beginning with Kant, which hold that phenomena and entities, such as we can access them, must always be understood as relative to the specific structure of subjective or human thought or agency. It is thus central to these projects to reverse this assumption, maintaining instead the possibility of a direct access of thought to being as it is, or at least as its structure can possibly appear under any conditions of symbolic or formal access whatsoever, and thus outside the conditions of being shaped, construed, or constituted by a specifically human, thinking and acting, subjectivity.

In his 1988 magnum opus *Being and Event*, Alain Badiou maintains this directness by identifying the overall structure of ontology – the presentation of being, insofar as it can be spoken of at all – with that of mathematical set theory in its typical ZFC axiomatic formulation. This bears witness to the guiding methodological thought that what is thinkable in being may, in abeyance of any purported conditioning by human subjectivity or agency, nevertheless submit to a formally determinable presentation of its structure in itself. This thought is also evidently a useful one, in connection with the contemporary possibility of a “realist,” or, in any case, non-idealist and non-constructivist, understanding of the diverse modes and relations of objects, outside any conception of their determination by or for human subjects. For such an understanding, the formal conception of objects in general in terms of their diverse relationships and

possibilities of interaction, including – but crucially not limited to – their interactions with human beings, will replace an older metaphysics founded on the subject/object divide, or on the implicit or explicit assumption of a clear division between the “artificial” and the “natural,” along with that between a realm of entities essentially conditioned by human agency and one not so conditioned. Such an understanding may be seen as especially requisite today, in view of the massively evident ethical, geopolitical, and practical relevance of the consideration of the mutual interaction of diverse entities and systems, on all scales, that cannot be understood in terms of any such simple division.

Is there, then, today a “new” metaphysics, shaped by the outcomes of twentieth-century metaphysical and anti-metaphysical thought in both its “analytic” and “continental” modes? For the reasons we have already seen, this question is not well put, today, as the old one of the possibility of just “doing” metaphysics in the traditionally assumed mode of a harmonious correspondence or assured identity of thought and being. Instead, it may evidently be better approached as that of the possibilities that can emerge from the critical, formal, and even ethical reconsideration of the central problem of the thought-being relationship, as it has been presupposed in both classical metaphysically realist, as well as more recent constructivist and anti-realist, projects. As several of the essays here suggest, these possibilities may be most significantly marked, today, in the problems of thinking, in a realist way, about the multiply problematic structures and relations of objects and agencies, in a contemporary global and situational reality that cannot any longer be thought simply in terms of the confrontation of subject and object, or human mentality with an in-itself thoughtless world. This may involve, in particular, not only a willingness to accommodate more closely the implications and results of contemporary scientific knowledge about processes and entities within “metaphysical” thinking about their structure, but also a formally structured re-consideration of the sense of things in the vastly heterogeneous and diverse significances and relations in which they can appear. Here again, then, formal considerations drawing on logic, semantics, and the theory of meaning may be reasonably thought to provide crucial determinations and articulations of the scope and limitations of the contemporary possibilities for thinking the varied and diverse relations and interactions of things.

The essays collected here, in any case, bear ample witness to the wide variety of these critical, reflective, and even potentially transformative possibilities, not only as they echo the themes and claims of traditional metaphysics, but equally as they challenge, contest, and problematize them.

In “Quine, Davidson, Relative Essentialism and the Question of Being,” Samuel Wheeler argues that both Quine and Davidson, despite their shared resistance, grounded in their respective linguistic-logical projects, to traditionally modal essentialism, nevertheless can be seen as holding a kind of relative essentialism. On this view, continuous with Davidson’s pursuit of metaphysics by formalization of the structure of a language under the conditions of radical interpretation, although there is no fixed and absolute articulation of reality into entities, there nevertheless are object-characterizing modal truths about objects, including multiple truths about distinct objects occupying the same space at the same time. Common-sense insights about change, persistence, and possibility for entities can thus be accommodated, while the idea of a single or absolute metaphysical framework determining identities once and for all is rejected. Wheeler further argues that, on this conception, the relative determination of entities can be seen in terms of Heidegger’s idea of ontological difference – the difference between being, as such, and entities, insofar as they are identifiable and thinkable at all – and may then further be related to Derrida’s idea of a semantically structuring *differance*. In “Heidegger, the Given, and the Second Nature of Entities,” Graham Bounds suggests that Heidegger’s conception of the constitution and presentation of entities, especially in his phenomenological thinking of the 1920s, provides for an instructive overall theory of intentionality bearing important consequences for questions of meaning, epistemology, and the mind-world relation overall. As such, Heidegger’s idea of the meaningfully availability of entities, as structured by the ontological difference, again proves important in supplementing and correcting some of the infelicities of pictures of the mind’s openness to the world and its objects, offering, in particular, an important supplement to the picture of that openness defended by John McDowell in *Mind and World*.

The next two essays consider some of the ethical and pragmatic dimensions of recent work in continental metaphysics, in dialogue with analytic approaches. Deborah Goldgaber’s “Return to the Repressive: Re-thinking Nature-Culture in Contemporary Feminist Theory” analyzes some recent discussions of power

and repression in relation to the distinction between “biological” and “cultural” aspects of the body and gender, arguing for a more fluid and pliable set of distinctions than those assumed in Foucault’s classic consideration of sexuality. Patrick Gamez’s “Metaphysics or Metaphors for the Anthropocene? Scientific Naturalism and the Agency of Things” considers the motivations of some recent positions, such as those of Bruno Latour, Jane Bennett, Timothy Morton, Ian Bogost, and Graham Harman, which aim to extend the concept of agency beyond the domain of the specifically human, in particular in connection with the significant ethical and theoretical challenges of thinking the multiple problems of human-nonhuman interaction in the current ‘anthropocene’ epoch. Gamez concludes that, while many of the recent projects fail to make good on the promise of a non-metaphorical extension of agency to “natural” objects and processes, a broader scientific naturalism commonly grounded in analytic thinkers, such as Quine and Sellars, as well as an earlier “continental” epistemological tradition, may do better at addressing these contemporary ethical-ecological problems. In particular, it does so by preserving an important structuring role for personhood and agency, even while maintaining a (non-metaphorical) naturalistic realism overall.

In “Fields of Sense and Formal Things: The Ontologies of Tristan Garcia and Markus Gabriel,” Arjen Kleinherenbrink comparatively considers the recent ontological projects of Garcia and Gabriel, both of which construe the sense of entities, in general, as determined by their relational possibilities of appearance rather than their intrinsic properties or substance. Although Kleinherenbrink concludes that such ontologies face a problem of specification that ultimately renders their account of the sense of things inconsistent, the alternative between them and more traditional substantialist ones may provide an important indication of a global methodological distinction capable of succeeding the “analytic”-“continental” one. Francesco Gandellini’s “The ‘Ontological Difference’ Again: A Dialetheic Perspective of Heidegger’s Mainstay” returns to the theme of the determination of the sense of entities through Heidegger’s global formalism of the ontological difference between them and being itself. As several commentators have recently pointed out, the structure of the ontological difference, as Heidegger discusses it, appears to imply that it cannot be stated without paradox; on a “dialetheic” reading of Heidegger, this can be partly or wholly affirmed, while statements articulating ontological difference generally are seen as simultaneously both true and false. This allows, however, for differing conceptions of the form of the internal negation in the statement of difference (that being is not an entity), and accordingly importantly different possibilities for the interpretation of Heidegger’s position overall. In “Minimal Sartre: Diagonalization and Pure Reflection,” considerations of the formal logic of reflexivity and the thought-being relationship are, again, to the fore; in particular, John Bova argues that the formal structure of diagonalization, at the structural core of the most significant limitative results of twentieth-century metalogic, can also be seen as structurally characterizing the “pure reflection” which supports, for Sartre, the (problematic) relationship of the for-itself of consciousness to the in-itself of being as such.

The next three essays engage the thought of Gilles Deleuze, at the same time continuing to pursue therein the question of the possibility of a new contemporary thinking of the formal structure of sense, insofar as it determines the thinkable being of things. In “The Metaphysical Subject and Logical Space: Solipsism and Singularity in the *Tractatus*,” M. Curtis Allen provocatively suggests a formal parallel between Wittgenstein’s idea of a “metaphysical” subject situated at the formal limit of language, and the “virtual” structure Deleuze treats as that of a “singularity,” or a critical, inflectional point in the determination of the overall structure of sense. In “Reading Problems: Literacy and the Dynamics of Thought,” Jeffrey A. Bell draws on Deleuze’s work, along with that of Mark Wilson, to address the longstanding problem of predication, or of the substantive or formal bond between conceptually articulated predicates and the real properties of things. Here, the commonalities in the two philosophers’ accounts of predication in terms of the problem-solution relationship suggest, Bell argues, important consequences for the overall consideration of the structure of human rationality as well as the metaphysical structure of its objects. Finally, in “Deleuze and Heidegger on Truth and Science,” Michael James Bennett defends Deleuze against the accusation that his systematic and metaphysical thought eschews any philosophical investigation of realist truth, arguing that a more careful consideration of Deleuze’s early work as well as his collaboration with Felix Guatari shows, instead, a deep critical engagement with scientific truth, philosophical truth, and the differences between the two.

In their essays, “Negation, Structure, Transformation: Alain Badiou and the New Metaphysics” and “Badiou and Frege: A Continental Critique of Logical Form,” Becky Vartabedian and Joseph M. Spencer, respectively, consider Badiou’s ontological and meta-ontological projects in light of considerations of logical structure and underlying logical form. Vartabedian’s essay, in particular, takes up Badiou’s account of the various conceptions of negation which are possible in light of the alternative logical frameworks of classical, intuitionist, and paraconsistent logic, as well as his own argument for considering the differences between them significantly to characterize what are for Badiou the importantly different structural regimes of being, appearing, and transformation. Drawing on related considerations but explicating Badiou’s early engagements with the materialist epistemology of formal logic and reflection, Spencer reconstructs the formally motivated critique that Badiou directed, on this basis, against the assumptions structuring Frege’s analysis of the concept of number. Further, he argues that the issues that arise in the course of this critique also substantively impact theories of truth, continuing into the present, that have a formal basis in Tarski’s schematism of its overall structure, and in the “semantic” conception which he associates with it.

The last three essays in the issue return to broader questions of the overall possibility of a transformed metaphysics, and indeed of metaphysical thought as such, in the wake of central twentieth-century and recent methods and innovations that plausibly bear on the consideration of the thought-being relationship overall, as well as the essential paradoxes or problems for metaphysical thought that these innovations appear inevitably to introduce there. In “Towards an Indexical Paradoxico-Metaphysics,” Hilan Nissior Bensusan, considering total positions which affirm the impossibility of an overall consistent account of what reality is like to, themselves, amount to metaphysical positions in a relevant sense, defends one such position: the position that the entities that “furnish” the universe, on the most fundamental level, themselves have an inherently indexical or demonstrative structure. Drawing on the results of analytic philosophers’ consideration of the linguistic functions of indexicality and deixis, Bensusan concludes that this overall position is, if true, paradoxical, owing specifically to the problems it introduces with the non-contradictory characterization of the total structure of beings. However, even if it cannot therefore be maintained, in the form of classical metaphysics, as a non-contradictory total conception of beings, it can still be defended in a contemporary context as a “paradoxico”-metaphysics that nevertheless offers an importantly innovative overall account of how things are. In “Process Metaphysics of Consciousness,” Robert Prentner considers what Chalmers has called the “hard problem” of consciousness as a problem of the overall structure of composition and causation in terms of the mereological relationship of parts and wholes. If it is re-situated in this way, Prentner argues, the problem can usefully be seen instead in the alternative paradigm of the “process” metaphysics suggested by Whitehead and other twentieth-century “system” philosophers, wherein it can then find terms for its potential solution. Finally, in “Which Laws, Which Past?: Meillassoux’s Hyper-Chaos and the Epistemological Limits of Retro-Causation,” Michael J. Ardoline re-considers the classical problem of the necessity, force, and stability of natural laws, in light of the intriguing possibility, suggested by a recent argument of Quentin Meillassoux, that laws themselves may ultimately be both contingent and independent of their objects, and thus may be open to the possibility of sudden and radically discontinuous transformation. If Meillassoux’s arguments are correct, this transformation may also be such as to permit the possibility of backward causation, leading to a host of surprising and ontologically problematic implications, even if the overall consistency of the world and its events is maintained.

We hope that it is clear from these brief synopses how every paper in this volume bears both on the contemporary “return to metaphysics” and the tearing down of the walls between analytic and continental philosophy. With respect to the former, one may be tempted to repeat, in a vaguely self-congratulatory way, Etienne Gilson’s quip to the effect that metaphysics always buries its own undertakers: is this not the story of post-positivistic analytic philosophy and post-phenomenological continental philosophy? Perhaps, then, the moral of this issue is that both “metaphysics” *and* the space of contemporary reflection on its possibility are appropriate gathering places for analytic philosophers interested in continental philosophy and continental philosophers interested in analytic philosophy. Here, philosophers working in each tradition can certainly learn from the failure of the other tradition’s anti-metaphysical programs. The

conceit that the telos of contemporary post-divide philosophy is a revived positive metaphysics, drawing from both traditions, would, then, still be a gross oversimplification; but, with a little bit of refinement, we can see why one might think that there is something to it. To get at this something, let us replace Gilson’s quip with the idea that it is rather *meta*-metaphysics which always gets the last word, or shovel full of dirt, as it may be.

If metaphysics concerns what the world must be like such that  $x$ , then for some important values of  $x$ , meta-metaphysics might be understood as considering the possibility, or impossibility, of metaphysics itself. If nothing else, the essays collected here then bear ample witness to the contemporary life and vibrancy of this consideration, across the “continental”/ “analytic” divide. And then, the fact that neither “analytic” nor “continental” philosophers have ever managed to get the last word with respect to their (anti)metaphysical meta-metaphysics is, almost certainly, just a function of how exceedingly difficult it is to get the last word about anything in philosophy.