

The Constituent Logic of Being: Identity, Non-Contradiction, Determinacy, and Rendering

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Abstract

This article argues that identity, non-contradiction, determinacy, and rendering together constitute the logic of Being, that is, the logical constitution through which anything is a being at all. The first three name what a being must be: self-same, not collapsing into its own negation, and one way rather than another. The fourth, developed from Leibniz's *principium reddendae rationis* but from the side of the object, names that constitution in act, the being's standing forth as what it is and in the way that it is. Non-contradiction is taken throughout as this non-collapse and not as the formal principle governing propositions. Much of the tradition has taken the first three for something else: underived principles of a logical system, implicit definitions fixing the use of terms, form shown rather than stated, norms of rationality, or beliefs revisable in principle. Where the tradition approaches anything analogous to the fourth, it has generally treated it separately, either as a metaphysical principle requiring things to have reasons or as an epistemological norm governing adequate explanation, rather than as part of the logical constitution of a being. Logical determination has been given ontological standing before, notably in Hegel's *Science of Logic*, where identity, difference, and contradiction are determinations of essence rather than laws imposed upon already constituted objects. The present account differs in identifying the constituents by which a being is determinate at once and in arguing for them from determinate objects rather than through the immanent dialectical development of logical determination.

The four constituents are not a third kind of item alongside axioms and theorems but conditions of both, since every axiom, theorem, formal system, and act of inference already bears them as a determinate being. Their constituent status is established independently of the fact that no denial of them can be made without employing them. The demonstration has two prongs. The first begins

with a substantive object and prescind its substantive determinations until the object is considered solely as an object, which identifies the four without locating them; the second locates them in the being's own constitution by the argument from mind-independent determinacy and the argument from the objectual nature of logic. The demonstration is completed by the argument that rendering is the being's own standing-forth and not a disclosure subsequently supplied by cognition. The article tests the resulting thesis against Aristotle's elenctic method, Hegel's determinations of reflection, Hilbert on axioms as implicit definitions, Wittgenstein on logical tautologies, the transcendental tradition from Kant through Apel, Stroud's objection to transcendental arguments, and Priest's paraconsistent and dialetheist program.

The co-determinacy of Being and its constituent logic has modal consequences. Whatever reality modality has, it has within Being, so modality does not constitute a neutral framework standing outside Being within which the obtaining of Being is adjudicated. Every possible reality, merely in being a reality, already falls within Being, and no possible reality can therefore be identified in which Being fails. The proposal that there might have been no reality whatsoever fails twice over: it seeks the modal standing of Being outside anything that could fix it, and it applies the modal contrast after withdrawing the articulation in which that contrast has its terms. The defect is categorial rather than the exclusion of an exotic possibility. Being is consequently anhypothetical, standing under no hypothesis, condition or prior field by reference to which its obtaining might be settled, and the distinction between the necessary and the contingent falls under Being rather than over it. Absolute Nothingness confirms this result by supplying no second term to which a modal status could attach. Because Being's anhypotheticity follows from its own constituent articulation rather than from an external ground, Being is intrinsically intelligible and, in the constitutive sense defended here, its own explanation.

I. THE QUESTION AND ITS STAKES

This article is about four structures: identity, non-contradiction, determinacy, and rendering. Together they constitute Being, the being of beings. The first three name what a being must be: self-same, not collapsing into its own negation, and one way rather than another. The fourth names that constitution in act, the being's standing forth as what it is and in the way that it is.

Non-contradiction requires a word at the outset, because it is habitually confused with two other things that go by the same name. As a constituent, non-contradiction is a condition on beings and not a schema about propositions. It requires that a determination cannot collapse into its own negation while remaining that determination: its being what it is must be determinately different from its not being that. That non-collapse is the operative claim of this article concerning non-

contradiction. §IV shows that no denial of non-contradiction, however radical, can dispense with non-collapse. The stronger traditional thesis, that nothing both is and is not what it is in the same respect, is compatible with the constituent account, but it is neither a premise nor a conclusion of anything argued here. The formal principle denying that any proposition whatever can be both true and false is a third thing. It concerns propositions as bearers of truth and falsity, and no argument here turns on it.

The same distinction between constituent structure and its formal or propositional expression governs the other three terms. Identity is the self-sameness of what is, not the formal law that $x = x$. Determinacy is that a being is one way rather than another, not bivalence as a principle of proof. Rendering is that whatever is shows itself as what it is and in the way that it is, not a demand that a reason be produced for it. In each case the formal principle is the shadow the constituent casts in a notation. It is the constituent and not the shadow that this article is about. §III establishes the priority of constituent over notation: there the notation is shown to record a constitution already found in the object rather than to confer one upon it.

The question this article answers is not whether the four logical structures can be stated or used, which no party to the dispute denies. It is what the four logical structures are. One may employ identity and non-contradiction throughout a body of work, and defend them when pressed, without having said whether they are principles the reasoning adopts, features of the language in which it is conducted, norms binding on anyone who reasons, or determinations of the things reasoned about. That is a question of metaphysical status, and §II sets out the answers the tradition has given to it. Most of them place the four among the things we do in describing beings: a practice of proof, a stipulation about terms, a demand made upon explanations, a norm of rationality, a belief held firmly and revisable in principle. Others make logical structure objective while still taking objects as supplied from elsewhere. Hegel goes further and gives logical determination ontological standing; §II sets out why that precedent nevertheless does not reach the constituent thesis defended here.

The thesis of this article is that identity, non-contradiction, determinacy, and rendering are the constituent logic of Being. Every axiom and every theorem is already about objects constituted by these structures, and every stating of an axiom and every derivation of a theorem is itself an act that bears them. Because these logical structures determine what an object qua object is, they are the precondition of all axioms and theorems and do not occupy a third place alongside them.

A thing's determinations are actual in it as the way it is, and rendering names that actuality as the thing's own standing-forth. The standing-forth is the thing's own and is complete whether or not

any cognition follows, which is why a thing can be brought before cognition as the thing it is without cognition supplying the determinacy it receives. Rendering belongs with the first three not as an addition to determinacy but as the actuality of determinacy in the being itself. The tradition has treated the demand of *reddendae rationis* under the Principle of Sufficient Reason, as a demand made upon explanation rather than a constituent of the thing. §II gives the history of that treatment; §III separates rendering from the Principle of Sufficient Reason and argues for the standing claimed here, at the length rendering requires, since the tradition places the giving of the reason on the side of the mind that receives it, and that placement, held in common across the positions of §II, is the denial the fourth constituent meets.

A word about terminology is needed. In the author's earlier work these structures were called *logical predicates* of objects and of Being, the deepest things that can be attributed to anything that is. We amend that formulation here, calling the four logical structures *constituents* rather than predicates, not because treating them as predicates yields different substantive results, but because a predicate is said of a subject, and a reader may mistakenly consider it possible to supply a subject prior to the logic predicated of it: Being arriving first, the logical structure said of it afterward, and so Being prior to logic. This is precisely the reversal at issue in Heidegger's *The Principle of Reason*.¹ Identifying the logic of Being as constituent makes that mistake impossible: logical structure is not attributed to Being from outside but composes it, and there is no subject standing behind the four to bear them. The ordinary use of formal logic is left as it stands, where the accidents of a being are stated as predicates without also stating that the subject is self-same, that its being what it is does not collapse into its not being that, that it is determinately one way rather than another, and that it shows itself as what it is and in the way that it is. Calling the four logical structures *constituents* does not make them the only constituents. What makes this being a rose rather than a dog is in its ground, and so is what makes it blooming rather than budding, and neither is conferred upon it from outside. Three levels are therefore distinguished throughout: the four logical structures, without which there is no being at all; what makes a being the kind of being it is, invariant while it is; and the sequential determinations that vary while it remains what it is. The four are the subject of this article because they are the level at which the tradition has most often placed logic outside the object in the mind that thinks it.

¹Martin Heidegger, *Der Satz vom Grund* (Pfullingen: Verlag Günther Neske, 1957); *The Principle of Reason*, trans. Reginald Lilly (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991). The lecture course takes Leibniz's *nihil est sine ratione* as its focal point and concludes that the Principle of Reason is a principle of Being. That is the order of priority reversed here: on the constituent thesis, the four structures compose Being rather than being derived from it. The constituent at issue is rendering, distinguished from the Principle of Sufficient Reason itself in §III.

The defect in the predicate picture is clearest in the subject it leaves standing behind the predicates. A subject stripped of everything attributed to it is bare, the same bare thing in a rose as in a dog, individuated by nothing and doing no work. The claim is not that predicate grammar entails that picture; Aristotelian substance theory, trope theory, and bundle theory can all be expressed in subject-predicate grammar without positing a bare bearer.² Predicate grammar nevertheless permits and encourages the picture, and where the picture is taken seriously it posits at the ground of each thing precisely the indeterminate something this article argues cannot be specified. On the

² Each of these avoids the bare bearer differently, and each pays for it. On an Aristotelian account the bearer is the composite substance, a this-such already of a kind before any accident is said of it; the pressure falls instead on what the composite is itself composed of, since matter considered apart from form is characterized as in itself neither a what nor a quantity nor any of the other categories, which is a subject specified by nothing; Aristotle declines to identify matter so considered with substance, on the ground that separability and thisness belong to substance and matter so considered has neither (*Metaphysics* Z.3, 1029a10–30). On the trope-bundle theories of Williams and Campbell, no substrate is posited: the ordinary particular is a bundle of particularized property-instances. D. C. Williams, “On the Elements of Being,” *Review of Metaphysics* 7 (1953): 3–18 and 171–92; Keith Campbell, *Abstract Particulars* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), 20–21. Bundle theories of universals do the same with compresence, the relation by which the properties are bound together as one particular, in place of a substrate. Both then owe an account of what makes a bundle one thing, and that account must be either a further member of the bundle, which requires in turn something to relate it to the rest, and so on without end, in the manner of F. H. Bradley’s regress, or something that relates the members without being one of them, which returns the difficulty the bare bearer was introduced to solve, unless compresence is taken as primitive and the question is declined. F. H. Bradley, *Appearance and Reality: A Metaphysical Essay* (London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co., 1893), ch. III, esp. 27–28. Bundle theories of universals owe more besides, since compresence of universals cannot by itself yield numerical distinctness; absent some further individuator, qualitatively indiscernible bundles cannot be distinguished by their constituent universals. Black’s two-sphere case supplies the canonical test of that consequence. Trope bundles are better placed on that point, since tropes are particulars. Max Black, “The Identity of Indiscernibles,” *Mind* 61 (1952): 153–64. §III treats these as a single difficulty and answers it by refusing the premise they share, that a unity must be conferred on constituents already assembled. The term *constituent* has an established use in the contemporary literature. A constituent ontology treats a thing’s properties as constituents of the thing; a relational ontology treats the thing as exemplifying properties that are not its constituents. Gustav Bergmann, *Realism: A Critique of Brentano and Meinong* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1967); Nicholas Wolterstorff, “Bergmann’s Constituent Ontology,” *Noûs* 4 (1970): 109–34; Michael J. Loux, “Aristotle’s Constituent Ontology,” in Dean W. Zimmerman, ed., *Oxford Studies in Metaphysics*, vol. 2 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 207–50; Peter van Inwagen, “Relational vs. Constituent Ontologies,” *Philosophical Perspectives* 25 (2011): 389–405; E. J. Lowe, “A Neo-Aristotelian Substance Ontology: Neither Relational nor Constituent,” in Tuomas E. Tahko, ed., *Contemporary Aristotelian Metaphysics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 229–48. The account given here is constituent in that sense, since every determination of a being is in its ground. It is not committed to treating those determinations as parts. The mereological reading takes a constituent

constituent account there is no such remainder. A thing is its ground constituted thus and not otherwise, and its showing is that constitution in act. A determinate being bears this constituent structure; remove the structure and no bare remainder is left to serve as the object.³

§III establishes the four logical structures in two prongs. The first prescinds an object of its substantive determinations and identifies the four as the determinations without which there is no object. The second locates them in the object's own constitution by the argument from mind-independent determinacy, by the argument from the objectual nature of logic, and by the argument that a determination without which there is no determinate subject is not a predicate of a subject constituted independently of it. Rendering is established as determinacy in the thing's own standing-forth rather than as a disclosure subsequently supplied by cognition. That the four cannot be escaped is a further fact about them, and §IV demonstrates it.

There is a maneuver by which logical propositions, objects, or processes that cannot be derived may still be defended. The method is to show that anyone who denies them must employ them in the denying, so that the denial defeats itself in the making. The Greeks called this maneuver *elenchus*, and the scholastic and transcendental-Thomist literature calls it *retorsion*.⁴ One recent form extends all the way to objective truth, holding that relativists who deny it implicitly affirm it whenever anything is thought at all. The present argument reaches something else. At issue here is what is, whether or not anyone thinks it, and the argument is that any attempt to deny the logicity

to be a proper part of the thing, so that the thing is a whole assembled from items each of which could be given independently of the assembly. The four are not parts in that sense: none of them is available as an item apart from a determinate being, and their removal leaves no remainder to have been assembled. Nothing here therefore requires a mereology of properties, and the objections directed at one do not reach the account.

³Logical predicate is a defined term in Albert Peter Pacelli, *Being and Intelligibility* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2017), where it is formally defined at 126. The present article amends that vocabulary from predicate to constituent. The author is grateful to Dr. Jeffrey Bergner for the exchange that prompted the amendment.

⁴ Eric D. Perl, "Lux mentium: Augustine's Argument to God as Truth and Its Recent Resumptions," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 64, no. 2 (2024): 93–110. Perl argues that the retorsive refutation of relativism does not merely defeat the relativist but discloses absolute truth as the implicit enabling condition of all thinking, a conclusion he traces from Augustine through the transcendental Thomism of Pierre Scheuer and the objective idealism of Vittorio Hösle. The present account accepts Perl's refutation and stops short of his conclusion. A proof conducted on the conditions of thinking discloses a condition of thinking, not the constitution of its objects. The step from retorsion to how beings are constituted apart from any thinking is the work of §III, which does not depend on that maneuver. Perl's overreach and the opposite underreach, Barry Stroud's objection that a transcendental argument establishes nothing beyond the thinking it examines, are the two errors §IV is written between; see §IV and n. 26.

of Being must employ that logic in the denial. Care must be taken to avoid overreach. The elenchus shows that the four constituent structures cannot be escaped: no denial can be made without employing them. It does not show that they are constituents of Being, and it does not by itself reach past the denial to beings ontologically. We call the status in question *self-vindication*. A structure has that status in virtue of what it is, not in virtue of how we come to know it. To show that they are also constituents of Being and therefore self-vindicating, we will need the additional methods set forth in §III.

The co-determinacy of Being and logic has a modal consequence. Metaphysical modality is a determinate articulation of alternatives, and every possible reality, merely in being a reality, already falls within Being, so no possible reality can be identified in which Being fails. The one proposal that remains, that there might have been no reality whatsoever, asks the modal contrast to apply after the articulation in which it has its terms has been withdrawn. Being is therefore anhypothetical in the sense §V fixes, standing under no hypothesis or prior condition by reference to which its obtaining might be settled. Absolute Nothingness confirms that result by supplying no second term to which a modal status could attach. That is the answer to the question Leibniz asks and Heidegger calls the broadest, the deepest, and the most originary of all: why is there something rather than nothing? There is something because it cannot be otherwise, and what is offered as the contrary turns out to be no alternative at all, so the question is answered rather than the choice it appears to offer.⁵

II. WHAT THE TRADITION HAS MADE OF THEM

Philosophers since Aristotle have repeatedly treated identity, non-contradiction, and determinacy as fundamental. What has varied among them is where they locate the logical structures within their systems and methodologies. In what follows we consider seven representative placements, each presented on its own terms before its classification is criticized. None of the seven includes rendering in its taxonomy. Leibniz alone supplies, in *principium reddendae rationis*, the formulation from which rendering is taken not as a demand made on explanation but as an ontological determination, while placing the Principle of Sufficient Reason alongside the Principle of Contradiction. The section on rendering below separates the two principles and addresses the

⁵Pacelli, *Being and Intelligibility* (cited in n. 3), 332–335, for the fuller development of the necessity of Being from the co-determinacy of Being and intelligibility. The characterization of the question is Heidegger's: *Einführung in die Metaphysik*, GA 40 (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1983), 3; *Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. Gregory Fried and Richard Polt (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 1, where the question is called first in rank as the broadest, the deepest, and finally the most originary.

tradition's omission of rendering as a constituent. This section is diagnostic: it shows where each classification stops and that none of the seven gives a being determinations of its own.

Logic as an Indemonstrable Starting Point: Aristotle

In *Metaphysics* Gamma, Aristotle defends the Principle of Non-Contradiction in its traditional form, that the same attribute cannot at once belong and not belong to the same subject in the same respect. That defense is the earliest sustained engagement we possess with the question of how a principle presupposed by every demonstration can itself be established. Aristotle recognizes that the principle cannot be demonstrated from anything more basic, since every demonstration already employs it, but he refuses to treat this as an impasse. His elenctic method shows that the denier of it must mean something determinate by his words, and meaning something determinate requires the principle he denies. The denial is thus self-undermining.⁶

On Aristotle's account the Principle of Non-Contradiction is a first principle that is ontological in nature, said of beings and not as a rule governing our discourse about them. The elenchus that defends it is discursive, because it works on what a denier must mean, not on the objects to which the principle applies, taking the objects for granted. In contrast, §III argues that non-collapse belongs to the constitution by which there is a determinate being at all, rather than being a universal truth about beings. Aristotle's elenchus establishes only the principle's inescapability, and does so independently of any formal system within which proofs are constructed.

Logic as Constitutive of Being: Hegel

Of the major positions considered here, only Hegel treats logical determination as constitutive of Being rather than merely as something true of beings or governing thought about them. However, Hegel's development of identity, difference, and contradiction is dialectical, and it neither supplies nor is presupposed by the four constituent structures defended here.⁷ Hegel's placement of logical

⁶ Aristotle, *Metaphysics* IV.3–6; the formulation of the principle is at IV.3, 1005b19–20, and the elenctic defense at IV.4, 1006a11 ff. See also Jan Łukasiewicz, "On the Principle of Contradiction in Aristotle," trans. Vernon Wedin, *Review of Metaphysics* 24, no. 3 (1971): 485–509.

⁷ See G. W. F. Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, trans. George di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010). On logic as the system of pure reason and the realm of pure thought, 29. In the Doctrine of Essence: the determinations of reflection at 354–385, with identity at 356, difference at 361 and contradiction at 374; Appearance at 418, which opens with the claim that essence must appear; and Actuality at 465, with the unity of inner and outer at 477 and possibility as mere essentiality, having no truth apart from being, at 479. On objectivity, 625ff. Hegel's determinations are moments in an immanent dialectical development; the four structures defended here (identity, non-collapse, determinacy, and rendering) hold together in every determinate being and are reached by a different route. §III begins from an ordinary concrete object and prescinds

determination within reality belongs to a system in which the whole is Absolute Reason. Logic is not a description of an independently constituted world but the self-articulation of thought, and objects have their standing as moments within that articulation. The determinations proceed dialectically. A thing is determinate through its negation of what it is not, and it is grasped successively as essence, as appearance, and as actuality, each mode superseded by the next. Actuality requires that what a thing is inwardly express itself outwardly, so that an essence which never appears is mere possibility.

The present account diverges at each point, starting with the direction of argument. We reason from the being of beings to Being as intelligible, not from Absolute Reason down to the being of beings. Nothing here rests on a prior thesis about the whole. §III argues that determinacy lies in each thing as what that thing is, whether or not any mind is at work, so determinacy is internal rather than relational, and relation is derivative from determinate identity rather than the other way around. Hegel's account of objects stands or falls with his system. The account given here stands or falls with what it establishes of beings, and it holds from the individual being upward, each result resting on what was established below it. The four constituent logical structures are not moments, one superseded by the next, but constituents holding of a determinate being together at once. Rendering is not a stage reached at the end of a development but determinacy as the being's own standing forth.

Logic as Objective Truth Holding of Objects: Frege

Frege sharpens the distinction between logical structure that is objectively true of beings and logical structure that is constitutive of them. For Frege the laws of logic are laws of truth. They are objective, they hold whether or not anyone thinks them, and they are in no way laws of how anyone happens to think. His own illustration is the principle of identity. One formulation runs: it is impossible for men, in the year 1893, to acknowledge an object as different from itself. Another runs: every object is identical with itself. The first speaks of men and of a date; the second speaks of neither. The first is a law of holding-true, the second a law of truth, and Frege observes that neither follows from the other, since what a mind can affirm is not settled by what can be the case.⁸

from its substantive determinations to the logical constitution of the object as such.

⁸ Gottlob Frege, *The Basic Laws of Arithmetic*, trans. Philip A. Ebert and Marcus Rossberg (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), Frege's Foreword, XV–XVII; the two formulations of the principle of identity are at XVII. Recent work on logical realism bears on the placement question. Michaela Markham McSweeney argues that if reality has a privileged structure, there is one true logic, made true by the mind-and-language-independent world and better than any other at capturing that structure. Timothy Williamson treats object-language logical truths as highly general structural truths about the world and holds the method for choosing among logics to be

Frege’s system begins with objects and functions.⁹ In Frege’s function-argument analysis, a first-level concept is a function from objects to truth-values: given Venus as its argument, “is a planet” yields the True; given the number seven, it yields the False. Existential quantification is second-level: to say “something is a planet” is to say that at least one object falls under the concept “is a planet.” In every case the logical operation therefore presupposes objects available to serve as arguments or to fall under concepts. Frege’s logic tells us what follows when an object is supplied; it does not tell us what makes there be an object capable of being supplied in the first place.

Logic as Implicit Definition within a System: Hilbert

Hilbert’s axiomatic method gives the concept of axiom a precise modern form. For Hilbert, axioms are implicit definitions: they define the terms they govern by fixing their structural relations, rather than describing a structure already there.¹⁰ Were identity, non-contradiction, and determinacy

abductive. See McSweeney, “Logical Realism and the Metaphysics of Logic,” *Philosophy Compass* 14, no. 1 (2019): e12563, and “The Cost of Closure: Logical Realism, Anti-Exceptionalism, and Theoretical Equivalence,” *Synthese* 199, nos. 5–6 (2021): 12795–12817; Timothy Williamson, “Is Logic about Validity?,” forthcoming in Elke Brendel et al., eds., *The Oxford Handbook of the Philosophy of Logic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press); and Gila Sher, “Logical Realism: A Tale of Two Theories,” in Sophia Arbeiter and Juliette Kennedy, eds., *The Philosophy of Penelope Maddy* (Cham: Springer, 2024), 241–61. The constituent thesis is not a claim of that kind. It concerns what must already hold for there to be an object, or a general truth about objects, at all.

⁹ The apparatus described here is Frege’s own innovation. Replacing the decomposition of a proposition into subject and predicate with its analysis into function and argument was foundational to modern quantification theory, and it displaced the Aristotelian syllogistic as the framework of formal logic. Gottlob Frege, *Begriffsschrift, eine der arithmetischen nachgebildete Formelsprache des reinen Denkens* (Halle a. S.: Louis Nebert, 1879); trans. Stefan Bauer-Mengelberg in Jean van Heijenoort, ed., *From Frege to Gödel: A Source Book in Mathematical Logic, 1879–1931* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967), 5–82. For the mature apparatus employed in the text (truth-values as objects, concepts as functions, generality, and the distinction between first- and second-level functions), see Frege, *The Basic Laws of Arithmetic* (cited in n. 8), §§2–3, 8, 21–24.

¹⁰ David Hilbert, *Grundlagen der Geometrie*, in *Festschrift zur Feier der Enthüllung des Gauss-Weber-Denkmal in Göttingen* (Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1899); *Foundations of Geometry*, trans. Leo Unger, 2nd English ed. (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1971). Hilbert states the position directly in his letter to Frege of 29 December 1899: the axioms are at the same time the definitions of the elementary concepts, so that any system of things satisfying them satisfies the theory built upon them. Gottlob Frege, *Philosophical and Mathematical Correspondence*, ed. Gottfried Gabriel, Hans Hermes, Friedrich Kambartel, Christian Thiel and Albert Veraart, abridged for the English edition by Brian McGuinness, trans. Hans Kaal (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 38–42, at 40. Gödel’s theorems are sometimes taken to settle whether logic can be axiomatized. They concern formal systems meeting specific conditions, and the constituent logic such systems

treated simply as axioms in a fully formalized system of logic intended to range over any object, their indispensability would establish their role in that system and in any reasoning conducted through it, and would leave untouched whether they constitute the beings to which the reasoning refers.

Identity, non-contradiction and determinacy cannot be got behind, and the formalist concludes that they are therefore the axioms of logic. An axiom is a starting point taken up within a practice of proof, one of the sentences a system helps itself to instead of deriving. The three are conditions of there being such a practice at all and of there being sentences to help oneself to. Calling them axioms applies a concept drawn from within the practice to what makes the practice possible, as calling the capacity for sight a particularly vivid visual experience applies an instance-concept to the condition that makes the category of instances possible.

The formalist may answer that we cannot step outside our logical practice in any case. However, if §III is correct that every determinate being bears the constituent structures, a standpoint outside would itself have to be some determinate thing rather than another, and so would bear the very structures it was supposed to stand outside of.

Logic as the Scaffolding of the World: Wittgenstein

Wittgenstein treats the propositions of logic as tautologies.¹¹ They do not describe particular facts and therefore add no information about how the world happens to be. “Either it is raining or it is not raining,” for example, tells us nothing about whether it is raining. Logical propositions instead display what Wittgenstein calls the scaffolding of the world, the logical form within which propositions can picture facts.

The constituent thesis accepts the phenomenon and disputes its metaphysical classification. That a logical proposition adds no factual information does not mean that the structure it displays is empty. “Either it is raining or it is not raining” can leave the factual question entirely open only because raining and not raining remain determinately different alternatives. Its lack of factual information rests on raining being one way and not raining another, which is determinacy, and presuppose lies outside their scope.

¹¹ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1961), 4.46–4.4661 and 6.1–6.13, especially 6.12 and 6.124; on identity, 5.53, 5.5303, and 5.534; on the form of reality, 2.18; and at 6.1231, that general validity is not the mark of a logical proposition. At 5.4, Wittgenstein denies that there are logical objects or logical constants in Frege’s and Russell’s sense. The logical object of §III is not an object in that sense, a term for which a constant goes proxy, but the being considered solely as an object, and nothing here turns on the fate of Frege’s and Russell’s constants.

determinacy is not made empty by the proposition that trades on it. It may be countered that determinacy is itself a tautology, or that any formula displaying it is one. But a tautology is a proposition true on every assignment of truth-values to its parts; determinacy, as meant here, is not a proposition and has no truth-value assignments. At most, the objection shows that a truth-functional formula displaying determinacy *may* be tautological. That is a fact about the formula, not about the ontological condition it displays. To call the condition itself a tautology is to transfer a classification of propositions to that which the proposition presupposes in distinguishing its alternatives. Wittgenstein grants as much in his own terms: logical propositions presuppose that names have meaning and elementary propositions have sense, and he identifies that presupposition as their connection with the world. The present argument presses what that connection requires of the beings so named.

Wittgenstein gives logical form to reality as well as to representation. The disagreement is therefore not that he confines logic to language or thought. It is that he stops with logical form as the scaffolding shared by world and representation. The constituent thesis makes the further ontological claim that this structure is interior to beings themselves: identity, non-contradiction, determinacy, and rendering are not merely the form within which beings can be represented but part of what makes anything a determinate being at all. Logical propositions add no further fact about a being because they display structure already present in any being there is.

Logic as Revisable Belief: Quine

Quine's holism, developed in "Two Dogmas of Empiricism" and *Philosophy of Logic*, represents a major twentieth-century challenge to any claim of logical necessity.¹² For Quine, our beliefs form a revisable web in which logical laws occupy the center: they are the last to be revised, the most deeply entrenched, the most resistant to recalcitrant experience. But they remain, in principle, revisable. The pressure of experience operates on the entire web at once, and any belief, including the laws of logic, can be abandoned if doing so produces sufficient theoretical benefit. The asymmetry between logical laws and empirical claims is one of degree, not of kind. No statement is, in Quine's phrase, immune to revision.

Quine must be answered on ground other than the elenchus because his doctrine of revisability reaches all the way to it. Quine holds that logical structures are revisable in principle, so showing that he employs them establishes nothing he disputes. He may add that the elenctic argument is itself one more belief in the web, entrenched but revisable like the rest. Nor is his position undone

¹² W. V. O. Quine, "Two Dogmas of Empiricism," *Philosophical Review* 60 (1951): 20–43; reprinted in *From a Logical Point of View* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1953), 20–46; and *Philosophy of Logic* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1970), ch. 6, "Deviant Logics."

by self-application: a fallibilist may hold that his own thesis is revisable while having good present reason to accept it, and revisability does not deprive a claim of present justificatory force.

Nevertheless, two considerations answer Quine. The first is that Quine's web of belief is a model of epistemic relations among beliefs, whereas the constituent logic of Being is not a belief at all; rather it is the condition under which belief, revision, evidence, and the web that relates them are possible. Applying the revisability criterion to the condition of revisability itself is a category error parallel to the formalist's. It is also parallel in this respect, that it is an error only if these structures are constituents rather than beliefs, a question we have deferred until §III.

The second is that proposals purporting to revise classical logic, such as Quine's and the paraconsistent systems discussed below, leave the constituent structure standing. Whether or not they succeed, they do not dispense with the non-collapse required for determinate distinction. A proposal to revise must identify what is to be revised, must distinguish the revised system from the unrevised, and must be this proposal rather than another. Quine treats the resilience of the center as an empirical contingency. The constituent thesis explains it: what every revision, every proposal, and every web of belief must already exhibit is not among the things a revision can reach.

Logic as a Norm of Rationality: Putnam and Boghossian

Putnam and Boghossian each reject the idea that logical principles have no epistemic status beyond their place in a revisable web of belief, but neither argues that logical structure is constitutive of the beings to which those principles apply.¹³ Putnam's 1978 argument defends what is generally called the minimal principle of contradiction, roughly, that not every statement is both true and false, as

¹³ Hilary Putnam, "There Is At Least One A Priori Truth," *Erkenntnis* 13 (1978): 153–170; reprinted in *Realism and Reason: Philosophical Papers, Volume 3* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 98–114. Putnam appended two notes to the paper, dated 18 February and 23 December 1977, in which he first withdraws the conclusion and then partly restores it; the position he settles on at 169 is that what is absolutely unrevisable is the conditional that if the classical notions of truth and falsity are not given up, then not every statement is both true and false. Paul Boghossian, "Analyticity Reconsidered," *Noûs* 30 (1996): 360–391; and "Knowledge of Logic," in Paul Boghossian and Christopher Peacocke, eds., *New Essays on the A Priori* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), 229–254. Boghossian's argument is epistemic: he distinguishes metaphysical from epistemic analyticity and defends the latter as a basis for a priori entitlement. His example throughout is modus ponens, which he takes at 229 as the only underived rule of the system under discussion: from *A* and if *A* then *B*, infer *B*. The rule is held to help fix the meaning of the conditional, so that anyone who means anything by "if" is already reasoning by it, and an argument for its validity that employs it is not for that reason worthless. The two principles are stated at 249–250. On the permissibility of this form of circular justification, Boghossian draws on Michael Dummett, *The Logical Basis of Metaphysics* (London: Duckworth, 1991), 202, while recasting the issue in terms of our justification for employing a rule of inference.

epistemically unrevisable, on the ground that, with the classical notions of truth and falsity held fixed, we cannot coherently specify circumstances in which giving it up would be rational. The principle he defends is deliberately weaker than the unrestricted classical law. It does not say that no statement is both true and false, only that not every statement is. It secures that assertion has not collapsed, that saying one thing is still different from saying another. That is the propositional counterpart of what §I calls the constituent, and it is the minimum any denial must leave standing. Putnam reaches the propositional counterpart by showing that, with the classical notions of truth and falsity held fixed, no circumstances can be coherently specified in which accepting that every statement is both true and false would be rational. Whether the determinations that assertions are about must equally not collapse is the question his argument does not raise.

Boghossian approaches the problem through the meanings of logical expressions. He argues that some basic rules of inference help determine the meanings of the expressions they govern. If a rule has that role, a person who understands and uses the expression may be justified in reasoning by the rule without first proving independently that the rule is valid. Any attempted justification may therefore use the very rule whose use it seeks to justify without, for that reason alone, being worthless. The result, like Putnam's, is epistemic. It concerns our justification for reasoning in accordance with logical principles. It does not establish that the logical structures expressed by those principles constitute the beings about which we reason. That is the further step taken by the constituent thesis.

Rendering: The Showing of Being

The fourth structure, rendering, has been classified differently from the other three and has been kept outside their company. Leibniz states the Principle of Sufficient Reason in the *Monadologie* (§32) as one of two great principles on which our reasoning is founded, alongside the Principle of Contradiction, and states it there without proof: there can be no fact real or existing, no statement true, unless there be a sufficient reason, why it should be so and not otherwise, although these reasons usually cannot be known by us.¹⁴ Two things are done at once in that sentence. The Principle of Sufficient Reason is placed in the company of the Principle of Contradiction; and it is introduced as a principle of our reasoning while being applied to every real or existing fact and

¹⁴ Leibniz, *Monadologie* §§31–32, quoted from *Leibniz: The Monadology and Other Philosophical Writings*, trans. Robert Latta (Oxford, 1898), 235; see also *Principes de la nature et de la grâce* §§7–8. For the contemporary analytic debate see Alexander Pruss, *The Principle of Sufficient Reason: A Reassessment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); and Michael Della Rocca, “PSR,” *Philosophers’ Imprint* 10 (2010): 1–13. For a prominent analytic rejection see Peter van Inwagen, *An Essay on Free Will* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 202–4.

every true statement. He does not, however, treat what this article calls rendering as a constituent of the beings to which the principle applies.

In the later positions considered here, the Principle of Sufficient Reason appears as a requirement of explanation rather than as a logical principle standing alongside non-contradiction. The standard treatment partitions these structures into two groups. Identity, non-contradiction and excluded middle are regarded as laws, the traditional laws of thought, governing propositions and the objects they are about, stated as formal principles holding of anything whatever (A is A ; not both A and not- A ; A or not- A). They are laws about what is, not what anything is made of; determinacy stands in the place of the third here for the reason given in §I, that a being is one way rather than another, which is a condition on beings and not a principle of proof. The demand of *reddendae rationis* accordingly enters the later tradition as part of the Principle of Sufficient Reason: a requirement that a reason or explanation be available for what is. These positions keep what this article calls rendering inside that explanatory demand rather than separating it out as a constituent of the thing itself. The unrestricted Principle of Sufficient Reason is contested in analytic metaphysics, chiefly on the ground that it leaves no room for contingency; to the extent that the fourth constituent is identified with it, that dispute is aimed at something the present argument does not assert.

What None of These Supplies

Most of the traditional placements locate the structures in something we do: a sentence a system takes up without proof, a stipulation fixing the use of terms, a demand made upon explanations, a norm binding anyone who reasons, a belief so deeply held that revision is remote, a form displayed in our propositions. Three do not. Aristotle's principle is a common axiom, true of whatever is, and defended by showing that a denier cannot mean anything without it. But an axiom is stated of beings already there. It says what must be true of anything that is, and leaves untouched the question what makes there be anything for it to be true. Frege is the harder case, since his laws of truth are objective and in no way laws of thinking, and his apparatus is explicit about what it requires. It still begins with objects already available to it: a function must be supplied with an argument, a quantifier must range over a domain, and neither says what makes there be an object to supply. Hegel goes further than either by treating logical determination as constitutive of Being. But on his account a being has its determinacy as a moment in the development of the whole, so there are no determinations belonging to a being taken by itself. That account is also available only within his system as a whole, and the constituent thesis neither accepts absolute idealism nor requires it. The claim here *of* beings is argued *from* beings. None of the seven gives a being determinations of its own. Six begin with the object already constituted, whether they locate the structures in something we do or hold them objectively true of what is, since a practice, a

stipulation and a belief are each themselves beings, and an axiom and a law of truth are each stated of beings already there. Hegel begins elsewhere and arrives at the same place, since a being on his account has its determinacy only as a moment of the whole. That the four logical structures are what makes there be an object at all is the claim none of them makes, and it is the claim of §III. There the accounts that locate the structures in what we do are answered by the fact that what we do is itself a being. The accounts that make them objective without making them constitutive are answered by a question: is that structure merely true of objects already constituted, or is it the constitution by which there is a determinate object at all?

III. THE CONSTITUENT THESIS: BEING AND LOGIC AS CO-DETERMINATE

The constituent thesis holds that logical structure is interior to Being. It is not attributed to Being from outside, not abstracted from it, not imposed upon it, but constitutive of what any being is. Being and logic are co-determinate. That does not mean that they are two independent things which condition each other, since that would still leave two things standing in a relation with the question of priority open between them. It means that there is no Being to which logic has not already belonged from the beginning, and no logic that is not the logic of some being. Nothing is left over on either side to stand in a relation. Being without logic is not an alternative mode of Being, because the phrase fails to specify a being at all; and there is no logic without Being to set beside it, not even a bare form awaiting content, since a form is already something and would bear the constituents in being one. The co-determinacy of Being and logic is what Being is.

The demonstration has two prongs. The first determines what is essential and common to every being, the determinations without which there is no being at all. The second locates them, establishing that they lie in the being's own constitution rather than in a mind that thinks it, in a notation that describes it, or in a subject that bears them. Prescinding the attributes of beings until one can go no further without eliminating them as beings is the first prong. It identifies the four logical structures without locating them, and a critic may grant everything it shows and still hold that the four are necessary properties of a subject constituted independently of them. The argument from mind-independent determinacy and the argument from the objectual nature of logic carry the second prong, and they reach the constituent conclusion. Both prongs are required, and neither reaches the thesis alone.

The first argument for the co-determinacy of Being and logic proceeds by prescinding from the substantive determinations of an ordinary object. Take a coffee cup. It is ceramic, white, cylindrical, chipped at the handle, standing on a desk. Prescind from those determinations one at a time, not by breaking the cup but by withdrawing them from the consideration, as one considers a

triangle without considering its color. Let it cease, for the purposes of the consideration, to be white; then ceramic; then cylindrical; then a cup; and finally let it cease to occupy a place at all. Each of those is a determination of the cup, and the series separates the determinations by which it is this cup from the constituents by which there is a being there at all.

At the end of the series the cup stands as an object only: this one and not another, not collapsing into its own negation, determinately thus rather than otherwise, and standing forth as what it is and in the way that it is. It is a logical object, the cup itself under a restricted consideration, bearing the constituent structure and no substantive determination beyond it. Every substantive object may be reduced to its logical object by prescinding its substantive and sequential determinations, and that reduction, rather than inspection of a formalism, is how the constituent structure is found. One thing must be kept apart here, since a single term has been made to carry both. A logical object as entertained in an act of thought, one's thought of the number two for instance, is thought-dependent in that respect, and nothing more need be said of the act than that it is before a mind. Prescinding discloses the cup's own constitution considered apart from what else is true of it. The abstraction is performed by a mind; what it finds was not put there by the mind performing it.¹⁵

The termination of the prescinding series discloses the difference between a substantive determination and a constituent of objecthood. A substantive determination can be withdrawn while leaving an object for further consideration; the four constituent structures cannot. The distinction is in the object rather than the abstraction. It concerns what the withdrawal leaves of the object, not what a mind can or cannot conceive. Prescind whiteness and an object remains, no longer considered as white. Prescind self-identity and there is nothing left to consider, not a thinner object but no object, since what was to be considered was this one rather than another and that is what has been withdrawn. So of the rest. The series does not stop because the mind loses its grip. It stops because at that point there is no longer anything of which a further removal could be predicated. A limit of the mind would arise somewhere for reasons of the mind's own, and no such reason picks out this place rather than one step earlier or later. The terminus is located by what the withdrawal leaves, and by nothing else.

¹⁵ The distinction between the *substantive object*, a thinkable entity having substantive as well as logical predicates, and the *logical object*, together with the reduction of the former to the latter by prescinding, is developed in *Being and Intelligibility* (cited in n. 3), at 119. The direction of the operation matters and is easily reversed by a careless reader. The order of discovery runs from the substantive object to its logical constitution; the order of specification, by which a logical object is substantively predicated, runs the other way and is an order of thought about objects, not an order of manufacture. Nothing here suggests that reason confers logicity upon an unordered material. Substantive objects are determinate in their very Being, which is why they can be thought at all.

Prescinding leaves a full object under a restricted consideration, not a remnant. The robustness of a logical object is demonstrable from its countability, which requires only the relations by which anything is a determinate object. The point is clearest in counting across substantive kinds. Two *stones* and two *pens* are four *objects*. Stonehood cannot supply the unit of that count, since the pens are not stones, and penhood cannot, since the stones are not pens. Whatever an ontology admits to the count, each thing counted must already be one determinate object in the same objectual sense before any difference of kind can enter. Nothing here settles which composites there are, or fixes any inventory. Whatever is counted as one already has the unity by which it counts as one. The logical object is constitutive rather than residual. It is present in every case, and prescinding brings it into view rather than producing it.

The first prong runs the same way from any account of what a concrete object is. Begin instead with a bare bearer standing behind its properties, with a bundle of determinations, or with a collection of tropes, and prescind by the same procedure. A bare bearer must be this bearer and not another, and must not collapse into what it is not, or there is nothing there to bear anything. A bundle must be this bundle, and its members must be determinately distinct from one another, or nothing has been bundled. A trope must be this trope, of this determinate character rather than another. Each posit is reached only by specifying it as one determinate item, which employs identity, non-collapse and determinacy. The prescinding result is therefore indifferent to the substance ontology brought to it, and the accounts part at the second prong to which we now turn.

The constituent status of identity, non-collapse and determinacy follows from the mind-independence of determinacy. Take an object that exists independently of the minds which perceive it. Its existing rather than not existing must itself be determinate independently of those minds. If that determinacy is not conferred by a perceiver and cannot be supplied by some further fact standing over the object without presupposing the object as already determinate, then it must belong to the object's own constitution. To be sure, the question of whether a tree exists is a question about the world, but that does not get to the bottom of it. To answer the question about the determinacy of the world, as a world in which the tree is included, you must first answer the question of the determinacy of the tree. You cannot say that the determinate world includes a tree that is not itself determinate. If there is an object having the determinations of a tree, then that object is identical with itself, does not collapse into something that is not a tree, and is this way rather than that in precisely the way trees are. This argument establishes that determinacy lies in each thing, as what that thing is.

An idealist who denies that any object exists independently of minds is not touched by this argument, but is reached by the argument from the objectual nature of logic below, since an idea, a

perception and a perceiving mind are each themselves determinate beings. A realist may object that the four logical structures are necessary properties of a subject constituted independently of them. On that account being this stone and being self-same are two things and not one, the stone standing as the subject of which self-sameness is said. The objection requires a subject that is this one already, before self-sameness is predicated of it, and it may construe that predication as necessary, a determination holding necessarily of the stone without belonging to what the stone is, or as essential, belonging to what the stone is while the stone remains the subject of which it is said.¹⁶ Four considerations defeat the objection. First, prescinding and counting disclose no subject that is this one without already being self-same. Second, no subject is constituted as this one prior to and independently of its being self-same, so self-sameness cannot be a further determination predicated of a subject already so constituted. Third, the ground of the predication either is already self-same or is not. If it is, self-sameness belongs to the constitution by which there is a subject to predicate anything of; if it is not, there is no this of which anything can be said, and no further determination can supply one. The necessary-property construal therefore fails for identity, and the essential-predication construal fails with it. Non-collapse and determinacy go the same way. Fourth, a primitive thisness does not evade the result. Offered as what makes the stone this one, a haecceity must itself be this haecceity rather than another and must not collapse into what it is not, or it settles nothing about which subject it individuates. Self-sameness is therefore presupposed by the individuator rather than conferred by it. Nothing in the argument requires that self-sameness individuate. Self-sameness is common to every subject, and the claim here is only that no subject is constituted as this one apart from it. Identity, non-collapse, and determinacy are not separable components but determinations internal to there being a determinate subject at all. Rendering, established below, completes the constituent structure.

Denying that determinacy has a further explanation by calling it brute does not alter the conclusion that it is constituent of objects. The argument concerns where determinacy lies, not whether it has a further explanation, so bruteness leaves it in the object's own constitution.

The constituent conclusion answers attempts to confine logical structure to the rules of thought, because whoever locates logic in the rules of thought has located it in a being. This is the objectual nature of logic: *whatever logic is said to reside in is itself an object bearing the constituent structure*. A thought is something that is: this thought and not another, its occurring determinately

¹⁶ Kit Fine, "Essence and Modality: The Second Philosophical Perspectives Lecture," *Philosophical Perspectives* 8 (1994): 1–16, arguing that essence is not to be understood in modal terms and that a property may hold necessarily of a thing without belonging to its essence. The use made of the distinction here is narrower than Fine's. The point is only that necessity does not by itself settle constitution.

different from its not occurring, and one way rather than another. The rules said to govern thinking are borne by the thinking, which is a determinate occurrence and not an ontologically neutral process over which instructions could be laid. Formal calculi are constructed: their symbols, axiom sets and rules of inference are devised, and nothing here requires otherwise. That formal systems are made by us leaves the constituent thesis untouched, since a calculus is itself an object and the making already bears the constituents. Stated collectively, the same result gives that nothing stands outside Being: whatever is proposed as lying beyond it is a determinate something and falls within it in being one. Being is accordingly the actuality of there being anything at all, and §V draws the modal consequence of that identification.

Predicate logic records the constituent logic of the objects over which it ranges rather than supplying that logic to them. Consider the simplest existential statement: there is an x . The variable ranges over the objects of a domain, and when the existential is used ontologically its satisfaction commits us to at least one such object. Once that commitment has been made, the following is already in force: the object is self-identical; its being what it is does not collapse into its not being that; and it is determinately one way rather than another. These are not further facts about the object requiring separate statement. They are what had to hold for the commitment to have a determinate object at all. The statement “there is an x such that x is self-identical” therefore adds nothing to “there is an x ”: the second clause unpacks what the first already carries, and the “such that” is redundant.

The substantive attributes are predicated of the subject but that does not mean they stand differently in the object. Writing that x is grey adds something, since x might have been otherwise, and it adds a further determination of the same ground the variable already carries. It does not introduce a subject to which greyness is then attached. Putting the predicate on one side of the formula and the variable on the other separates nothing in the object and moves nothing into the predicate. There is no x apart from its being constituted thus. The proposition holds the object entire, unified, constituted logically and determined substantively.

The universal law that for all x , $x = x$ runs the same way, since it quantifies over objects already capable of serving as determinate values of x and therefore records in general form what each must already be to fall within its domain.

A formal semanticist might seek to sever the notation from ontology by arguing that his domain contains no cups and no roses but only elements, and that no ontological commitment is undertaken in assigning them. Granting that entirely, an element of a domain must still be this element rather than another, the same on its second occurrence as on its first, and determinately in or out of the

extension of a predicate. It is therefore a logical object under another notation. Whether the domain was reached by abstraction from things or laid down as abstract from the outset makes no difference. Its elements must bear the constituent structure in order to function as elements of a domain at all. A domain of logically anonymous elements would not be a domain.

The Fourth Constituent: Rendering

The present argument appropriates the *reddere* from the *principium reddendae rationis* and relocates it in the object, away from the mind that thinks it. What renders is the being itself, and what is rendered is its own constitution as what it is, rather than a reason supplied to a mind that asked for one. To be clear, this is a constructive ontological development of *reddere*, the verb underlying the gerundive *reddendae*, not an adoption of the Principle of Sufficient Reason.

The four constituents are not wholly symmetrical. Identity, non-collapse, and determinacy articulate the invariant structure by which a being is this determinate being rather than another. Rendering names that structure in act. Rendering adds no further determination alongside the first three; it names their actuality as the being's standing-forth as what it is and in the way that it is. A being is never an unrendered, static specification of determinations. There is no moment at which a being has the three logical determinations without them standing forth.

Rendering shows a being's objecthood. What stands forth is that this is a being at all, self-same, not collapsed into what it is not, and one way rather than another. A reason in the older sense is not what is given. A being does not stand forth as caused by this rather than that, as doing this rather than that, or as being for this rather than that, and a being that had no cause, no function and no purpose would render no less than any other. Causes, functions and purposes are determinations a being may have, and they stand forth in the same way as its other determinations, as determinations of a being already standing forth as one. Rendering is the self-showing of objecthood, and it is in that sense a being's standing forth as what it is and in the way that it is.

The Principle of Sufficient Reason requires that there be a sufficient reason why what is is so rather than otherwise, whether or not anyone knows it. Leibniz's own name for it, the *principium reddendae rationis*, is the principle of the reason to be rendered, and its gerundive carries a demand the principle itself leaves implicit: the reason is to be given. Leibniz takes the giving to be done in explanation, which is where our access to intelligibility lies, so the demand falls on the mind that renders the reason. Relocated to the side of the object, it becomes rendering, which requires that whatever is show itself from within itself as what it is and in the way that it is. Rendering belongs with identity, non-collapse, and determinacy because a thing's determinate constitution is actual as the thing's own way of being, and rendering names that actuality from the side of the thing itself.

The traditional treatment presupposes that an object can be fully constituted, can be a determinate being, without disclosing itself, and that its disclosure is something added afterward from the side of a knower. Consider what such an object would be. It satisfies identity (it is itself), non-collapse (its being what it is does not collapse into its not being that), and determinacy (it is this way rather than that). And yet it renders nothing of itself. Such an object would possess a determinate constitution that played no part in its being the determinate thing it is. But there is no further bearer in which a constitution could be held in reserve, waiting to be put into effect. A being is its ground constituted in this way rather than another, and its being determinately thus is already its standing forth as thus. Rendering is therefore not a second determination added to determinacy but the actuality of determinacy in the being itself, and to grant an object its determinations while withholding their standing-forth is to grant and withdraw the same thing.

Nor can this standing-forth be supplied afterward by cognition. Cognition takes up objects and their relations, and what it takes up must already be the determinate being it is. Knowing what an object is in the way that it is begins from the object's own showing, which cognition finds and does not confer. A representation may receive what is rendered under forms peculiar to the knower, and may receive it incompletely or inadequately; it cannot originate the determinacy it receives without becoming the source of the thing itself. Rendering is therefore prior to cognition. The thing renders because it is determinately what it is, whether or not any cognition follows.

Rendering should not be misread as determinacy under another description. Determinacy is a being's being one way rather than another. Rendering is that being's standing forth from within itself as what it is and in the way that it is. The tradition puts the showing elsewhere, so that the giving of the reason falls to the mind and not to the thing. On the present account the showing belongs to the being, as everything else the being is belongs to it. To identify rendering with determinacy collapses a being's being one way rather than another into its standing forth as what it is, and the constituent thesis requires both.

Four familiar notions lie near rendering, and none of them is it. Actuality says that a thing is, and leaves open whether the thing's being what it is is of itself its showing; the position rendering denies holds that a thing may be actual while its disclosure comes from elsewhere. Manifestation, in the phenomenological use, takes a term and is manifestation to something, whereas rendering is complete whether or not any cognition follows. Expression sets an inward essence over against an outward showing and asks whether the one has come out in the other, and rendering has no inward remainder that could be held back. Intelligibility belongs to a being as constituted by all four logical structures, and rendering is one of them. Being and intelligibility are self-same, so

intelligibility names no single constituent, and identifying it with rendering takes one constituent for the character of the whole.

The Kantian thing in itself might appear to provide a counterexample. Whether the thing in itself is the perceived object considered apart from our mode of cognition or a distinct object standing behind what appears is disputed,¹⁷ but on either reading the result is the same. On the first reading, if it grounds this appearance rather than another it does so by being constituted this way rather than another. On the second, a thing in itself distinct from the object that appears grounds this appearance rather than another only if it is itself this rather than another, and the requirement follows at one remove. Strip the thing in itself of determinate constitution and nothing remains in it by which one appearance rather than another could be grounded. It would affect nothing, and the grounding role Kant assigns to it would be empty.

The Constituent Thesis and Monism

A possible objection to the constituent thesis is that a logical constitution common to every being collapses plurality into monism. Parmenides gives the objection its earliest canonical form.¹⁸ If only what-is can be thought or said, plurality appears to require what-is-not to separate one being from another; without it, what-is collapses into one.

Determinate distinction is itself what holds one being apart from another, and the objection goes wrong in demanding a further thing to do that work. Two beings do not require a third thing between them by which they are kept apart. They require that each be determinately itself and that

¹⁷ Henry E. Allison, *Kant's Transcendental Idealism: An Interpretation and Defense*, rev. and enl. ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004; 1st ed. 1983), 42; Gerold Prauss, *Kant und das Problem der Dinge an sich* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1974), ch. 2; and Graham Bird, *Kant's Theory of Knowledge: An Outline of One Central Argument in the "Critique of Pure Reason"* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962), read Kant's distinction as marking one object considered in two ways. Paul Guyer, *Kant and the Claims of Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), and James Van Cleve, *Problems from Kant* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), stand closer to two. Nothing in the present argument depends on resolving the dispute. That Kant needs affection by the thing in itself while confining causality to appearances is a known difficulty, raised by Jacobi and pressed since; F. H. Jacobi, *David Hume über den Glauben, oder Idealismus und Realismus. Ein Gespräch* (Breslau: Löwe, 1787), Beylage, "Ueber den transscendentalen Idealismus." The point here rests on the grounding role Kant assigns, not on a claim that he can make good on it.

¹⁸ Parmenides, frs. 2, 3, 6, 7 and 8 (Diels-Kranz), in G. S. Kirk and J. E. Raven, *The Presocratic Philosophers: A Critical History with a Selection of Texts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957). That what-is-not can be neither known nor uttered is at frs. 2 and 3, 269, and frs. 6 and 7, 270–271. The deduction that what-is is uncreated, imperishable, entire, indivisible and motionless is at fr. 8, 272–277.

each stand in a determinate relation to the other. *A* is *A*, *B* is *B*, and *A* is not *B*. The last proposition does not introduce not-Being as another constituent of reality. It states a relation of non-identity between two beings already determinately constituted. Relation is therefore derivative from determinate identity, and the capacity to stand in relations belongs derivatively to anything that is one being among others.

Objects can be held apart and counted because each is determinately this object rather than another. Determinacy does this work even more starkly with logical objects, which need occupy no different places at all: two can be held determinately apart in thought without anything lying between them. The act of distinguishing them itself exhibits plurality within Being. Nothingness supplies no separation.

Nor is the constituent logic a common object or hub whose numerical identity would make all beings one. It is a manner of being constituted, recurring across beings rather than held in common by them as an item. A dog and a rose are each self-identical, non-collapsing, determinate, and rendering, while differing in their substantive determinations. The universality of the constituent structure therefore no more makes them one being than their common status as beings does. The constituent thesis supplies the condition for there to be distinguishable beings at all; it does not abolish their distinction.

The arguments from prescinding, counting, mind-independent determinacy, the objectual nature of logic, and rendering make one case. Prescinding shows what withdrawal leaves, and it identifies the four logical structures without locating them. Counting shows that no substantive determination supplies the unit that remains. The argument from mind-independent determinacy places determinacy in the thing rather than in a perceiver, and the argument from the objectual nature of logic, with the reply to the realist, shows that a determination without which there is no determinate subject is not a predicate of a subject constituted independently of it. Rendering is then argued to be the being's own standing-forth and not a disclosure added to a being already complete. Taken together the two prongs answer the accounts that would hold a subject apart from its logical structure, whether by predicating that structure of a bare bearer, by bundling determinations, or by construing them as tropes.

IV. WHAT NO DENIAL CAN ESCAPE

§III independently establishes that the four logical structures constitute beings generally, and therefore that they are self-vindicating in the sense given in §I. With the four established, the elenctic method, which ordinarily catches an assertion and shows that it cannot be maintained,

acquires ontological force as well, because a denial is not only an assertion but a being. It is determinate, distinguishable from the assertion it opposes, one denial rather than another, and it stands forth as the denial it is whether or not anyone takes it up.

Karl-Otto Apel recognizes that the elenchus is foundational without asserting its ontology. Apel argues that what cannot be denied without performative self-contradiction is justified in the only way anything can be, since no deeper court is available. Apel's term for the result is *Letztbegründung*, ultimate justification.¹⁹ He therefore supplies what Aristotle does not, that self-presupposition is a form of justification and not a debating point. But he does not supply the reach to ontology, instead taking the presupposed structure to be a condition of argument, the norms anyone entering an argument has already granted. Apel's self-presupposition is bound to rational discourse; the present one extends to any intelligible act or being whatever.

Paraconsistent Logic and What Its Statement Requires

The paraconsistent tradition, Priest, Routley and da Costa among them, provides a particularly severe test of the claim that non-collapse is constitutive.²⁰ Paraconsistent logics permit reasoning from an inconsistent set of propositions without allowing the inconsistency to make every proposition derivable. That formal result does not require that any contradiction be true; the inconsistent premises may simply include error. Dialetheism is the further and stronger claim that some contradictions are in fact true. Priest defends both positions. It is the latter that matters here, because it challenges not merely a rule of inference but the claim that a determination cannot collapse into its own negation while remaining that determination.

Priest advances a metaphysical dialetheism as well as a semantic one. In *One*, the principle unifying the parts of a complex object, which he calls a gluon, is argued to be both an object and not an object.²¹ Although we do not concede that any contradiction is true, we grant the dialetheist's claim for the purpose of asking whether even that claim can dispense with constituent non-collapse.

¹⁹ Karl-Otto Apel, "The Problem of Philosophical Foundations in Light of a Transcendental Pragmatics of Language," in Kenneth Baynes, James Bohman and Thomas McCarthy, eds., *After Philosophy: End or Transformation?* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987), 250–90; and *Towards a Transformation of Philosophy*, trans. Glyn Adey and David Frisby (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980), ch. 7. The difference from Apel is set out further at n. 25 below.

²⁰ Graham Priest, *In Contradiction: A Study of the Transconsistent*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), especially chs. 1–2 and 18–20; and "What Is So Bad about Contradictions?" *Journal of Philosophy* 95 (1998): 410–26. Richard Routley (later Sylvan) and Robert Meyer, "The Semantics of Entailment," in Hugues Leblanc, ed., *Truth, Syntax and Modality* (Amsterdam: North-Holland, 1973), 199–243; Newton C. A. da Costa, "On the Theory of Inconsistent Formal Systems," *Notre Dame Journal of Formal Logic* 15, no. 4 (1974): 497–510.

Suppose, then, that there is an item of which it is true both that it is an object and that it is not an object. For this to state a contradiction at all, the item must remain this item across both assertions; being an object must remain determinately distinct from not being an object; and “both” must remain different from “neither” and from either determination taken alone. If being an object collapsed into not being an object, there would no longer be two opposed determinations whose joint truth could constitute a contradiction. The same requirement governs the formal practice. The dialetheist must distinguish contradictions from non-contradictions, one formula from another, and what follows from what does not. He cannot dispense with non-collapse even when otherwise dispensing with classical non-contradiction; without the former, no logic could tell one of its own formulas from another. Nothing here requires the dialetheist to concede that the theory in which his logic is studied must be classical. He does not concede non-collapse; he cannot state his position without it.

The Liar’s Paradox, a prominent example cited by Priest, raises a different question. “This sentence is false” is ordinarily treated as producing a contradiction because, if true, it is false, and if false, it is true. Priest accepts both verdicts. But the construction can be challenged at an earlier point. The constituent thesis requires a subject to be determinate independently of the predication made of it. In the Liar’s Paradox, the subject-expression “this sentence” purports to refer to the whole sentence, and the whole sentence includes the very predication of falsity whose truth value is to be determined. The sentence therefore attempts to predicate falsity of a proposition whose content already includes that same predication. Though grammatically well formed, it fails to constitute a determinate proposition capable of bearing either truth value. On this account the contradiction is not true; it never arises because there is no completed truth-bearer to which both truth and falsity attach. That the Liar’s Paradox fails to express a proposition is not itself a new suggestion. What is offered here is a particular reason for it, drawn from the requirement just stated.²²

²¹ Graham Priest, *One: Being an Investigation into the Unity of Reality and of its Parts, including the Singular Object which is Nothingness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), chs. 1–4, for the gluon and the argument that it is both an object and not an object; and *Nothing in Particular* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2026), where nothingness is argued to be a dialetheic object, both something and nothing, and, in a qualified sense, the ground of reality. Priest’s *gluon* is a metaphysical principle of unity and has no connection with the gluon of quantum chromodynamics; the word is borrowed.

²² The suggestion has a long history in treatments of the Liar’s Paradox. An early medieval family of responses known as *cassation* or nullification held, in effect, that the utterer of an insoluble “says nothing”; some versions treated the failure as semantic. See Paul Vincent Spade, “Insolubilia,” in Norman Kretzmann, Anthony Kenny, Jan Pinborg, and Eleonore Stump, eds., *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy: From the Rediscovery of Aristotle to the Disintegration of Scholasticism, 1100–1600* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 246–53. The present

Either account of the Liar's Paradox leaves the constituent argument standing. If the construction is malformed in the way described, it establishes no true contradiction. If Priest is right that it constitutes a genuine proposition that is both true and false, the claim still presupposes that truth and falsity remain determinately distinct: to ascribe both is to say more than to ascribe either one alone. The same requirement governs the sentence and its negation, and "both" and "neither." Without those distinctions, no contradiction has been stated. Constituent non-collapse therefore remains intact on either account.

Priest's metaphysical dialetheism requires the same distinctions. The constituent account separately rejects the regress that motivates the gluon, but grant the gluon for the sake of argument. Its alleged contradictory status still requires being an object and not being an object to remain determinately distinct. If they collapse into one another, nothing contradictory has been asserted; if they remain distinct, the assertion itself depends upon non-collapse.²³

Transcendental Form and the Reflexive Structure

The elenctic argument of this section shares a form with the transcendental tradition. A transcendental argument identifies something as a condition of the possibility of something not in dispute, and argues from its being unavoidable to its being justified. Kant's transcendental deduction argues that the categories of the understanding are justified because they are conditions of the possibility of unified experience.²⁴ Apel's argument, set out above, has the same form, with argument does not adopt the medieval theory but gives a distinct constituent reason for the failure: the purported subject is not determinate independently of the predication made of it.

²³ The constituent account separately rejects the regress from which Priest's gluon arises. If the principle unifying a complex is itself treated as a further object alongside the things unified, a new unifier is required and the regress begins. On the constituent account the ground is not an additional object joined to its determinations; the being is its ground constituted thus and not otherwise. The regress therefore does not arise. The point required in the text is narrower: even if Priest's contradictory gluon is granted for argument's sake, "object" and "not an object" must remain determinately distinct for the alleged contradiction to be stated.

²⁴ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B116–B169 (Transcendental Deduction of the Pure Concepts of the Understanding); B232–B256 (Second Analogy, establishing that every event has a cause). Kant establishes the causal principle of the Second Analogy as synthetic a priori by transcendental argument: it is a condition of the possibility of unified experience. Kant sometimes casts the issue in sufficient-reason language, but the causal principle is narrower than Leibniz's unrestricted principle and should not be identified with it. The present argument reverses the direction of the transcendental strategy rather than extending Kant's principle: determinacy and rendering are conditions of determinate Being itself and not merely of unified experience. Kant confines such conditions to the domain of experience, and he does so on the strength of his own restriction of cognition to possible experience, which is imported into them rather than found in them. The constituent claimed here is neither the causal principle Kant defends nor the unrestricted

the norms of rational discourse in place of the categories and argument in place of experience.²⁵ Barry Stroud's standing objection to arguments of this kind is that a necessary condition of thought or experience is not thereby a feature of the world, and that the passage from the one to the other requires a bridge the argument cannot supply.²⁶ That objection has nothing here to attach to, because the inference it attacks is never made. §III establishes the four independently of anything about denial, and the elenchus confirms that result rather than supplying it. A denial is itself a determinate being, not merely a representation whose conditions must somehow be transferred to what it represents, and in being the denial it is it employs constituent Being. What the denial must bear, it bears as a being, so no passage from the conditions of thought to the world is required. There is no position outside the constituent logic of Being from which it could be questioned, because any such position bears the constituent logic in the act of its own formulation, whether it is the attempt to formulate a question, the identification of the constituent logic as the target of the question, or the claim that the question is intelligible.

Thomas Nagel raises the same difficulty from the opposite end.²⁷ He asks how creatures whose capacities are those of a biologically contingent species have access to universally valid methods of

Principle of Sufficient Reason. Kant's confinement is answerable to what he was defending, a principle about how events in experience are ordered, and it carries no consequence for a constituent of what any being is.

²⁵ Karl-Otto Apel, "The Problem of Philosophical Foundations in Light of a Transcendental Pragmatics of Language," in Kenneth Baynes, James Bohman, and Thomas McCarthy, eds., *After Philosophy: End or Transformation?* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987), 250–290; and *Towards a Transformation of Philosophy*, trans. Glyn Adey and David Frisby (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980), ch. 7. Apel's key concept is performative self-contradiction: to deny the norms presupposed by rational discourse one must employ them in the act of denial, generating a contradiction between what one says and what one does in saying it. Jürgen Habermas employs the same test while rejecting Apel's stronger claim to *Letztbegründung*, treating it as identifying the rules of discourse rather than as supplying an ultimate justification; see Jürgen Habermas, *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, trans. Christian Lenhardt and Shierry Weber Nicholsen (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990), "Discourse Ethics: Notes on a Program of Philosophical Justification," 43–115, esp. 82–99. The present argument is structurally analogous to Apel's but extends the elenchus from communicative discourse to any intelligible act whatsoever, including non-communicative acts of thought, and from discourse norms to the constituent logic of Being itself.

²⁶ Barry Stroud, "Transcendental Arguments," *Journal of Philosophy* 65 (1968): 241–256; see also Stroud's "Kant and Skepticism," in Myles Burnyeat, ed., *The Skeptical Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 413–434. For discussion of the objection and of the strategies proposed in reply, see Robert Stern, *Transcendental Arguments and Scepticism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), chs. 2–3. The elenctic argument of §IV needs no such bridge, since it does not proceed through what we must believe.

objective thought, and observes that the apparent unanswerability of that question sustains sophisticated forms of subjectivism. The question takes the contingency of the reasoner's capacities to stand in the way of objectivity, so that objectivity must be earned by reaching a structure that is not the reasoner's own. The constituent thesis leaves no such distance to cross. A reasoner is a determinate being and bears the constituent structure in being one; the objects he reasons about are determinate and bear it in being what they are. The structures by which his thinking is this thinking rather than another are the structures by which its objects are those objects. Universality of method accordingly rests on a constitution the reasoner shares with everything he reasons about, and requires no faculty by which a contingent organism reaches beyond its own contingency. The contingency of the species is beside the point, since the constituent structure is not something a species acquired. The further capacities by which a self-conscious reasoner considers itself as an object and abstracts from its own standpoint are not addressed here. They concern the knower, and the constitution of beings as such does not settle them.

V. WHAT THE CONSTITUENT THESIS ESTABLISHES

Being is anhypothetical, standing under no hypothesis, condition or prior field by reference to which its modal standing could be fixed.²⁷ Accordingly, the claim of Being's anhypotheticity is not made within the field of modal alternatives. A modal claim is a determinate articulation of alternatives within Being, so it cannot be made over Being. Every distinction by which a being is called necessary, contingent, possible or impossible is therefore drawn within Being. Being falls under none of them. An ordinary claim of necessity is made against a field of alternatives that the claim denies. The anhypotheticity of Being is prior to that field, rendering the field of modal alternatives inapplicable altogether. A reader who prefers to say that Being is necessary rather than anhypothetical will exclude contingency, possibility, or impossibility in doing so, and, since both anhypotheticity and necessity exclude the failure of Being, may reach the same result so long as he

²⁷ Nagel's question is at the introduction to *The Last Word* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 3. The answer developed in *Being and Intelligibility* (cited in n. 3), ch. 4, turns on an order common to the objects known and to the knowing subject, which is itself an object, and states the first of its three conditions as mind-independent rules of thought. The present account reaches the same result without that vocabulary, for the reason given in §I.

²⁸ The term is Plato's. ἀνυπόθετον occurs twice in the *Republic*, at 510b7 and 511b6, both within the Divided Line, where it names a first principle resting on no hypothesis; the related discussion is at 533c8–d4 and 534b8–10. Aristotle uses the word once, at *Metaphysics* Γ.3, 1005b14, of the firmest principle of all, which he there gives as the principle of non-contradiction. The present use takes the term in that sense alone, as that which stands under no hypothesis. Nothing here depends on Plato's account of how such a principle is reached, on the widely held identification of it with the Form of the Good, which the text does not state, or on whether Aristotle means by the word what Plato meant; on the last question see D. T. J. Bailey, "Plato and Aristotle on the Unhypothetical," *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 30 (2006): 101–126, who argues that Aristotle has Plato's text in view and yet must mean something different by the word.

observes the limits discussed below on how modal analysis may be applied to the problem. Under no circumstances may Being be called amodal, because that would suggest that the standing of Being survives the withdrawal of the modal contrast as an open question, to be settled by an analysis of some other kind.

Being is unlimited and unrestricted, and so is not a bounded region with an exterior, nor one domain standing among others. Where the argument below speaks of the field of determinate difference, or of the domain within which alternatives have standing, it names the articulation of Being itself and not a container in which contents are held. Being is equally not the bare existential quantifier, the unrestricted “there is something,” which carries no constitution of its own where Being has the constituent articulation §III establishes. The proposal that unrestricted quantification might have come up empty is the proposal that there might have been no reality whatsoever, and it is taken up below. Modality, negation, alternative, possibility and necessity have determinate standing only within Being.

The four modal classifications are used here in the following senses, each of them concerning a being within Being. A being is necessary when it cannot be removed from Being without contradicting the constituent logic of Being. It is contingent when it can be removed from Being without contradicting that logic. A determinate specification is possible when what it specifies might be added to Being without contradicting that logic, and impossible when what it specifies could not be added without contradicting that logic, or when the purported specification is not determinate. Removal and addition here are removal from and addition to what Being contains, and neither operation is performed upon Being.²⁹ Modality is called metaphysical throughout to distinguish it from the logical modality fixed by a formal system, the nomological modality fixed by the laws of nature, and the epistemic modality fixed by what is known. A metaphysical modal claim concerns what could or could not be the case given the constitution of what is, and the four senses just defined are metaphysical in that respect.

These senses are defined over beings, and their terms are supplied by Being. Classifying a being proceeds by asking what its removal or addition would do to the constituent logic that Being and its contents already bear, *so none of the four is available where that logic has been withdrawn*. A claim that Being itself might not have obtained therefore falls outside the four rather than counting as a further application of them. That much follows from the definitions and defeats nothing on its own. The claim that Being might not have obtained must find its warrant in three presumptions: that Being is not anhypothetical, that a field prior to Being supplies the alternative, and that the modal contrast keeps its terms after the articulation in which those terms stand has been withdrawn. Each is taken up and rejected below.

²⁹ These definitions fix the sense of the four terms as this article uses them, and they are not offered as an account of modality in general. They differ from the standard scheme in two respects. Modal logic treats necessity and possibility as interdefinable operators, so that whatever is necessary is also possible, whereas the four classifications are used here as mutually exclusive, with possibility reserved for what is not already among the things that are. And they locate the modal contrast in compatibility with the constituent logic of Being rather than in truth across a space of worlds. A reader who prefers the possible-worlds idiom may substitute it throughout, given the argument below that any such space falls within Being.

The Argument

Being is the actuality of there being anything at all. Logical articulation is interior to Being, and nothing has determinate standing apart from that articulation. Whatever reality modality possesses, it possesses on logically constituent terms.³⁰ A modal law, relation, fact, structure or field, if real, is something rather than nothing, and the modal distinctions themselves are determinate: this rather than that, obtaining rather than not obtaining, possible rather than impossible, necessary rather than contingent. Modality is not a fifth constituent alongside the four logical constituents. It classifies a being by whether it could have been otherwise, and presupposes the constitution by which it is a being at all.

A modal distinction is a determinate articulation of alternatives drawn within Being. Each of the four modalities defined above is applied by asking what the removal or addition of a being would do to the constituent logic that Being and its contents bear. Such a distinction is a difference, and a difference has two terms, each of which must have determinate standing for the difference to be one. The possible absence of a tree satisfies that requirement, since a reality with a tree is a determinate way for reality to be and so is a reality without one. Ordinary contingency runs both ways. Reality containing the tree can say that the tree might not have been, and a reality lacking it can say that the tree might have been, since each is a determinate way for reality to be and each stands as a term of the same contrast. The alleged contingency of Being runs one way only, since absolute not-Being holds nothing of which anything is contingent. The absolute withdrawal of Being supplies no second term, which makes the modal classification impossible, and ordinary modality is therefore inapplicable to Being.

A critic who insists that modality may nevertheless be applied to Being as such must be asked what his modal operator marks. If prefixing *possibly* to a proposition marks a real difference from not prefixing it, that difference is determinate, and every such difference has its standing within Being. If it marks no such difference, the operator distinguishes nothing, and the claim that Being might not have obtained says nothing of Being. No third case remains in which an operator carries metaphysical weight while standing free of the conditions under which anything is one thing rather than another. The critic must therefore dispute the constituent thesis of §III, or its application to real modal distinction. §III has explored and defended the constituent thesis, so only the latter remains to be defended here.

The ordinary treatment of contingency obscures this limitation on the scope of modal analysis. A tree might not have existed. Earth might not have existed. There might have been no human beings, no language, or no concrete objects. In each case the modal contrast is intelligible because the possible absence is an absence within Being: reality might have differed by lacking the tree, Earth, human beings or concrete objects, while remaining reality. Being is not another member of that series. A reality lacking Being is no reality at all. Every possible reality, merely in being a reality, already falls within Being. Being admits of no limitation, having no boundary, no exterior, and no respect in which it falls short of anything, *so no argument may take a limit of Being as the room in*

³⁰A related position has been defended on independent grounds. John Heil argues that reality itself determines what could or must be the case, rather than modality standing over reality and settling what it may be, and gives the result the form that if there is anything at all, there could not have been nothing. John Heil, “Brute Fact,” in *Appearance in Reality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 179–188.

which an alternative to it would stand. Inside and outside are alternatives within Being, and a whole that is limited is limited by something. The critic who asserts that Being might not have obtained cannot identify another possible reality in which Being fails, since every attempt reinstates Being in the act of specifying the alternative. The only remaining proposal is more radical: that there might have been no reality whatsoever.

That proposal changes the function of modality. It no longer distinguishes one determination of reality from another. It asks the modal distinction to remain applicable after the articulation within which determinate alternatives have standing has been wholly withdrawn. The defect is categorical. The two parts of the proposal stand in an order of dependence. Whatever standing the modal distinction has, it has from the articulation the proposal withdraws. Asserting the withdrawal and the distinction together leaves that dependence untouched. *Might, obtaining, not obtaining, instead* and *otherwise* articulate determinate modal contrasts within Being, and applying them after Being has been withdrawn employs a structure after abolishing that in which the structure has standing. A modal difference must be a difference, and the absolute withdrawal of the field of determinate difference cannot constitute one term of such a difference. With no alternative to Being available and no term by which the modal contrast could be drawn, nothing remains by reference to which the modal standing of Being might be fixed. It follows that Being is anhypothetical. The presumption that the modal contrast keeps its terms after the withdrawal of the articulation in which they stand is thereby denied, and with it the presumption that Being is not anhypothetical.

The elenchus of §IV confirms this result at the limit without supplying a premise for it. The proposition “Being might not have obtained” is itself a being, and the whole articulated content by which the alleged absence is presented as a modal alternative is constituted within Being. The proposition then uses that articulation to place Being beneath the distinction the articulation supplies. It fails because it applies a distinction drawn within Being to the alleged absence of the domain within which the distinction is drawn.

To be clear, we do not argue that the sentence is defeated by the fact that one needs Being in order to utter it. A reference may outrun the existence of its referent, and a thought of the absence of thinkers is not defeated by being a thought. One needs language to say that there might have been no language, and human existence to say that there might have been no human beings, and those propositions survive the point. Language and human beings are particular beings within a field whose logical and modal articulation does not depend upon their existence. The distinction lies in the fact that Being is not one represented item inside a surviving framework, since on the constituent thesis the framework itself has no standing apart from Being. Absolute not-Being therefore removes the determinate articulation by which the purported contrast between obtaining and not obtaining is a contrast at all, and not merely the speaker or the proposition.

Possible Criticisms and Their Disposition

That proposal has been made in several forms, and others may be constructed against a result of this kind, including the following.

(1) Logic itself supplies the possibility that Being might not obtain, since identity, non-collapse and determinacy leave open whether what a claim says could have been otherwise.

- (2) Formal modal logic establishes that Being might not obtain, since a calculus may admit an empty domain and a possible-world semantics may include an empty world.
- (3) The possible truth of the proposition “Being does not obtain” is primitive, and requires no further license.
- (4) The instruction is intelligible. Take Being unrestrictedly, negate it, and prefix a modal expression. Whoever can follow the instruction has the alternative before him.
- (5) Absolute Nothingness is the second term. It is that which obtains if Being does not.
- (6) A world containing no concrete objects is a genuine possibility, and it shows the possible absence of Being.
- (7) Each concrete thing can separately be absent, and by subtraction all can be absent together, and the last subtraction reaches not-Being.
- (8) Unrestricted negation generates not-Being as the term standing opposite Being, in the way that “A is not B” sets A over against B.
- (9) Being is what it is, and nothing in what Being is makes its obtaining necessary. The non-necessity of Being is accordingly a feature of actual Being, read off its constitution in the way this argument requires a modal profile to be read.
- (10) The critic may abandon the search for an alternative and call the actuality of there being anything at all brute.

Proposals (1) through (9) fail in one or more of three ways. The first fault is the assertion of contingency without supplying a second term against which the contingency can be measured. Whatever a proposal offers as the second term either has determinate standing, in which case it falls within Being and is not an alternative to Being, or it has none, in which case there is no difference for the modal operator to mark. This fault also disposes of the presumption that a field prior to Being supplies the alternative, since any such field would itself have determinate standing.

Proposal (5) makes this visible. Absolute Nothingness means none of empty space, an empty universe, the absence of concrete objects, or a peculiar negative item standing opposite Being. It means the absolute absence of Being and therefore of reality altogether. If Nothingness is treated as a state, condition, object or bearer of a modal status, it has been given determinate standing and brought within Being, where it ceases to be absolute Nothingness. If the reification is refused, as it should be, nothing remains to which the contrast between obtaining and not obtaining can apply.³¹

³¹ For independent arguments that total Nothingness is metaphysically impossible, see Emanuel Rutten, *A Critical Assessment of Contemporary Cosmological Arguments: Towards a Renewed Case for Theism* (PhD diss., Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, 2012), 14–15; and Heil, “Brute Fact” (cited in n. 30). Rutten argues from an Aristotelian-causal account of metaphysical modal facts together with modal principles; Heil argues that reality or Being itself determines what could or must be the case. Neither argument proceeds from the constituent structure defended here. See also Bede Rundle, *Why There Is Something Rather Than Nothing* (Oxford: Clarendon Press,

Absolute Nothingness is accordingly impossible in the modal sense defined above, since the purported specification is not determinate. The finding is about the proposal rather than about a candidate assessed and excluded.

Proposal (6) falls the same way. A world containing no concrete objects may possess logical structure, relations, modal status and mathematical structure, and insofar as it is a world at all it has determinate standing and is within Being. If strengthened until it means the absence of every being, every structure, every fact and every actuality whatsoever, it ceases to designate an empty member of a modal plurality and has become the absolute negation of Proposal (5). Proposal (7) explicitly adds the ultimate negation and reaches the same place. The informal move, that because each existing thing can separately be absent all can be absent together, is invalid without a principle licensing the passage from separate to joint possibility, and the developed arguments supply premises intended to secure it. However, even granting whatever those premises require, the result is at most the reality lacking concrete objects of Proposal (6). Absolute not-Being is not one final object to be subtracted after the others have gone. It is the alleged disappearance of that within which subtraction, absence, combination and modal variation have meaning.³² Proposal (8) supplies no second term at all. The unrestricted negation of Being is an operation performed within Being, and it generates no second metaphysical term standing opposite Being. §III showed that one being differs from another through determinate identity and relation, and that no Nothingness is interposed between them. Being and absolute Nothingness could not stand as two coordinate terms in any case, since standing in contrast would require each to be determinately this term rather than the other, which gives absolute Nothingness the articulated standing its content excludes. There is therefore no contrast with absolute Nothingness by which Being becomes determinate.

2004), which concludes that there could not have been nothing and reaches that conclusion through considerations of sense and intelligibility rather than through the constitution of what is, and which argues further that if anything exists matter exists, a step not taken here; and Geraldine Coggins, *Could There Have Been Nothing? Against Metaphysical Nihilism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), defending the thesis that necessarily there is some concrete object or other without any concrete object being necessary. That thesis is the closest published analogue in form to the scope limit stated above; it is argued within the possible-worlds framework and concerns concreta rather than Being.

³² Contemporary subtraction arguments for metaphysical nihilism commonly begin from the possible absence of concrete objects. See Thomas Baldwin, "There Might Be Nothing," *Analysis* 56 (1996): 231–238; Gonzalo Rodriguez-Pereyra, "There Might Be Nothing: The Subtraction Argument Improved," *Analysis* 57 (1997): 159–166; David Eford and Tom Stoneham, "The Subtraction Argument for Metaphysical Nihilism," *Journal of Philosophy* 102 (2005): 303–325; E. J. Lowe, "Metaphysical Nihilism and the Subtraction Argument," *Analysis* 62 (2002): 62–73; and Ross P. Cameron, "Much Ado About Nothing: A Study of Metaphysical Nihilism," *Erkenntnis* 64, no. 2 (2006): 193–222. Lowe challenges the restriction of the dispute to concrete objects. Even so framed, the dispute concerns whether an empty world is metaphysically possible; the present argument concerns the still stronger claim that there could be no Being whatsoever.

The second fault takes a feature of a representation for a feature of reality. A formula, a sentence, a model or an operator is an articulated being, and what it permits, expresses or admits is a fact about it. That a representation can be constructed settles what has been constructed, and settles nothing about what could have been.

Proposal (1) asks the constituents to generate what they only constrain. Identity, non-collapse and determinacy are the conditions of any modal claim but are silent on the question of modality in any particular instance. Two truths may be alike in actual truth value and differ in modal standing, and no principle governing determinate standing addresses the existential status of their contents. The formal modal systems of Proposal (2) introduce operators as primitives and lay down axioms to govern their behavior. Such systems settle how a chosen operator behaves under chosen axioms, and no more, in the way that introducing a predicate settles nothing about whether anything bears it. §III established that formal notation records logical articulation rather than conferring it upon reality, and a model, its domain, its rules and its semantic relations are themselves articulated beings. An empty unrestricted domain accordingly supplies no second term for a modal difference, since what it represents is the absence of terms.

Proposal (3) claims the same entitlement and declines to derive it. The proposition can be formed and its determinacy can be granted, but prefixing *possibly* to it cannot extend metaphysical modality beyond Being. Primitivity may be asserted to terminate a demand for further explanation, but it cannot confer upon an operator jurisdiction where the conditions of its application have been withdrawn. A critic who holds that metaphysical possibility just is the possible truth of a proposition, and who denies that possibility is a difference with terms, leaves the operator marking no contrast with the actual obtaining of Being, and states no contingency of Being at all.

Proposal (4) mistakes following an instruction for constituting its terminus. We can understand the operation performed upon the words, and that is enough to identify the assertion under discussion. It does not establish that there is an intelligible object or condition answering to it. Here the difficulty is maximal, because successful completion of the instruction would withdraw every determinate condition by which there is a conception, a conceived content, a difference between that content and another, or a modal status attaching to it. Proposal (4) ends where Proposal (7) ends. The final step of the instruction, like the last subtraction, is not a further operation of the same kind but the withdrawal of everything by which an operation has a result.

The restraint at work in the second fault is one the critic accepts in another case. The ontological argument in its familiar form moves from a concept of a being whose essence includes existence to the existence of such a being, and the refusal commonly made of it is that a feature of the concept has been taken for a feature of reality. Forming the concept settles what has been conceived and settles nothing about what is. The present refusal applies the same restraint to a modal predicate. A reader who refuses the move from the concept to the existence of its object has already granted the principle that refuses the move from a formable proposition and an operator to a possibility concerning reality. The resemblance invites a reverse charge that the present argument commits the same fallacy in the opposite direction, taking the fact that no alternative to Being can be articulated

for a fact about what is possible. The premise here is a condition on difference, that its two terms each have determinate standing, and absolute not-Being has none. That the alternative also resists articulation follows from this and does no work in establishing it.

The third fault proposes a determination that shows nothing of itself. Proposal (9) accepts everything argued so far, including that Being is and is its own explanation. Its author offers no second term and reifies no model. He says the non-necessity of Being is found in the constituent structure itself, which is where this argument holds that a modal profile must be found. Proposal (1) inferred an open possibility from the silence of the constituents; this proposal claims to have found a determination.

Said of the whole, *could have failed* is then a proposed determination of Being rather than a primitive attitude taken toward it. Rendering governs proposed determinations. A being's determinate constitution stands forth from within itself as what it is and in the way that it is, so a proposed determination that shows nothing of itself is refused at the outset. §III leaves no further bearer in which such a determination could sit apart from the constitution it would determine, and the critic may therefore not lodge the alleged possibility in Being while declining to find it in what Being is. Should he answer that non-necessity is the absence of a determination rather than one, his claim concerns nothing in the constitution of what actually is, and he has returned to an assertion without a subject matter. A feature of the actual constitution of Being by which Being could have failed would have to be identifiable as that feature, and identifying it restores the demand for an intelligible alternative that the first fault has already met.

Proposal (10) concedes what the other nine attempt and asks whether the concession helps. If *brute* means only that Being has no explanation outside itself, the present argument affirms as much, and for the reason already given: there is no outside. If it means that Being is explanatorily featureless, §III denies it, since the constituent articulation is what determinate Being is, and it supplies the only explanation appropriate to what stands under nothing. A brute fact may be necessary or contingent, and the word settles neither. Calling Being brute therefore leaves the question of its modal standing exactly where the argument leaves it.

One consequence should be drawn out, since it disposes of the traditional form of the Why question. "Why is there something rather than nothing?" misleads when its two terms are treated as coordinate metaphysical alternatives. Being is prior in the order of metaphysical ultimacy to the modal distinction under which a comparison with Nothingness would have to be made. Nothingness has not been excluded from an antecedent modal field after comparison with Being. There is no such field, and Nothingness offers no term for the comparison.

The Result and Its Scope

The result may now be stated in its scope. Everything that can be, differ, obtain, fail to obtain, be possible, be necessary, be denied or be asserted has its determinate standing within Being. Being itself is under none of these as an exterior condition. The statement "Being is" is accordingly not one metaphysical statement among others concerning an item within a wider reality. It is the

ultimate metaphysical statement: whatever is said truly of anything, and whatever modal differentiation reality admits, is already within its scope.

The result has no coherent contingency standing opposite it. The ordinary distinction between the necessary and the contingent applies to beings within Being, and the opening of this section has fixed what a reader who applies *necessary* to Being may mean by it. There is no coherent standpoint from which Being and its absolute absence can be presented as coordinate candidates. To call Being contingent would therefore not identify another modal status available to Being; it would repeat the categorial defect by placing Being beneath a modality whose own determinate standing is interior to Being.

Being is intrinsically intelligible, and this follows from the interiority of logical articulation to Being. The claim is not that every being must actually be known by a human or other finite intellect. It is that whatever exists possesses the determinate articulation by which there is something there to be understood. Epistemic inaccessibility is therefore beside the point. A purported reality unintelligible in the stronger sense of lacking determinate articulation would nevertheless have to be this real rather than another, identical with itself, non-collapsing, determinate and standing forth as what it is and in the way that it is, merely to be identified as the reality whose intelligibility is denied. Intelligibility in this sense belongs to Being before cognition and does not wait for a mind to confer it.

The claim that Being is its own explanation can now also be stated without introducing a further explanatory structure above Being. Being cannot arise from anything other than itself, since whatever is proposed as its source is a determinate something and falls within Being in being one, so it stands as a being and not as the origin of there being anything at all. Nor does Being cause or ground itself as one independently constituted relatum standing in a relation to another.³³ “Being is its own explanation” means that no explanatory remainder lies beyond its constitution. Identity, non-collapse and determinacy articulate what a being is; rendering is that determinate constitution in act, its showing itself from within itself as what it is and in the way that it is. There is no further bearer in which Being waits to be actualized and no exterior condition that converts its constitution into actuality.

Self-explanation is therefore constitutive rather than causal. To set out the constituent structure is to set out the explanation appropriate to Being, because Being is not under a further fact by which it

³³Grounding is commonly modeled as a strict partial order that is irreflexive, asymmetric and transitive, but each of these formal features has been contested and counterexamples proposed. See Kit Fine, “Guide to Ground,” in Fabrice Correia and Benjamin Schnieder, eds., *Metaphysical Grounding: Understanding the Structure of Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 37–80; Gideon Rosen, “Metaphysical Dependence: Grounding and Reduction,” in Bob Hale and Aviv Hoffmann, eds., *Modality: Metaphysics, Logic, and Epistemology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 109–136; Michael J. Raven, “Ground,” *Philosophy Compass* 10, no. 5 (2015): 322–333; and Gonzalo Rodriguez-Pereyra, “Grounding Is Not a Strict Order,” *Journal of the American Philosophical Association* 1 (2015): 517–534. The claim in the text is compatible with any resolution of these disputes.

obtains. Asking what makes Being obtain as against its possible non-obtaining again places the question at the wrong level: it presupposes the very encompassing contrast the argument has rejected. Being is not one result requiring selection from a prior range. Being is the actuality within which selection, explanation, modality and range have whatever standing they possess. The anhypotheticity argued above does not rest on this vocabulary. A reader who declines to call constitution explanation may set the claim of self-explanation aside, and the anhypotheticity of Being stands as it is argued.

The scope of the conclusion should be kept exact. Nothing here establishes the necessary existence of any particular concrete being. Earth may be contingent, human beings may be contingent, and every concrete object may for present purposes be granted contingent. Their possible absence is variation within Being. Nor does the argument depend upon any particular inventory of possible worlds or upon the existence of abstract objects apart from the constituent commitments already defended. The conclusion concerns Being as such: the actuality of there being anything at all.

Being is. It stands under no prior, exterior, or wider condition by which its obtaining could be set. Its anhypotheticity is not the result of comparison with a possible absence. It is the ultimacy of Being itself.

VI. CONCLUSION

We can state our argument in a single movement. Identity, non-collapse, determinacy, and rendering are the constituent logic of Being: the constitution by which there is a determinate being at all, and therefore the condition of every determinate object and every determinate act. The four logical structures are not axioms or theorems. An axiom is a starting point taken up within a practice of proof, and a theorem is derived within that practice. The four are what makes there be objects to reason about and acts of reasoning to conduct. Every axiom stated and every theorem derived already bears them. They occupy no third place alongside axioms and theorems, because they are presupposed by both. Their apparent redundancy when formally predicated of objects is the mark of that standing: stating explicitly what already belongs to there being a determinate object adds nothing, because the object could not have been constituted without it.

§III establishes that conclusion from beings themselves. Prescinding from the substantive determinations of an object discloses structures that cannot themselves be withdrawn while leaving a determinate object for further consideration. Mind-independent determinacy locates those structures in the object rather than in cognition. The objectual nature of logic prevents their relocation to thought or formal systems, since thoughts, symbols, domains and formal practices are themselves determinate beings. Predicate notation records rather than confers this constitution. Rendering completes the argument by identifying the thing's own standing-forth as intrinsic to its

determinacy rather than as something subsequently supplied by cognition. The four are not separable components and not predicates attached to an independently constituted bearer. They are aspects of the constitution by which there is a determinate being at all. Hegel alone among the positions of §II gives logical determination ontological standing, and the present account differs in reasoning from beings to Being rather than from Absolute Reason down to beings, and in holding that the four characterize a being at once, as determinations belonging to it and not as moments in the development of the whole.

With the four logical constituents established, §IV shows that the elenctic method acquires ontological force, because a denial is not only an assertion but a being, bearing in the making of it what it purports to deny. Priest's dialetheism requires non-collapse without requiring concession of classical logic at the metalevel: a purported true contradiction remains a contradiction only if its opposed determinations remain determinately distinct. The Liar's Paradox presents a still earlier question, since "this sentence is false" may fail to constitute a determinate truth-bearer at all. If it does fail, no true contradiction has arisen; if Priest is right that it constitutes a genuine truth-bearer, the distinction between truth and falsity must still remain intact for both to be attributed. Either way, constituent non-collapse survives the strongest proposed denial. Stroud's objection to transcendental arguments finds nothing to attach to, since the ontological conclusion is not reached by inferring from the conditions of thought to the structure of reality.

Being is anhypothetical. Whatever reality modality has, it has within Being, since a modal law, relation, fact or field is something rather than nothing, and the modal distinctions themselves are determinate: possible rather than impossible, obtaining rather than not obtaining. Modality therefore articulates differences within Being and ranges over realities rather than beyond them. Every possible reality, merely in being a reality, already falls within Being, so no possible reality can be identified in which Being fails, and every attempt to specify one reinstates Being in the act of specifying it. Nor can the operator be exempted from what it marks. If prefixing *possibly* to a proposition makes a real difference, that difference is itself determinate and has its standing within Being; if it makes none, the claim that Being might not have obtained says nothing of Being. The proposal that there might have been no reality whatsoever asks the modal contrast to apply after the articulation in which that contrast has its terms has been wholly withdrawn, and a modal difference must be a difference. Being is accordingly anhypothetical: no condition remains under which its obtaining might be set.

Absolute Nothingness confirms rather than produces that result. Treated as a state, condition or bearer of a modal status, it has already been given determinate standing and brought within Being, and it is then no longer absolute. Refuse that reification, as one should, and no second term remains

beside Being over which a wider modality could range. An empty world, an empty formal domain, or the possible absence of every contingent concrete being is therefore not absolute Nothingness. Formal representation can describe such absences without establishing that the absence of Being itself is metaphysically possible. Taking modal facts or possible worlds as primitive leaves the point standing. The critic is entitled to the verbal move; primitivity terminates a demand for further explanation and confers no jurisdiction on an operator where the conditions of its application have been withdrawn, so the move establishes no metaphysical possibility. The traditional question why there is something rather than nothing accordingly misleads when its two terms are taken as coordinate candidates before an antecedent modal field. There is no such field, and no comparison in which Nothingness was the alternative that lost.

Being is intrinsically intelligible, and this follows from the co-determinacy of Being and logic rather than from anything established about modality. Whatever exists must therefore possess the articulation by which it is something determinate and capable of disclosure, whether or not any finite intellect ever encounters it. Rendering is that intelligibility in act: the determinate constitution of a being standing forth as what it is and in the way that it is.

In this constitutive sense, Being is also its own explanation. Its anhypotheticity follows from what Being is, and not from an external principle or from the elimination of a competing candidate. The claim is neither that Being causes itself nor that it stands to itself in an ordinary relation of metaphysical grounding. Being's own constitution is therefore what leaves the proposed non-obtaining of Being without terms in which it could be stated. Nothing outside Being could supply a further reason for its actuality without already belonging to Being, and no unexplained modal residue remains once it has been shown that the proposed non-obtaining of Being lies outside what the modal contrast can reach.

Being is. Identity, non-collapse, determinacy, and rendering constitute what it is for anything to be.

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