Discussion with Graham Priest

EMANUELE SEVERINO

1. Dialetheism and primal structure

1. I would like to extend my warmest thanks to Professor Graham Priest for having kindly agreed to take part in the Congress held in Brescia (Italy) on March 2-3, 2018 and dedicated to my book *La struttura originaria*, published in 1958. On that occasion, he presented a highly interesting text entitled *Emanuele Severino and the Principle of Non-Contradiction*, where he analyzes a number of pages of my *Returning to Parmenides* (1964), now included in *The Essence of Nihilism* (Verso, London-New York, 2016, Italian edition 1972, Adelphi 1982) – an essay which elaborates on several central themes of *La struttura originaria*. Priest addresses the basic issues of knowledge. The video of his talk is available on Google, and the text, divided into chapters and sections, was distributed to the participants. For my own part, I provided a response in the form of a set of notes before the Congress opened. I re-present them here, re-ordered and to some extent expanded – though they deal with only some of the topics, those that I regard as most decisive, covered by Priest.

In the 'Presentation' of the first issue of this journal, I provided a rough outline of the general framework of my philosophical thinking, which provides the background for the following pages.

2. As we know, Priest is the most important supporter of the form of paraconsistent logic he calls "dialetheism". This theory holds that *in certain cases* the statement A and the negation of A are both true, or in other words they are both true and false, and consequently *some* contradictions are true. ("Dialetheism is the view that there are some dialetheias: that is, some contradictions are true, and so may be accepted. It is very necessary to distinguish dialetheism from a distinct view: that all contradictions are true. This is trivialism, and a quite different matter", 2.1).

Much earlier, my essay *Returning to Parmenides* had presented this central thesis of what later were to be called "paraconsistent logics" and "dialetheism", but had done so in order to demonstrate that it *is* a contradiction – where it does *not intend* to be a contradiction (but intends to theorize *non-contradictorily* that *in certain cases* the statement A and the negation of A are both true).

3. But before turning to why this thesis is a contradiction, I would like to say – referring not just to Priest, but to all present-day scientific and philosophical perspectives – that these perspectives' contentions no longer intend or can no longer claim to be absolutely and incontrovertibly true, "Truths" with a capital T, which is what the Western philosophical and scientific traditional has always aimed at. In other words, these perspectives, at least in their more cognizant forms, recognize that they are hypotheses, postulates, falsifiable knowledge, faiths, a desire to acknowledge that certain things rather than others exist (they recognize this, even though they often forget it). They recognize it even if they do not consider themselves as contradictions – given that, *from their own point of view*, not being a contradiction is *not* being incontrovertible truth (Hilbert maintains that, for mathematical beings, not being contradictions means that they exist and thus are true. But Hilbert does not say what determinations make his statement an incontrovertible truth, or what configuration truth would have to have in order to be incontrovertible. In any case, not even Gödel's essay on formally undecidable propositions has anything to say about this, though it sets out to prove that it is impossible to prove that arithmetic, and thus all of mathematics, is non-contradictory).

As for Priest, even assuming that his dialetheism is not in turn a contradiction, I do not see where it shows *why* it should be considered undeniable and definitively incontrovertible truth. This means that the thesis that *in certain cases* the statement A and its negation are both true (both of them are

at once true and false) can only be a hypothesis, or the consequence of a hypothesis. This must be said not only of contemporary logic and mathematics, but also of the "principle of non-contradiction" (PNC), since it arises from the climate of rejection of all incontrovertible truth.

By contrast, my *Returning to Parmenides*, which Priest discusses, is framed in a language that refers to a dimension where the *truth* has a meaning which does not belong *either* to the philosophical tradition, *or* to the negation of that tradition that is now taking place.

Greek philosophy invokes the *idea* of "incontrovertible knowledge", or "science of truth" (*epistéme tês aletheías*) and seeks to discover what this knowledge consists in. In the past two centuries – as we have seen – science and philosophy have denied that such knowledge is possible, and hence that an incontrovertible *ground* for it is possible. Not even logic can be the incontrovertible ground of knowledge. It proceeds from a group of postulates, or in other words, of conventions. On the other hand, by accepting logic we believe that we can transform the world according to certain projects: it has a *practical* value.

In any case, the meaning of "Being" that Greek philosophy brought to light is at the basis of the growth of all Western civilization, as well as that of the planet by now (the wisdom of the East is the prehistory of the Greek sense of Being). For the Western tradition, in fact, as well as for the knowledge that seeks to destroy it, Being *qua* Being is that which was not and will not be (it was nothingness, and will return to nothingness. My writings demonstrate that when the meaning of Being is interpreted in this way, it is "inevitable" that we end by rejecting all incontrovertible knowledge and any incontrovertible ground of knowledge. But my writings question the Greek sense of Being and can thus once again address the sense of incontrovertible knowledge, demonstrating its ground, i.e., the *primal structure*. This structure is the authentic meaning of primal truth. It is the dimension where Being *qua* Being appears in its being itself and nothing other than itself, and where the negation of this being itself and of the beings that appear is self-refutation. The "false" is the negation of the primal structure. I call the authentically incontrovertible "destiny", using the term with a nod to its Latin roots: "destiny" is "that which *stands firm*", which does not let itself be shaken or knocked down, where the "de" in "de-stiny" does not mean "coming *from*", but is an intensifier (along the lines of the Latin *devincere* or *deamare*, for example).

And it should be noted that in *Ritornare a Parmenide* ([RP] – *Returning to Parmenides*), this "being itself and nothing other than itself" is

called the "opposition of Being and Not-Being" ("opposition of positive and negative") – where the term "being" denotes *every* being, i.e., *every- thing* that is in any way significant (things, statements, feelings, impulses, fantasies, faiths, rational constructs, relationships, situations and so forth): *everything that is not nothing and nothingness itself.*

4. In the way *RP* anticipates the central thesis of paraconsistent logic and dialetheism, this thesis holds that that which exists is divided into two fields: one we will call C1, where that which exists is not contradic- tory, and one we will call C2, where that which exists is contradictory. But – I ask – why then do we have the "principle of non-contradiction" (PNC) whereby C1 exists and cannot be negated? In other words, why *must* "trivialism" (see section 2) be negated? Until such time as this ques- tion is answered, this PNC is a faith, a hypothesis.

It seems to me that Priest maintains that the "truth" and hence the non-contradictoriness of dialetheism is given by the circumstance that in dialetheism, the statement of the contradictoriness of C2 does *not* entail that it be followed by any statement whatsoever (or in other words, from that *falsum* that is C2, *quodlibet* will follow); and that it thus follows that dialetheism belongs to C1 even though it affirms that the contradictori- ness of C2 exists; accordingly, C1 would not be a contradiction. But even if we accept this thesis, it does not mean that dialetheism is an incontro- vertible truth.

5. However, dialetheism (like every paraconsistent logic) not only is not incontrovertible truth, but contrary to its intentions, is a contradic- tion (i.e., it asserts something contradictory, see section 7-9). This is one of the points where Priest and I do not see eye to eye.

Section VI of *RP* deals with the negation of the "opposition of positive and negative", or in other words, the negation of the opposition between any *meaning* – or *being*, or *entity* – and everything which is other than itself (my writings show that this opposition is the authentic sense of what phi- losophy and logic call the "principle of non-contradiction"); and *RP* shows that this negation is the meaning's negation (*in actu exercito*) of what it (*in actu signato*) signifies, so that it rejects (*in actu signato*, in fact) its own ba- sis: it rejects itself, and thus is unable to be what it intends to be. The demonstration of this self-negation has its historical roots in the refutation (*élenchos*) of the negation of the *bebaiotáte arché* (*principium firmissimum*), developed by Aristotle in Book IV of *Metaphysics,* which we will return to

later (see section 13-14) in discussing Priest's criticisms of the Aristotelean *élenchos* and how *RP* draws on it (and also goes beyond it).

6. *After demonstrating* that the opposition of positive and negative is irrefutable, *RP* considers the case where C1 (see section 4) is the dimension that, *without* intending to be contradictory, *is the negation of the opposition of positive and negative*, or in other words is the negation that affirms the contradictoriness of everything differing from it (i.e., affirms that C2 is contradictory). C1's statement of the contradictoriness of that which exists claims to be the only non-contradictory thing in existence (so that affirming the coexistence of C1 and C2 is a form of what then came to be called "dialetheism").

But – as should be emphasized – by demonstrating that, contrary to its intentions, C1 is contradictory, *RP* does *not* intend to show that the negation of the opposition of positive and negative is self-negation (such an intention would be a trivial *petitio principii*); rather, *once it has been determined that this negation is self-negation*, *RP* considers the thesis that posits C1 as non-contradictory and C2 as contradictory, and *on the basis of this determination* shows that C1, contrary to its intentions, is contradictory. (As I have already said, this seems to me to be one of the points where Priest and I are at odds).

7. *RP* demonstrates it as follows: "Since C2 is the negative of C1 and vice versa, it is said (when the non-contradictoriness of C1 is to be preserved) that C1 is opposed to C2, and (when the contradictoriness of C2 is to be posited) that C1 is not opposed to C2" (RP, p. 66).

Indeed, if we posit that C2 is contradictory, and given that C2 is related to C1 (if for no other reason than because C1 asserts that C2 exists), this relation is in turn something contradictory, and consequently C1's relation to C2 is also something contradictory (since C2's relation to C1 *is* C1's relation to C2); accordingly, the contradictoriness of C1's relation to C2 entails that C1 is contradictory, in the sense that C1's relation to C2 can be contradictory only if C1 is contradictory.

C1's contradictoriness is thus two-fold. First, C1 is contradictory because its relation to C2 is contradictory; second (as *RP* points out), C1 is contradictory because it is opposed and is not opposed to C2.

8. In other words, if dialetheism claims not to be simply a hypothesis and believes that its ground for the existence of contradictory dimensions

is a necessary (undeniable) implication, then the relation that dialetheism posits between the contradictory and non-contradictory dimensions cannot be external to the terms in this relation (an "external relation" in the sense that Bertrand Russell assigns to this expression): it is a relation that involves the content of the two dimensions.

Now, a dimension is contradictory only if it is X and at the same time is not X; and if this dimension is related to something else, it is not only X or only not X which is related (in which case the relation would not be contradictory), since what is related is the contradictory unity of X and not-X. This means that the relation between the non-contradictory and contradictory dimensions is necessarily a contradictory relation.

But, as we were saying, if dialetheism sees this relation as incontrovertible (i.e., if it holds, as seems to me to be the case, that the ground for the contradictory dimension's existence is not deniable, not hypothetical, not conventional, not provisional, not falsifiable, and so forth), then this relation cannot be an external relation. Consequently, the existence of a contradictory relation between the non-contradictory and contradictory dimensions necessarily entails that the non-contradictory dimension also be contradictory, and in other words that – contrary to dialetheism's intentions – *every* dimension, every being, and every reality be contradictory.

9. Conversely, in connection with the relation between C1 and C2, Priest asserts (3.5.): "if something is in C2 it is certainly true and false, and so contradictory. However, this does not make C2 itself contradictory". And he adds: "Even if C2 is itself contradictory, one cannot reject it on this ground without begging the question". This claim that my argument begs the question makes me think that Priest believes that *RP*'s treatment of the relation between C1 and C2 is meant as an *élenchos* of the negation of the opposition of positive and negative – where, as was indicated in sections 6 *ff* and bears repeating here – this treatment *is grounded* in the *élenchos* of this negation, and *on this ground* demonstrates the contradictoriness of the thesis (and hence of dialetheism) which seeks to support the form of negation of the opposition which considers that contradictory existence is limited to C2, or in other words demonstrates that dialetheism is contradictory.

Ruling out that dialetheism's contradictoriness follows from the way *RP* considers the relation between C1 and C2, Priest also adds that "it does not follow that there is something in C1 and C2". But the relation between C1 and C2 is indeed something that is in both C1 and C2.

10. According to Priest, dialetheism is confirmed by Hegel ("the most notable example", as he writes near the beginning of his commentary), by self-referential paradoxes such as the liar's paradoxes, and by the existence of movement ("Other subjects include the law, and the limits of thought). As it seems to me that Priest's contention does not clarify why the law and the limits of thought should confirm dialetheism, I will now consider the other cases of such a confirmation.

Hegel undoubted denies the PNC, *but he denies the abstract conception of this principle*, as I have shown in Chapter IX of *La struttura originaria (op. cit.), in Abitatori del tempo* (Armando, 1978, 2nd edition, Rizzoli) and in *Tautotes* (Adelphi, 1995). And if Hegel sees every *finite* reality as undoubtedly a contradiction, we must not forget that for Hegel every reality is the content of thought, and if finite thought contradicts itself – if contradiction exists – this does not mean that Hegel believes that a contradictory reality external to thought exists.

My writings have long dwelt on the difference between contradiction and the contradictory (i.e., impossible, nil) content of contradiction. Someone may *believe* that the circle is square – his or her conviction exists –, but its contradictory content, i.e., a square circle as a reality, is an impossibility, a nothingness, and cannot exist. (Similarly, we can say that madness exists, but not what it believes in). And since I maintain that, in considering movement to be a confirmation of dialetheism, Priest is again referring to Hegel, it should be pointed out that with the Hegelian dialectic method, movement results in thought contradicting itself when thought is still abstract "intellect" (*Verstand*) where determinations are isolated, so that the isolated determinations contradict each other and are involved in the movement which makes them become their opposite. For Hegel, in any case, movement is also that which removes the contradiction produced by abstract intellect – and in this movement thought becomes "reason" (*Vernunft*).

Self-referential paradoxes like the liar's paradox are also to be interpreted in the light of the distinction between contradiction and its contradictory content (nothingness). "This sentence is false". Reasoning about this sentence very quickly leads to a "contradiction", writes Priest (2. Background). But there are *contradictions* that reveal themselves as such immediately, and there are others – like the statement "This sentence is false" – that in order to be revealed for what they are must be subjected to certain kinds of conceptual elaboration. And these contradictions – we repeat – are precisely that: *contradictions*. They are not their

contradictory content; they are not the content they assert, which is nothing, and does not exist.

Consequently, self-referential paradoxes do not confirm dialetheism, or in other words do not demonstrate the existence of contradictory *realties*. Rather, it should be pointed out that all forms of knowledge other than the knowledge which is able to be absolutely undeniable, the "destiny of truth", are contradictions (see section 3, last paragraph but one). The sphere of existing contradictions is infinitely larger that the sphere in which dialetheism holds that contradictions exist.

There are contradictions – as we have said – that are immediately apparent as such, and there are others (e.g., "This sentence is false") that in order to be revealed must be subjected to conceptual elaboration. But this elaboration is based on hypotheses and postulates, not on the absolutely undeniable. In the case of "This sentence is false", the elaboration goes, as we know, "If this sentence is true, then it is false (because since it says it is false, it is thus false); if it is false, then it is true (because it says it is false). But the statement "If this sentence is true, then it is false" not only presupposes a certain logic and a certain use of the PNC, but assigns a meaning to the terms "true" and "false" that differs from truth as the "destiny of truth" and of its negation (and this also apples to the statement "If this sentence is false, then it is true"). Paradoxes thus spring from the desire to assume certain hypotheses as a ground. These hypotheses – as we said a moment ago – are not absolutely undeniable and consequently are contradictions that entail the contractions making up these paradoxes (and where these implications are themselves hypothetical rules).

11. In the primal structure of the authentically undeniable, i.e., of the destiny of truth, Being *qua* Being, i.e., every being, appears in being itself and nothing other than itself on the one hand, and a certain set of beings appears on the other hand. In this combination, the negation of this being itself and of this set is self-negation. As indicated above, *RP* considers this self-negation first according to how it is presented in the Aristotle's *élenchos* and then in its authentically radical form. Priest maintains that neither succeeds in its intent.

And as we have said (section 3, next to last paragraph) that in *RP* the term "being" is taken to be a synonym of "that which exists" or "meaning", so that "being" is everything that is not nothingness (and thus even the *meaning* "nothingness" is a "being"), in *RP*, "being" consequently in-

cludes not only the distinction between "meaningful" and "meaning", but also (l mention this because Priest has asked me) the "extension" of "everything that is not nothingness" (where this totality is the "intension" of "being").

2. Elenchos

12. As for the Aristotelian *élenchos*, Priest discusses the sequence where Aristotle notes that someone who denies the *principium firmissimum* must say something (1006a 12-13), or in other words, something that has a meaning (*semaínein*, 1006a 21). But for Priest, the something that has a meaning to which this passage refers would be "a simple common noun", like "man".

Except that, by interpreting Aristotle's text in this way, Priest fails to consider that this (i.e., "man" or another "simple common noun") is not the *primary* signification asserted in the *semaínein* of the denier of the PNC: this primary signification is *the universal negation of the principium firmissimum.*

In fact, Chapter 4 of *Metaphysics*, Book IV, which deals with the *élenchos* or proof by refutation of this principle, starts out by noting that "there are some who *state* (*phási*) that *the same* can be and not be" (1005b 35-1006a 1); where "the same" refers to *any* meaning whatsoever, or in other words, "the same" is universal. And, *immediately* after emphasizing that whoever denies the principle must say something that has significance, the text notes that in this significance "there will be something with a definite or determinate meaning (*horisménon*)" (1006a 24-25), and so – the text *concludes* – the denier of the principle, by "disowning reason, acquiesces to reason" (*anairôn gàr l gon hypoménei l gon,* 1006a 26).

Here, reason, or "logos", is first of all the *principium firmissimum* (and thus everything grounded in this principle). The fundamental meaning of Aristotle's *élenchos* is that if the denier of the principle states the meaning which is the *universal* negation of the principle, then this negation, as it means something, is a *horisménon*, something "determinate", or in other words it is a non-being other than itself, it is not itself and other than itself, and it is impossible that it exist and not exist. The content of the formula that Aristotle starts from (it is impossible for the same thing to belong and not to belong at the same time to the same thing and in

the same respect, 1005b 19-20) is in fact identical to the content of the formulas that state that it is impossibe for something "determinate" to be other than itself, to be itself and other than itself, to be and not to be – in the same respect. That the negation of the principle is a *horisménon* means that it accepts, affirms and acquiesces to this principle.

13 – In Aristotle's *élenchos*, the denier of the *principium firmissimum* first states the meaning that is the *universal* negation of this principle, but this is not to say that Aristotle does not consider the principle's particular negations, "Socrates is and is not a man", for example. Here too, however, as we will discuss in a moment (III, 17), *RP* proceeds independently of Aristotle's text.

14. In the meantime, returning to the conclusions of the primary sequence of Aristotle's *élenchos* – that "disowning reason" which is also an "acquiescence" to it" – it should be noted that precisely because "disowning" is also "acquiescing" to what was disowned, the disowning is not in fact accomplished and is thus only the *intention* of disowning reason, an intention that *is expressed* in the negation of the principle. Conversely, inasmuch as the denier of the principle also "acquiesces" to it, he does not intend to acquiesce to it, and *neither acknowledges nor expresses* his acquiescence and yet it is necessary that he acquiesce. This means that he negates it explicitly (*RP* says: *in actu signato*) and acquiesces to it implicitly (*RP* says: *in actu exercito*).

It is thus strange that Priest maintains that this relationship between the explicit and the implicit has nothing to do with Aristotle's *élenchos* ("this is not really Aristotle's élenchos", Priest, § 3.2, p. 50 in this volume). And the *determinatio* of Spinoza's *omnis determinatio est negatio*, which Priest considers extraneous to Aristotle's *élenchos*, is precisely the Aristotelian *horisménon* – even though Spinoza does not speak of the connection between *determinatio-negatio* and *élenchos* of the negation of the PNC.

In general, I would urge Priest not to lose sight of the *élenchos* of the *universal* negation of *principium firmissimum*, i.e., the first part of Book IV, Chapter 4, and specifically the passage 1005b 35-1006a 26 discussed above (section 12). *Everything* else that Aristotle adds does not concern that negation as much as it does the *particular* negations of the principle (e.g., "Socrates is and is not a man").

In this connection, *RP* develops a set of considerations that are not in Aristotle's text – (and which are informed by a sense of "being" differing

radically from that which has dominated throughout Western, and now planetary, civilization). We will return to this portion of the discourse, which Priest neglects.

On the other hand, we can say without fear of exaggeration that Book IV, Chapter 3 of *Metaphysics*, where Aristotle formulates the *principium firmissimum*, has almost never been understood (one of the very rare exceptions, and perhaps the only one, is Thomas Aquinas's commentary on this passage). And the failure to understand Chapter 3 has affected how the first part of Chapter 4 (1005b 35-1006a 26) has been interpreted. I demonstrated this in Part Three of *The Essence of Nihilism* (cit.). And in Part One of *Fondamento della contraddizione* (2005, Adelphi; French translation *Le fondement de la contradiction*, 2018, Mimesis), I demonstrated the inconsistency of Łukasiewicz's critique (with which Priest agrees) of the essence of Aristotle's *élenchos*.

15. We will now come back to Aristotle's *horisménon*, which crops up again in Spinoza's *determinatio*, i.e., in the principle that *every* meaning rules out (or in other words, is not) that which is other than itself (the ruling out theory of meaning): every *horisménon est negatio*. In connection with this principle, Priest states that "there are many predicates that rule out nothing, e.g., is an object, is self-identical, was or was not thought about by Aristotle" (3.3 *Meaning*); and a few lines later adds: "In fact, virtually no contemporary theory of meaning endorses the ruling out theory of meaning, just because it is all too clear that some predicates apply to everything".

I will overlook the fact that the dialetheist should *not* say that the predicate "is self-identical" applies to everything: he should not say it because self-identity is a way that what the dialetheist also calls the "principle of non-contradiction" is presented. Accordingly, if everything is self-identical, *everything* falls under this principle. And I will start by observing that the predicate that applies "to everything" is first of all the meaning "thing" (which I do not believe Priest has difficulty in identifying with the meaning "object"). The "was or was not thought about by Aristotle" (and every other similar predicate) is also a "thing" (in the broad, transcendental sense of "being" – see section 11). Greek ontology then thought of a "thing" as "being", as opposed to absolute nothingness. Aristotle – well before any contemporary theory of meaning – speaks of the science of *Being qua Being,* or in other words sees existing as being as the predicate of all things. On the other hand, "being" is everything that is in some way

meaningful, so that saying that "being" is predicated of all things is to say that "meaning" is predicated of all things. The meaning that is predicated of all things is first of all the meaning "meaning", or "being" – and as every "meaning" or "being" is an "object" and "self-identical", so every "object" and "self-identical" thing is a "meaning" or "being".

But if some predicates apply to everything and rule out nothing, *nevertheless* every meaning (every being), and thus every predicate rules out being a meaning other than what it is. However nuanced, complex and elusive a meaning may be, its nebulous semantics is not to be confused with another dimension or nebulous semantics. Additionally and *a fortiori*, the predicate "being" ("meaning") *rules out* that it is not predicated of everything, but at the same time rules out having a meaning other than itself: even being predicated of everything rules out not being predicated of everything. And it is only because "being" rules out being meaningful in another way that "being" can be the predicate of everything.

"Being" does not rule out anything: in the sense that it is the predicate of everything. Asserting that its meaning differs from the meaning in which it consists is a contradiction; but contradictions are also beings (unlike their null content). And consequently, "being" is also predicated of the contradiction "being is a meaning differing from the meaning of which it consists". And indeed, it is precisely because "being" *rules out* that it is *not* the predicate of everything and in general rules out being meaningful in another way than its own, that "being" "applies to everything".

(The statement "Every predicate rules out having a meaning differing from what it is" does not mean that a meaning – this white surface, for instance – can disappear and be replaced by the appearance of this black surface. In other words, it does not rule out what Western civilization, which is now planetary civilization, interprets as this white surface's "becoming black").

That "being" does not rule out anything because it is the predicate of everything is not to be confused with the need for "being" to rule out being meaningful in a way other than its own and for which it is the predicate of everything.

16. In addition, just as "being" does not mean "tree", "water", "moon", and so forth (even though it is the predicate of "tree", "water", "moon", and so forth), so "being" does not even mean, and, in a certain sense, above all does not mean "nothing". "Being" is not "nothing".

And yet "being" is also predicated of "nothing". In fact, the "nothing"

that "being" (the *determinatio* "being") denies that it is (i.e., that "being" rules out) is a meaning that, unlike all other meanings, signifies the absence of all signification, and is thus a *contradiction*. As such, the meaning signifies *something*, but the meaning "nothing" signifies the absence of any *thing*. The signification of this meaning contradicts what it signifies.

Except that, as we have seen, contradiction (being contradictory) is not nothing, but is in turn a being, a meaning, so that "being" is also predicated of the meaning "nothing". It is only because the *determinatio* "being" is *negatio* of the meaning "nothing" that this *determinatio* can also be predicated of this meaning. Thus, the meaning "being" does not rule out "nothing", but this is not in turn a contradiction.

The conviction that the existence of meanings that apply to everything entails that the *determinatio* as such is *not negatio* of what is other than the *determinatio* is the negation of the opposition of the positive and the negative – and as we discussed above, is the form the *élenchos* of this negation should take, over and above the configuration of Aristotle's text. What is all clear for every contemporary theory of meaning is thus more complex than could be suspected.

The contradiction in the meaning "nothing" (and the aporia brought about by the fact that Nothing is thought about, and thus exists in some way) are addressed in particular by Chapter IV of *La struttura originaria*, *cit.* and by *Intorno al senso del nulla*, Adelphi, 2013. Here, in addition to reiterating the distinction between contradiction (which is a being) and the contradictory content of the contradiction (which is a non-being, nothing, or in other words an impossibility), we can point out that in the statement "being is not nothing" – i.e., in the negation of "being is nothing" – "being is nothing" is a contradiction both because, as in all contradictions, the predicate is the negation of the subject, and because the predicate itself is a contradiction, or in other words, it is a meaning whose content is the absence of all meaning. And the sense of this two-fold contradiction is addressed determinately in the two works cited above.

3. Elenchos and primal structure

17. But, as we were saying (section 13), the denier of the opposition of positive and negative makes statements that are not only the universal negation of the opposition, but are also particular negations, e.g., "Socrates is and is not a man".
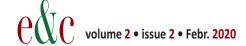
Of this negation, Priest writes: "This is clearly, in some sense, a denial of the PNC. But how does it presuppose the PNC [i.e., the *principium firmissimum*]? There is, as far as I can see, no argument for this in this piece of text" (3.2): according to Priest, my text presents no argument that would allow us to claim that that negation of the principal of non-contradiction ("Socrates is and is not a man") presupposes that principle.

RP (pp. 66-68) considers the statement that "red is green" (or, to give other similar examples here, that this house is this tree, or that a certain hot liquid is not hot, etc.). As will be clarified below, the statement "red is green" is of the same type as "Socrates is and is not a man"; but we will begin with the latter, applying the same considerations that RP applies to "red is green".

"Socrates is and is not a man" is equivalent to "The man Socrates is not-man" (p), which is in turn equivalent to "The not-man Socrates is man". Now, following *RP*, it should be noted that p is the (particular) negation of the opposition of positive and negative only if, in this negation, "man Socrates" (MS) shows a meaning other than "not-man (nM)". If MS were to show the same meaning as nM, the statement "MS is nM", as such, would not be a negation of the opposition between positive and negative.

But if it is necessary that, to be the negation of that opposition, "MS is nM" (p) must be such that MS differs from nM, this differing is the opposition of that positive which is MS to that negative which is nM; thus, p is the negation of that (the difference-opposition) which, in p, makes it possible for it to be the negation of the opposition – and consequently p is the negation of itself. Contrary to Priest's belief, p is thus grounded upon, and *presupposes* that which it denies; it does not deny the universal opposition of positive and negative, but that particular opposition – that individuation of the universal opposition – which is the negation of p. (And it denies *in actu signato* what it affirms *in actu exercito*).

The example *RP* uses to demonstrate the self-negation of the particular negations of the opposition between positive and negative is, as we have said, the statement "red is green" (p'). And *RP* notes that p' denies the opposition *only if* "red" and "green" show themselves to be different (opposed); here again, then, p' is the negation of the difference-opposition which, in p', enables p' to be the negation of the opposition – and consequently p' is the negation of what it affirms, the negation of itself. Here, "red" corresponds to MS and "green" corresponds to nM. Priest

writes that "dialetheists are not, as such, committed to things of the form: Red is green". Except that things of the form "Red is green" belong, as we have said, to the same type as things of the form "Socrates is and is not a man", which the dialetheist is committed to defending.

However, the main intention of these pages of *RP* is not that of obliging the dialetheist to come to grips with statements like "red is green" (as Priest would appear to think), but to demonstrate that even the *particular* negations of the universal opposition of positive and negative (i.e., the individuations of this opposition) can be constituted only by denying themselves. Here, it should also be borne in mind that the configuration of the *élenchos* of *p* (and of *p'*) enables the primal structure to be the negation both of the particular negations and of the universal negation of the opposition of positive and negative, as "positive" is to "negative" as *MS* is to *nM*, or as "red" is to "green".

Above all, however, it should also be emphasized that the sense of the primal structure would change completely were we to affirm that it is incontrovertible because p' (and p) are contradictions. If this were the case, the *élenchos* of the negation of the opposition of positive and negative would beg the question. This does not mean that *p'* (and *p*) are *not* contradictions, but that *p*, which is a contradiction, is not able to be the negation of the opposition of positive and negative which appears in the primal structure, in the sense that *p* is such a negation *only* by *also* being the negation of itself, and precisely for this reason is unable to be the negation of that opposition (just as the synthesis of *K* and not-*K* differs from *K*). The negation of the primal structure cannot be constituted, and that structure is the negation of *p* in the sense that it denies the *intention* that p be such a negation: the intention that consists in what *p* means *in actu exercito*. I like to say that the primal structure – and thus the opposition of positive and negative – is a target such that every arrow shot at it pierces itself and can thus never reach the target.

Note 1 – In saying that statement A and the negation of A are both true, or both true and false, it is necessary that the dialetheism assert the difference (opposition) between the meaning of A and the meaning of the negation of A. In other words, it is necessary that their difference appear; indeed, if no difference between A and not-A were to appear, the statement that A and the negation of A are both true or both true and false would not be a dialetheia (i.e., a particular negation of the PNC). This means on the one hand that the dialetheia is *in actu exercito* that which it denies *in actu signato*, or in other words denies being a dialetheia

in actu exercito; on the other hand, dialetheism is the simple faith that, *in actu exercito*, presupposes that A opposes not-A *in actu signato*, i.e., denies being a dialetheia *in actu exercito*.

But then, why must this opposition be asserted? The negation of the PNC can have a more radical meaning than that known to dialetheism.

Note 2 – Priest maintains that a *dialetheia* consists of two statements of the form *A* and not-*A,* where both are true, or where *A* is both true and false. But even dialetheism, or any form of knowledge or logic that holds sway today, does not assert that "true" and "false" can mean, respectively, the incontrovertible primal structure of the truth of destiny (and that which it necessarily entails), and the negation of that structure. Rather, they are more or less accredited hypotheses (postulates, faith, decisions) and negations of these hypotheses (postulates, etc.). Just as the PNC is only a hypothesis which for dialetheism cannot be denied in C1, so in a dialetheia saying that A and not-A are true, or that A is both true and false, are hypotheses (postulates, etc.) that contradict each other. This form of contradiction is how the normal contradiction takes shape in the dimension where people commonly believe they live, or in other words, in the dimension separated from the truth of destiny.

18. As the primal structure of the incontrovertible is the appearance of the opposition of positive and negative, the negation of their non-opposition, this structure is necessarily the appearance of this non-opposition. But this circumstance does *not* mean that, just as the negation of the opposition between *MS* and *nM* denies that which enables them to exist, so the negation of the opposition between positive and negative would be (given that it is necessarily the appearance of this non-opposition) the negation of that which enables them to exist. In fact, the non-opposition appearing in its negation is the positive meaning of Nothing, not the nothingness of the non-opposition, not a Nothing. In other words, it is not the case that the negation of the opposition is made possible by that which it denies, and that consequently the negation whereby the primal and incontrovertible structure of the destiny of truth denies the non-opposition is also self-negation.

It should be added that the negation of the non-opposition, by opposing the non-opposition, is an individuation of the universal opposition of positive and negative, whereas the negation of the opposition, by opposing the opposition (otherwise, it would not be its negation) is self-negation.

19. The primal structure of the incontrovertible includes the negation of the opposition (and the negation of the beings that appear). If this structure were *only* the appearing of the being's being itself and thus were not the appearing of the negation of the opposition (if it were *determinatio* without being *negatio*), this structure would be affirmation and negation of the opposition: it would be explicitly (*in actu signato*) the affirmation and implicitly (*in actu exercito*) the negation, because if it were the appearing of only the affirmation of the opposition it could not be the negation of the non-opposition. In other words, it would leave the possibility of the non-opposition open. The authentic primal structure, as the negation of the non-opposition, is also the negation of this inauthentic form of the primal structure.

20. It could be objected that everything that is denied by the incontrovertible – as the negation of the opposition is denied – is nothing, but nevertheless appears and thus is being. Demonstrating this contradiction – which as we have seen (section 16, last paragraph), is at the heart of the aporia of Nothing (see *La struttura originaria*, IV, *cit.* and *Intorno al senso del nulla, cit.*) and seems to belong to the primal structure – this objection does not obviate the need for the negation of the opposition to be self-negation, but demonstrates that this necessity, while remaining such, is joined to that contradiction. And not only, but as this contradiction is (like every contradiction) a negation of the opposition, considering this contradiction as something that must be denied is grounded upon the primal structure and thus cannot be its denial. In other words, it is necessary that the denial be only apparent.

21. As we have said (section 19), the primal structure of the incontrovertible *includes* the negation of the negation of the opposition: it does not coincide with it. This structure, in fact, is the appearing of being itself and not other than itself (it is the appearing of the opposition) on the part of being *qua* being, and thus on the part of every being and, primarily, *on the part of the beings that appear*, where both the negation of being itself and the negation *of the beings that appear* is self-negation. Thus, the primal structure *also includes* the negation of the negation of the existence of the beings that appear.

That something like appearing, affirmation, negation, opposition, the positive meaning of Nothing, contradiction, non-contradiction and so forth can exist is something incontrovertible because these determina-

tions are beings that appear together with the totality of the beings that appear in the primal structure of the incontrovertible. And the negation of their existence is self-negation *for the same reason* that the negation of the opposition between *MS* and *nM* is self-negation. For example, to deny that *these words* exist, it is necessary that *these words* appear in the negation, and thus exist, so this negation denies that part of itself which is the condition for its existence. This negation is consequently self-negation. The logical, natural and mathematical sciences presuppose that their content exists; phenomenology limits itself to the principle that everything that appears cannot be denied, but it does not show why.

22. Section 5 discussed how *RP* demonstrates that the universal negation of the opposition is self-negation: to the extent in which it intends to be the negation of the opposition, this negation rules out not being a negation. Accordingly, it is the negation (*in actu exercito*) of its own meaning what (*in actu signato*) it means, and thus denies itself. In the ascertainment of this self-negation, what brings it about is the *total* meaning of this negation, in the sense that it is precisely this *total* meaning which rules out that it can mean something other than what it means (in other words, it is this *total* meaning that opposes that which is other than itself, so that the negation of the opposition denies itself).

As regards the self-negation of the particular negation of the opposition between *MS* and *nM* (section 17, *ff*), on the other hand, what brings it about is that *part* of the total meaning of the negation which is the content it denies – i.e., it is the opposition between *MS* and *nM*. Thus, the negation denies itself not inasmuch as it is its own total meaning, but inasmuch as the content that it denies shows itself in it as the opposition that it denies. So the negation denies itself, and is not negation.

In any case, that the self-negation of the negation of the opposition is due to the total meaning of this negation is a property not only of the universal negation of the opposition, but also of the particular negations of the opposition. For example, the negation that *MS* is not *nM* in fact intends to be the negation that *MS* is not *nM*: it intends to be itself, or in other words what it is in its totality. So *in actu signato* it denies what it is *in actu exercito*, i.e., denies that it is the negation of what is other than itself.

On the other hand, that the self-negation of the negation of the opposition is due to that part of the total meaning of this negation which is the content it denies is a property not only of the particular negations, but also of the universal negation of the opposition. To deny that (every)

positive opposes (every) negative, it is necessary that the content denied by the negation (i.e., the opposition) appear, and that consequently – here as before – the negation deny *in actu signato* what it is *in actu exercito*, or in other words that it deny itself.

23. It was pointed out in section 17, fourth paragraph, that if *MS* were to show the same meaning as *nM,* the statement "*MS* is *nM*", as such, would *not* be a negation of the opposition between positive and negative.

We must now clarify that *everything* shown in a dimension other than the incontrovertible (and first of all by the primal structure of the incontrovertible) is its negation and consequently is also a negation of that primal trait of the incontrovertible that is the opposition between positive and negative. So if *MS* were to show the same meaning as *nM in a dimension other than the incontrovertible*, then "*MS* is *nM*" would also be a negation of the authentic opposition between positive and negative.

In the fifth paragraph of section 17, we also added that, in order to be the negation of that opposition, it is necessary that "*MS* is *nM*" be such that *MS* differs from *nM*, and so differing is the opposition of that positive which is *MS* to that negative which is *nM*. But here again, if *MS* differs from *nM* in a dimension other than the primal structure of destiny, then this differing is *not* that opposition of *MS* to *nM* that appears in this structure, and consequently this differing is also the negation of this opposing. In other words, for the opposition of *MS* to *nM* to be authentically incontrovertible, it is necessary that this opposition appear in the primal structure of destiny. And this necessity also exists in relation to the universal opposition of positive and negative.

This necessity concerns the primal form of the authentic sense of the *élenchos* of the negation of the opposition: by contrast with passage 1005b 35-1006a 26 of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, where the relation between affirmation and negation of the *bebaiotáte arché* is *intersubjective* in character, or in other words is the relation between the supporter of that *archè* (the *phil sophos*, 1005b 6) and his "opponent" (*ho amphisbetôn,* 1006b 13) – a relation that, at the level in which the *élenchos* is established, can only be a simple, ungrounded presupposition.

24. All the properties of the *élenchos* of the negation of the primal structure of truth's destiny (e.g., the properties considered in the previous section) are necessarily a part of that *élenchos*. On the other hand, even to

the extent that the *élenchos* is distinct from its properties, it is the primal incontrovertible; and it is the primal incontrovertible even if these properties do not appear and the *élenchos* appears separately from them.

Inasmuch as it is separate, it does not show its concrete meaning and is thus a typical form of the *contradiction* that in my writings is called "contradiction C". This is a contradiction that is not overcome by its content (as is the case for "normal" contradictions), but by the appearance of its concreteness.

25. Conversely, the *élenchos* of the negation of the primal structure, unlike the properties considered in the previous section, is neither a property of the universal opposition of positive and negative, nor a property of the totality of the beings that appear: it is not such a property in the sense that the affirmation of this opposition and this totality, separated from the *élenchos* of their negation, are only postulates, faiths, forms of will or conventions.

On the other hand, inasmuch as they are traits of the primal structure, this opposition and this totality are not even truths grounded upon a more primal truth: they constitute the primal and thus not even the *élenchos* of their negation can be their ground. *RP* (pp. 71*ff*) demonstrates that the assertions that make up the *élenchos* of their negation are *individuations* of the universal opposition of positive and negative, and that the primal structure is authentically incontrovertible only inasmuch as these individuations appear *co-originally* with the appearing of the opposition of positive and negative and the appearing of the totality of the beings that appear – individuations in the same sense (though differing profoundly in other respects) as that whereby this red's not being this green is an individuation of every positive's not being its own negative (i.e., everything other than itself).

And the *élenchos* of the negation of the existence of that which appears is also an individuation of the universal opposition of positive and negative – i.e., not an individuation of the totality that appears, but a part of it.

26. In *RP*, the consideration of the self-negation of the negation of the primal structure essentially entails, as suggested in *La struttura originaria*, *cit.*, the impossibility of a time in which any being does not exist: essentially, it entails the "eternity" of every being, i.e., of the being *qua* being. By contrast, Aristotle's *élenchos* of the negation of the *bebaiotáte arché* is now entirely pervaded by the persuasion that it is necessary that

the being be "*when it is*" (*De interpretatione*, 19a 23-27), which means that for Aristotle the being *qua* being can also not exist (when it is not), or in other words that for certain beings (those of the *physis*) there is a time in which they do not exist. At the center of the content addressed by my writings, it appears that the assertion that any being does not exist affirms that this being is nothing, i.e., it affirms the impossible, the impossible identity of being and nothing: it affirms that which is nothing.

But this affirmation is not a nothing: it is a contradiction (a great contradiction, as the entire history of the West rests on it); and we have repeatedly pointed out in these pages that the contradiction (unlike its contradictory content, nothing) is a being, a meaning.

Aristotle's concept of being is thus a contradiction, a great contradiction. By affirming the impossibility that a being can be and not be (or that this is advisable and inadvisable for it at the same time), Book IV of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* affirms, without being able to realize it, the impossibility that that contradiction which is the *being* be or mean something other than itself. Aristotle believes that he is speaking of the being *qua* being, but – from the perspective of the destiny of the truth – he speaks of that particular being which is the contradiction in which his concept of being consists, and for this specific being he shows that the negation of its not being other than itself is (*in actu exercito*) a *horisménon* (see sections 12-15), and consequently this negation denies (*in actu signato*) the condition whereby it is constituted.

As Aristotle's *elenchos* of the negation of the *bebaiotáte arché* believes that it considers the being *qua* being, whereas it actually considers that specific being which is the contradiction in which the Aristotelean concept of being consists, Aristotle's *élenchos* is itself a contradiction. The importance that *RP* assigns to it depends on *RP's* aim of considering the formal structure of Aristotle's *élenchos* independently of another aspect which is nevertheless central in *RP*: the nihilistic sense that the being presents in Aristotle and Greek thought, and thus in the thinking and work of the West and, by now, the planet as a whole.
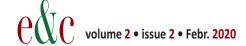
Postscript

1. In the first paragraph of section 26, we said that "At the center of the content addressed by my writings, it appears that the assertion that any being does not exist affirms that this being is nothing"; in other words,

it appears that this affirmation is a *contradiction*: the contradiction that affirms the existence of a time in which any being does not exist. This theme is also central to *RP*, where it draws on *La struttura originaria* (1958, *cit.*) and indeed was presented even earlier, in *La metafisica classica e Aristotele* (published as a supplement to the "Rivista di filosofia neoscolastica", 1956, Milano, and translated in 1958 as *Aristotle and Classical Metaphysics* in Volume 2 di Philosophy Today, Carthagena Ohio). The existence of a time in which any being does not exist (i.e., what that contradiction affirms is the existence of *becoming*, of *change*).

In the second note to the definitive version of his presentation, Graham Priest writes: "I find Severino's arguments that change violates the PNC convincing. Nevertheless, there can be other arguments as well, see Priest (2006)". This is all he has to say about this, but the sentence deals with a question of great interest. In fact, he may find my arguments convincing because from his point of view they confirm dialetheism. In this sense: that for Priest as well, change (becoming) *exists*, and is *real* (in other words, not even Priest can fail to agree with the conviction underpinning Western, and planetary, civilization: that beings become, i.e., they issue from their non-being and return to it. Accordingly, the thesis advanced in my writings that issuing from non-being and returning to it "violates the principle of non-contradiction" is in Priest's eyes a confirmation of dialetheism, or in other words a confirmation of the thesis that some contradictions are true – precisely because change, which is a contradiction, exists.

However, section 26 points out that, precisely because affirming any being's non-being, i.e., affirming that issuing from non-being and returning to it exists, is a contradiction, it is necessary that the being *qua* being, i.e., any being, be *eternal*. This need is demonstrated in the *Postscript* to *RP* (see *The Essence of Nihilism*, cit., pp. 85-145), where I show that *the passage from not-being to being and vice versa, i.e., the content of the contradiction of becoming, is not and cannot be a content of experience, is not and cannot be a phenomenological datum that can be observed, noted, experienced; it is not and cannot be something that appears*. This means that affirming that becoming is impossible, i.e., affirming that all beings are eternal, does not deny the presumed "evidence" of becoming. In other words, if we believe, as Priest does, that this existence is "evident", then we must say (as Priest says) that *RP*, by demonstrating that the existence of becoming violates the "principle of non-contradiction", offers a confirmation of dialetheism. But the primal structure of destiny shows that

it is impossible that the existence of becoming be "evident", and consequently the appearance of this impossibility, together with the appearance of the contradictoriness of becoming, is the appearance of the necessity that every being be eternal.

A second observation can be made concerning Priest's concurrence. "I find Severino's arguments – he says – that change violates the PNC convincing. Nevertheless, there can be other arguments as well, see Priest (2006)". But the dimension upon which these arguments are grounded is not the primal structure of destiny, it is not the absolutely incontrovertible, and consequently neither are these arguments, nor can they be. They are conjectures. And indeed, if Priest finds these arguments convincing, this *cannot* be the case, because he sees them to be entailed by the primal structure of the incontrovertible and his concurrence can thus only be apparent.