

The Aporia of Nothingness

Emanuele Severino

Texts by Emanuele Severino, excerpted from La struttura originaria [Primal Structure] (1958), and from Intorno al senso del nulla [On the Sense of Nothingness] (2013), translated into English by Sergio Knipe, edited by G. Goggi and F. Perelda.

Translator's note: Translating Emanuele Severino's writing poses a number of terminological challenges, the most obvious being his use of the Italian word "niente". This means both "nothing" (as in "no thing") and "nothingness" (the state of not existing). I have done my best to distinguish between the two. For simplicity's sake, I have instead avoided using "Nothing", with a capital N, except in one case where Severino himself uses it, with reference to Heidegger's work. In the same context, the author also employs the expressions "nullità", which I have rendered literally (as "nullity"), and "nientità", which I have again translated as "nothingness".

The Aporia of Nothingness I

Excerpts from *La struttura originaria* [*Primal Structure*], ch. 4.

I. Formulation of the aporia

The positing of the principle of non-contradiction requires the positing of *not-being*. Not only that, but “not-being” belongs to the very meaning of “being”. [...]

The aporia which we wish to examine pertains to not-being, not insofar as this is *a certain* not-being – or *a certain* being (i.e. a determined being) – but insofar as not-being is “nihil absolutum”, what is *absolutely other* than being, and therefore – we might say – insofar as it is that which lies *beyond* being, understood as the *totality of being*. This is an ancient aporia – which Plato was already fully aware of – yet which in a way has always been avoided, circumvented, and ultimately left unsolved.

Now, precisely because it is ruled out that being is nothing, in order for this exclusion to subsist, nothingness is *posited*, *present*, and therefore *is*. There is a discourse on nothingness, and this discourse attests to the *being* of nothingness. Or there is some knowledge, some awareness of nothingness, which attests to its being. Therefore, we must apparently conclude that contradiction is the foundation on which the very principle of non-contradiction can be realised. Plato clearly presents this aporia in the *Sophist*. But he only presents the aporia here, and then sets it aside for good. Certainly, Plato shows what kind of not-being can be said to be – not-being is as *a certain* being – but in doing so he leaves open the difficulties initially outlined in the dialogue (236e-239a), which stem from the impossibility of excluding not-being, understood as absolute not-being, from being, without thereby including it in the latter. In order to refute the sophist – and especially to show that, contrary to what Parmenides maintained, being does not imply the negation of multiplicity – Plato’s

analysis is certainly sufficient; but the aporia remains with regard to absolute not-being, which Plato – like Parmenides – preserves as not-being: for, by manifesting itself, this absolute not-being bears witness precisely to its being¹.

2. [...]

3. Another formulation of the aporia

As absolute not-being, nothingness is like the *horizon* of being: nothingness is what is absolutely *other* than being, or what is *beyond* being².

The principle of non-contradiction expresses precisely the nature of the relation between being and the horizon of nothingness. For this relation, being on the one hand implies the horizon of nothingness, precisely since it is claimed that being is not not-being; but, on the other hand, since this horizon is nothingness, being implies nothing, no horizon at all. Hence, the principle of non-contradiction, which ought to express this implication, cannot be established. (But, once again, it is precisely this acknowledgement that being as such implies nothing outside itself which requires being to refer to nothingness, i.e. the implication of the latter by the former). In other words, if not-being is not, it cannot even be stated that being is not not-being, since not-being, in this statement, in some way is.

- 1 Aristotle formulates the same aporia without explicitly presenting it as such, when he notes that we even say that not-being “is” not-being: “we assert that even what is not *is* a thing that is not” (*Met.*, IV, 2, 1003, b10, transl. by Ch. Kirwan).
- 2 It is clear that not-being is *other* than or *different* from being, not *because of something* which it is but which being is not, but precisely because it is not something. Indeed, if someone were to say that, since not-being is different from being, yet not different *because of something*, it is no different from being, we should answer that, certainly, in this sense it is no different – for this is the sense in which two beings are different – but that it is different in the sense that it is the absolute privation of being. The aporia under scrutiny here instead concerns this absolute privation, which – within the present argument – presents itself precisely as a *being*.

4. General structure of the aporia

The aporia of not-being can therefore be developed in a twofold direction: either by showing that not-being is (§ 1); or, if we keep the not-being of not-being, by showing how those logical structures that imply the positing of not-being cannot constitute themselves (§ 3).

5. Clarification of the sense in which nothingness is

To solve the aporetic situation just outlined, let us first observe – and this is ultimately the fundamental observation – that when we affirm that the positing of not-being attests to the being of not-being, we cannot be seeking to affirm that “nothing”, as such, means “being”; but, rather, that “nothing”, which is meaningful as nothing, is. The presenting itself of nothing does not attest to the fact that “nothing” means “being”; but that “nothing”, meaningful as nothing, is. And, on the other hand, this “being” of nothing is not meaningful as “not-being”; but, being meaningful as being, is the being of nothing (which is meaningful as nothing). The contradiction of not-being-that-is, therefore, is not internal to the meaning “nothing” (or to the meaning “being”, which is the being of nothing); but lies between the meaning “nothing” and being, or the positivity of this meaning. The positivity of meaningfulness, in other words, is in contradiction with the very content of the meaningfulness, which is precisely meaningful as absolute negativity.

6. “Nothingness” as a self-contradictory meaning

Every meaning (every thinkable content, which is to say every entity, however it may constitute itself) is a semantic synthesis between the positivity of meaningfulness and the determinate content of positive meaningfulness; or – which amounts to the same thing – between formal being and the determination of this formality (Ch. 2, § 2) – where formal being is precisely the positivity of the meaningfulness of the determination. Thus, it is clear that the meaning “nothingness” is self-contradictory, which is to say a contradiction, it is being meaningful as a contradiction: the very contradiction whereby the positivity of this meaningfulness is contradicted by

the absolute negativity of the meaningful content. In other words, every meaning is a synthesis of the meaning “being” and of the determination of being; every meaning, that is, is a determinate positivity (“being”). In the meaning “nothingness”, the determination of positivity contradicts – as absolute negativity – positivity, which is to say the positive meaningfulness of the determination.

It is clear, therefore, that “nothing”, understood as a self-contradictory meaning, includes as a semantic moment “nothing”, which – as we have noted in the previous section – is meaningful as nothing. (To put it differently, “nothing”, as a non-contradictory meaning, is the moment of “nothing”, as a self-contradictory meaning).

7. General structure of the resolution of the aporia of nothingness

The aporia of the being of nothingness is resolved by noting that the principle of non-contradiction *does not affirm the non-existence* of the self-contradictory meaning discussed in the previous section; rather, it affirms that “nothing” does not mean “being” (as stated in section 5); in other words, it requires the non-existence of the contradiction intrinsic to the meaning “nothing”, which ranks as the moment of the self-contradictory meaning. Not-being, which in the formulation of the principle of non-contradiction appears as the negation of being, is precisely the not-being which ranks as the moment of not-being, understood as a self-contradictory meaning.

The aporias formulated in sections 1 and 3 are produced, on the one hand, by the failure to acknowledge the correct meaning of the self-contradictoriness of the meaning “nothing”; and, on the other, by the abstract adoption of the moments of this self-contradictoriness. It is worth noting that this “self-contradictoriness” is not equivalent to “meaninglessness”: if not, the meaninglessness of nothing would determine the meaninglessness of being – unless by “meaninglessness” we mean self-contradictoriness itself.

8. Solution of the aporia formulated in section 1

As regards the first aporia presented, we will answer by acknowledging that, certainly, nothingness is; yet not in the sense that “nothingness” means “being”: in this sense, nothingness is not, and being is – and it is this not-being

of nothingness and being of being that is affirmed by the principle of non-contradiction; indeed, to state that “nothingness” is not absolutely meaningful as “being” is tantamount to stating that nothingness is not. We thus state that nothingness is, in the sense that a positive meaningfulness – a being – is meaningful as the absolutely negative, i.e. as “nothing”; in other words, it is meaningful as that “nothing” which is absolutely not meaningful as “being”. Therefore, nothingness is, in the sense that the absolutely negative is positively meaningful; or, nothingness is, in the sense that the meaning “nothing” is self-contradictory. The two sides or moments of this self-contradictoriness are – as already noted – *being* (positive meaningfulness) and *nothing*, as a *non-contradictory* meaning (precisely because nothingness-as-moment is absolutely not meaningful as “being”).

[...] In order to exclude that being is not – i.e. that it is not-being – it is thus necessary for not-being to be; that it to say, it is necessary for the self-contradictory meaning in which that being of not-being consists to subsist. If the meaning “nothingness” did not rank as this self-contradictoriness – if nothingness were not, in the sense which can correctly be acknowledged – and if, therefore, nothingness were only that absolute negativity whereby it ranks as a non-contradictory meaning (“nothingness” as the moment of self-contradictoriness), to exclude that being is nothingness would be not to exclude anything, since the exclusion would not have anything to which it could apply: nothingness would not appear at all. (But it is also clear that the very assumption that nothingness is only that absolute negativity [...] is self-contradictory: for we can say that nothingness is really nothing, insofar as nothingness is *manifest*, and therefore *is* this being nothing at all).

[...] The establishment of the principle of non-contradiction does not require [...] that the self-contradictory nature of the meaning “nothing” not be removed, but requires the semantic field constituted by this self-contradictory meaning.

9. Explication of the reasons for the aporia

The aporia of nothingness emerges because the two abstract moments of the concreteness constituted by “nothing” as a self-contradictory meaning are abstractly conceived as mutually unrelated. By contrast, insofar as these two moments are conceived concretely, nothingness-as-moment does not rank as a self-contradictory meaning, precisely because the self-contradic-

toriness applies to the concrete, of which nothingness-as-moment is a moment.

The concreteness in question is such insofar as the abstract is *removed*, as it is abstractly conceived. If nothingness, as an abstract moment of self-contradictoriness, is understood as being in turn a synthesis of the two abstract moments of being and nothingness, it is posited as *the very concreteness* of which it was a moment. This positing is simply a *repetition* of the previous positing of that concreteness. Hence, it will be necessary to repeat the removal of the abstract. And if not-being, as an abstract moment of repeated concreteness, is posited again as the synthesis of being and nothingness, a second repetition will occur.

The granting of an *actually* endless repetition entails that the meaning “nothing” is not posited, and therefore that not even being is posited, if the positing of being implies the positing of nothingness; therefore, it also entails that nothingness is not posited, if the positing of any meaning implies the positing of being.

But even leaving aside the consequences of the granting of the actually endless repetition, the affirmation of this repetition, as such, is intrinsically contradictory. On the one hand, it leaves what it conceives of as involved in an endless repetition as *something posited* – for, in order to conceive of it like this, it must somehow posit it; on the other hand, precisely by virtue of the content of the conception, what is conceived of *must not be posited* – for else the endless repetition would be limited by the removal of that abstract moment which in turn is not posited as the repetition of the concept. The exclusion of the actually endless repetition of the semantic concreteness of nothingness thus entails the positing of nothingness; and thus its being concretely posited as a self-contradictory meaning. This concrete positing in turn entails, as already mentioned, the removal of the abstract concept of the abstract moments of being and nothingness, where this nothingness – by virtue of the exclusion of endless repetition – means, as an abstract moment, only “nothingness”, and not, in turn, the synthesis of being and nothingness.

The aporetic argument instead keeps the moments of self-contradictoriness abstractly separate, and by considering nothingness-as-moment, finds it as something which lets itself be considered, and which therefore *is*; that is to say: it finds precisely that from which it has sought to prescind (the other moment) by considering nothingness-as-moment abstractly: it finds the being of nothingness. [...]

To sum up: once the moments of the concrete are abstractly assumed

as unrelated, nothingness-as-moment is detected as that self-contradictoriness which belongs to the concrete – that is, the abstract is assumed as the concrete; but at the same time the abstract is assumed as abstract, because the self-contradictoriness that is seen to pertain to it is not allowed to resolve itself into “nothingness” as a non-contradictory meaning, and this not letting the self-contradictoriness resolve itself amounts precisely to assuming as abstract what had been assumed as concrete, notwithstanding the fact that what does not allow itself to be further analysed is the abstract moment. [...]

The non-contradictoriness of nothingness, nothingness as nothing, thus only manifests itself insofar as nothing is held firm as the moment of nothingness as a self-contradictory meaning. [...]

10. Solution of the aporia formulated in section 3

As regards the second aporetic direction (§ 4), here too an abstract adoption occurs of the abstract moments of self-contradictoriness. But while in the first aporetic direction the abstract moment constituted by positive meaningfulness – from which one prescind in the abstract consideration of nothingness-as-moment – occurs again within nothingness-as-moment, in this second direction the prescinding from that moment makes one completely lose sight of it. Thus, as what remains evident is the absolute negativity of nothingness – i.e. nothing as a non-contradictory meaning, whereby it cannot even rank as something present – one notes the impossibility for there to exist any kind of relation (such as that which the principle of non-contradiction would establish) with absolute negativity – i.e. with that which, insofar as it is this negativity, cannot even manifest itself.

It is clear that, here too, the aporia can constitute itself, since, at the same time, we both completely lose sight (*in actu signato*) of the moment of the positive meaningfulness of “nothingness” and do not lose sight of it (*in actu exercito*). If this moment were completely absent – i.e. not posited – the aporetic argument would not subsist either: the “nothingness” would continue to be ignored, because talking about it would constitute precisely the presence of the moment from which one absolutely prescind. In other words, the absolute prescinding subsists insofar as, by abstractly considering the non-contradictory moment of nothingness, the possibility of any relation to the absolutely negative is ruled out; and, at

the same time, that absolute prescinding does not subsist, precisely insofar as the absolute negativity *is considered*, and hence is implicitly held in relation to the moment of its positive meaningfulness from which one would wish to absolutely prescind.

The aporia states: being both implies and does not imply a horizon (the horizon of nothingness) (§ 3). It is clear by now that the aporia constitutes itself insofar as, on the second side of this antinomy, nothing, which is the abstract moment of nothingness as a concrete meaning, is abstractly conceived as unrelated to the moment of positive meaningfulness: as the abstract concept of the abstract moment of nothingness. Having assumed this moment as the horizon of being, and having abstractly conceived this moment (that is, having conceived it as the totality of the meaning “nothingness”), it follows that the implication at such a moment resolves itself in a non-implication.

The removal of the abstractness of the moments of nothingness as a self-contradictory meaning is the positing of abstractness and hence the positing of the relation between the abstract moments. Thus, being, which in the relation of non-contradiction excludes not-being, understood as a non-contradictory meaning, excludes *something distinct* from the positivity constituted by the other moment of self-contradictoriness, yet not *something unrelated* to this moment. As something distinct, nothingness-as-moment is not a self-contradictoriness, and hence it can stand in a relation of contradiction with being; but precisely because nothingness-as-moment is something distinct and not something unrelated to the other moment, it is not the case that being, by referring to it, in the relation of non-contradiction, does not refer to it. In other words, in its reference to nothingness, being excludes it as its contradictory only insofar as it refers to nothingness-as-moment; besides, this moment stands in relation to the moment of its positive meaningfulness, and through this relation – which is the very contradictoriness of “nothing” as a concrete meaning – *endures* or *is capable of standing* in a relation of contradiction to being.

11. Notes on the concrete concept and the abstract concept of nothingness as abstract moment

a) Based on what has been argued in the previous section, it is also possible to solve an aporia similar to that presented in section 3. It can be stated that: if nothingness is absolute negativity, it cannot rank as the *semantic*

moment of nothingness as concrete meaning.

It is clear that in this case too the aporia emerges because nothingness-as-moment is abstractly conceived of as unrelated to its being, to its positive meaningfulness. Insofar as the distinction between the different moments is understood as their abstract separation, nothingness, as absolute negativity, certainly cannot rank as a moment of semantic concreteness. It must thus be stated that absolute negativity can be distinguished from its positive meaningfulness, and rank as semantic moment, precisely insofar as the very positivity of its ranking as a moment is the other moment – it is the other moment of nothingness as self-contradictory concrete meaning; in other words, it is the very positive meaningfulness of the absolute negative or, rather, it belongs to the structure of this positive meaningfulness of the absolute negative; and the negative must be held in relation to this meaningfulness, so that the concrete concept will not become the abstract concept of the abstract. Nothingness is a moment, because the distinction is not a separation; hence, that from which the negative distinguishes itself is precisely the positivity which enables it to rank as a moment. On the other hand, “nothingness” as something distinct from the positivity of its meaningfulness – since it is considered according to the meaning applicable to it insofar as it is thus distinguished – does not rank as a moment (as a positive), precisely because, as absolute negativity, it has no value. Certainly, nothingness is meaningful as absolute negativity, insofar as it *is* a moment; but its very *being* belongs to the horizon that remains excluded by absolute negativity. Its *being* a moment is precisely the *other* moment; more exactly, its *being* a moment belongs to the structure of its positive meaningfulness.

What is absolutely other than being, *qua other than being*, is not a being; but insofar as it *is meaningful as* what is absolutely other than being, it is a being, a positivity. The positivity of this meaningfulness is not included in what this meaningfulness means, it does not determine what this meaningfulness means. The contradiction of “nothing” lies precisely in this, namely the fact that the meaningfulness is the meaningfulness of the absolutely non-meaningful: it lies not in the fact that the non-meaningful means the meaningful (i.e. has the meaning of “meaningful”), but that the non-meaningful *is meaningful as* non-meaningful.

Nothingness, as such, is the non-meaningful (the non-existent). But the non-meaningful is not separate from its being meaningful as the non-meaningful: it is only through its *being* meaningful that nothingness means “what is absolutely other than meaning” (“what is absolutely other

than being”). The meaning “nothing” is not abstractly separate, but is concretely distinct from the positivity of its meaningfulness. Insofar as it is distinct, it is capable of both meaning what is absolutely other than being and of ranking as the moment (and thus as the positivity which is a moment) of the contradiction in which the concrete meaning of nothingness consists.

In other words, nothingness is that which is affirmed to be meaningful, positive, and existent. And insofar as it is the subject of this affirmation, it is a moment. This being meaningful, positive, and existent is the other moment of the concrete meaning of nothingness. Yet precisely because nothingness is that which is said to *be* meaningful, positive, and existent, it is true that its meaning does not include that positive meaningfulness of its own meaning (i.e. “nothingness” does not mean “being”, which is to say that nothingness as such is not being, but what is absolutely other than being). But it is also true that this meaning of nothingness, insofar as it is *that whose* positive meaningfulness is affirmed (i.e. insofar as it is that which is said to *be*, that is meaningful, positive, and existent), can rank as the moment of contradiction in which the concrete meaning of nothingness consists.

In its concrete meaning, nothingness is the contradiction of existing nothingness; but this being of nothingness, which allows nothingness to be a moment, is posited in the other moment (or as the other moment) of that concrete meaning; and, precisely because it is posited in the other or as the other moment, nothingness-as-moment can be the meaning in which only what is absolutely other than all being (including that being which is the being of nothingness as moment) is posited.

b) If, again, one were to state: distinct moments must be set in relation to one another; but nothingness, as something distinct, is absolute negativity; hence, it cannot *stand* in any relation – if one were to state this, we ought to answer that, in such a way, distinct moments are understood as presupposed to their synthesis; hence, once again, they are understood abstractly. Certainly, if at a first moment the distinct aspects are assumed separately, then no synthesis can occur, at a second moment, between the positive and the negative: the negative, as such, will not even have any relevance on the basis of which the synthesis can be established. Therefore, either no awareness of nothingness is given – and this very aporia does not subsist – or, if this awareness subsists, then the negative already finds itself in a synthesis with the positive. In order for the affirmation of the synthesis not to rank as a self-contradictory statement (i.e. in order for the positing

of the self-contradictory meaning in which the synthesis consists not to rank as a self-contradictory or aporetic statement), it will thus be enough for the synthesis to be concretely conceived: as *primal* and *immediate*, and not as a result presupposing the unrelatedness of distinct moments. If their synthesis is primal, and hence the distinct entities are not assumed as unrelated, the negative can both be that absolute negativity which is required by the principle of non-contradiction and stand in relation to the positive: precisely because the negative is distinct, yet not unrelated to the positive. To deny the unrelatedness is to understand the relation as a primal one.

c) It has also been clarified that nothingness *is* nothing (as already Gorgias noted), not insofar as the absolute negative *is* something (albeit the absolute negative), but insofar as the positive meaningfulness of nothingness *is* that particular meaningfulness which it is. In other words, nothingness is nothing, not *qua* nothing, but insofar as it is a positive meaningfulness.

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13. Critical-historical remarks on the problem of nothingness

a) The study of “nothingness” which Bergson has included in the last chapter of *Évolution créatrice* is certainly among the most noteworthy studies on the topic. However, on the one hand it only shows the self-contradictoriness of the meaning “nothing” – thereby still compromising the value of the principle of non-contradiction – while, on the other, it notes the self-contradictoriness of that meaning for reasons other than those which must be acknowledged. Indeed, for Bergson, the idea of nothingness is “destructive in itself”, since the positing of the negative implies the positing of the positive, which is the content that is being denied: if nothingness is the negation of the positive, the *positing* (concept, idea) of the negative ultimately results in the positing of the positive: for this must be posited, in order to remove it.

The first part of the study, which sets out by gradually eliminating the ways in which the idea of nothingness has been introduced, ends as follows: “the idea of the absolute nought, in the sense of the annihilation of everything, is a self-destructive idea, a pseudo-idea, a mere word. If suppressing a thing consists in replacing it by another, if thinking the absence of one thing is only possible by the more or less explicit representation of

the presence of some other thing, if, in short, annihilation signifies before anything else substitution, the idea of an “annihilation of everything” is as absurd as that of a square circle. The absurdity is not obvious, because there exists no particular object that cannot be supposed annihilated; then, from the fact that there is nothing to prevent each thing in turn being suppressed in thought, we conclude that it is possible to suppose them suppressed altogether. We do not see that suppressing each thing in turn consists precisely in replacing it in proportion and degree by another, and therefore that the suppression of absolutely everything implies a downright contradiction in terms, since the operation consists in destroying the very condition that makes the operation possible.” As a general conclusion, Bergson states that: “the idea of Nothing, if we try to see in it that of an annihilation of all things, is self-destructive and reduced to a mere word; and that if, on the contrary, it is truly an idea, then we find in it as much matter as in the idea of All”³.

Bergson never mentions Hegel, yet the latter had dwelt on the same topic at length, namely the notion that the negative is richer than the positive which is denied: it removes it and at the same time preserves it. The meaning “nothing” (which should not be confused with the “nothing” oc-

3 H. Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, translated by A. Mitchell, The Modern Library, New York, 2005 (first edition: Heryny Hold and Company, 1911), p. 308, 324. Consider also the following passage: “there is more, and not less, in the idea of an object conceived as ‘not existing’ than in the idea of this same object conceived as ‘existing’; for the idea of the object ‘not existing’ is necessarily the idea of the object ‘existing’ with, in addition, the representation of an exclusion of this object by the actual reality taken in block” (*ibid.*, p. 311).

Bergson does not distinguish between nothing, understood as what is absolutely other from being (the totality of being), and nothing, understood as the annulment of the totality of being. In Bergson’s text what we find is always this latter meaning. Yet it is clear that nothing is not this annulment, even though the outcome of the annulment is nothing. Besides, according to both meanings of the term “nothing”, the positing of nothing implies the positing of the totality of the positive, so that, on the one hand, Bergson’s considerations can be extended to that meaning of nothing which Bergson does not take into account, and in this sense they are examined in the present text; on the other hand, what is stated in the text can also be referred to that meaning of nothing which Bergson considers. In this latter respect, it must be stated that the concept of “annulment of the whole” does not at all exclude – and this is a very important point – that the concept in question is self-contradictory, for indeed, as we shall see, the ascertainment of the self-contradictoriness of such a concept belongs to the primary structure itself, and, we might say, constitutes its most crucial aspect.

curing at the beginning of Hegel's *Logic*) is therefore a semantic field which includes the very totality of the positive, as something denied, overcome. Positing nothingness certainly means positing what lies beyond being, and hence the positing of nothingness includes the positing of being. But are we really to detect some self-contradictoriness in this, as Bergson contends?

It is certainly interesting to note that the reason why Bergson detects this self-contradictoriness is the abstract assumption of nothingness as moment. Indeed, if nothingness as moment is abstractly separated from the moment of its positive meaningfulness, it presents itself as that absolute negativity whose positing cannot amount to positing anything positive. Furthermore, once we realise that the positing of "nothingness" even implies the positing of the whole, this implication is qualified as self-contradictoriness: as the contradiction between the intention to positing nothing positive and the the actual positing of the totality of the positive. Hence, if we wished to clear Bergson of the charge of making that abstract assumption – which would mean going against the explicit meaning of his text – we would have to counter that the implication of the positing of the positive by the positing of the negative can only be regarded as a self-contradiction if we mistake that implication for the fact that the meaning "nothing" is meaningful as "being" (according to what has been stated in section 5): in order to posit the negative, it is necessary to posit the positive, yet this does not imply that "nothing" means "being".

However, Bergson implicitly comes close to the genuine meaning of the self-contradictoriness of nothing, since – as has been shown – the absolutely negative is positively meaningful – this being the genuine meaning of that self-contradictoriness – and its meaningfulness is, if one may put it so, so positive that it requires the very positing of the totality of the positive.

b) One of the greatest merits of Heidegger's investigation in *Was ist Metaphysik?* is that it has drawn attention to the basic opposition between being and nothingness. The psychologistic tendencies – most prominent in the concept of "anxiety" – and the author's anti-intellectualistic position do not impinge upon this crucial reference. Besides, this psychologism and anti-intellectualism derives from his incapacity to resolve the aporia of the positing of not-being, which – as Heidegger explicitly acknowledges – lies in the contradictoriness of a not-being which is.

Particularly noteworthy is the aporia consisting in the observation that not-being, as the intellectualistic negation of the totality of being, presup-

poses an understanding or presence of the totality of being. Heidegger actually highlights and exploits this aporia in such a way as to essentially determine the development of his enquiry. He warns us that the presence of the totality of being is impossible in its exhaustiveness or concrete determinacy, or only possible as something *ideal*: as the presence of the *idea* in the totality. Thus not-being would only rank as the *formal* negation of being. But how is it possible to distinguish between formal nothingness and real nothingness? Hence the suggestion to abandon the logical plane in order to realise the experience of nothingness.

However, it is clear that, in Heidegger's argument, the claim that the totality is only present as an idea (i.e. in a formal, or non-exhaustive, way) amounts to the mere *presupposing* that the totality is determined to a further degree than experience as the primal determination of the whole; and that furtherness is the *in itself* which remains unknowable. (A counterpart to this logical situation may be found in Jasper's concept of the *Umgreifende* as a non-objectifiable horizon).

On the other hand, since we will independently come to show that further determination of the whole which Heidegger simply presupposes, it must be added that the negation of the formal whole certainly differs from the negation of the concrete whole; yet this difference entails that *we must* speak of a formal nothing and a real nothing, in the sense that the distinction between formality and reality belongs to the *positive meaningfulness* of nothing, and not to nothing as distinct from this positivity. The absolutely negative is not, or does not mean, anything positive, regardless of whether positivity – which is posited as removed in the concept of nothing – has formal value or concrete value. Indeed, the positive is removed or surpassed, in the concept of nothing, as the *whole* of the positive; thus any possible emergence of concrete determinations of this formal positing of the whole certainly entails a change in the positive meaningfulness of nothing, but does not entail that the absolutely negative is not truly such on account of the fact that the positive which has been removed manifests itself inadequately. Assuming that the manifestation of the positive is a process that becomes increasingly concrete, this increase is no doubt at the same time an increase of *the positive meaningfulness* of nothing, but it is not an increase of nothing, as something assumed to be distinct from its positive meaningfulness. Hence, in this respect, there subsists no distinction between formal and real nothingness.

Heidegger too, therefore, abstractly considers nothingness-as-moment to be unrelated to its positive meaningfulness. With a particular take on

Bergson's position, he notes the inconsistency of the distinction between formal and real nothing: indeed, through that abstract way of considering it, the positive meaningfulness from which he abstractly prescind resurfaces within nothingness-as-moment, producing the aporia. Bergson thus notes the inconsistency of the absolute positivity of nothing; complicating the Bergsonian position, Heidegger notes the inconsistency of the distinction between formal and real nothing. For Bergson, what determines the aporia is simply the resurfacing of the positive within nothingness-as-moment; for Heidegger, the aporia is caused by the further consideration that the positive, which resurfaces, has a formal value, which is why the formality and the resulting distinction between formality and reality are attributed to nothingness as such.

c) The aporia of nothingness is not caused by mere verbal suggestion. Suppose that instead of saying "Beyond, outside being there is nothing", we were to say "There is no positive that lies outside the totality of the positive"; or, in symbols: " $\sim (x)$. x is outside the totality of the positive" (where variable x can assume any positive value). What would still remain to be clarified is the meaning of that "outside the totality of the positive" which is precisely nothing, and whose presence gives rise to the aporia. Carnap has good reasons to claim (*The Elimination of Metaphysics Through Logical Analysis of Language*) that, in his investigation of nothingness, Heidegger merely substantialises a logical form. (And it may be added that Heidegger – like Schopenhauer before him, and later Sartre and others – inappropriately employs the word "nothing" to describe a certain dimension of the positive which, certainly, is not a certain other dimension, but is not the *nihil absolutum*). However, in the logical proposition " $\sim (x)$. x is outside...", Carnap does not distinguish the logical situation in which variable x assumes a limited number of positive values (whereby that with respect to which x is "outside", "beyond", is a limited dimension of the positive), from the logical situation in which – as mentioned above – x can assume all positive values (whereby that with respect to which x is "outside" is the very totality of the positive). It is precisely in this latter case that nothingness (what is outside the whole) *manifests itself*, insofar as in the proposition " $\sim (x)$. x is outside the totality of the positive" the meaning "outside the totality of the positive" manifests itself.

14. Nothingness and contradiction

Self-contradictoriness – every self-contradictory meaning – is nothingness itself. To clarify this theorem, consider, for example, the following meanings: “non-triangular triangle”, “non-red red”, “non-here here”, “non- x x ”, etc. (Let symbol RnR stand for any of these meanings, where R stands for any determination and n for the negation of the determination). To posit any of these self-contradictory meanings is to *posit nothingness*. Indeed, *no* positive can be said to be a non-triangular triangle, a non-red red, a non-here here, a non- x x , etc. By stating that being is not not-being (where “not-being” ranks both as absolute negativity and as the contradictory of a *certain* positive), the principle of non-contradiction rules out that the positive be self-contradictory, or that self-contradictoriness *be*. Being is being, so self-contradictoriness is nothing: a being that is not (or which is its own contradiction) *is not*.

But just as *to posit* nothingness is not *to posit nothing*, to posit self-contradictoriness is not to posit nothing. For self-contradictory meanings are *present*, and hence *are*. The aporia of the *being* of self-contradictoriness is the *very* aporia of the being of nothingness. This means that – as with the meaning “nothing” – the meaning “self-contradictoriness” is a self-contradictory meaning.

Let us briefly develop the solution of the aporia. Self-contradictoriness is; yet not in the sense that a self-contradictory meaning is meaningful as non-contradictoriness – for instance, not in the sense that RnR is or means $RnnR$ (where R ranks as the negation of its negation); nor in the sense that the positive meaningfulness of self-contradictoriness is not a positive meaningfulness. A self-contradictory meaning is meaningful *in a non-contradictory way* as that self-contradictoriness which it is – the nullity of self-contradictoriness is not or does not mean a not-nullity; self-contradictoriness is not, or does not mean, both a self-contradictoriness and a non-contradictoriness. Now, it is precisely this self-contradictoriness which is meaningful in a non-contradictory way that *is*, i.e. that is positively meaningful. It thus follows that self-contradictoriness, which is to say the absolutely negative, is meaningful in a non-contradictory or positive way. Self-contradictoriness is meaningful in a non-contradictory way, which is to say – *and this amounts to the same thing* – that the absolutely negative is positively meaningful: this is the self-contradictoriness whose *moments* are the self-contradictory meaning (= self-contradictoriness-as-moment) and the non-contradictory or positive meaningfulness of the self-contradictory

meaning. For example, positing the meaning RnR means positing a self-contradictory meaning, whose moments are the self-contradictory meaning RnR and the positive meaningfulness of this meaning. (These moments respectively correspond, in the self-contradictory meaning “nothing”, to nothingness-as-moment and to its positive meaningfulness). These, then, are *distinct*, yet not *unrelated*, moments. We have thereby clarified the condition by which we can speak of a *being* of self-contradictoriness; and the condition whereby self-contradictoriness on the one hand is *nothing* and, on the other, is *removed*, i.e. whereby it stands in a (positive) relation to the positive. [...]

This whole argument has nothing to do with A. Meinong’s position, which simply consists in acknowledging that meanings of the RnR sort must have some mode of existence (*Sosein*) in order for it be possible to deny their existence (*Dasein*). In other words, according to Meinong even self-contradictoriness – which is to say the content of a self-contradictory statement – *is*. What Meinong believes to be a theory is nothing but the enunciation of the aporia of the being of self-contradictoriness. Therefore, Russell is right to note that this theory is a violation of the principle of non-contradiction. Yet just as the aporia of nothingness (or of self-contradictoriness) is not resolved by Frege, so it is not solved by Russell either, because his statement that “the null-class is the class containing no members, not the class containing as members all unreal individuals”⁴ only apparently avoids Meinong’s contradiction. Indeed, “not containing any element” is, like Frege’s “absence of meaning”, something positively meaningful, namely the very positive meaningfulness of nothing. Russell’s theory too fails to go beyond the enunciation of the aporia.

15. The aporia and its solution: the twofold meaning of self-contradiction

1) What has been stated in the previous section makes it possible to formulate the following aporia: “The positing of the meaning RnR , as we have seen, is the positing of a self-contradictory meaning, whose semantic moments are RnR and the positive meaningfulness of RnR . Let $r'nr'$ be this

4 B. Russell, (1905). On Denoting. *Mind* 14 (56):479-493, p. 491 [Editor’s note].

new self-contradictory meaning. But if $r'nr'$ is a self-contradictoriness, based on what has been established in the previous section it must be stated that the self-contradictoriness $r'nr'$ is nothing; hence, if to posit RnR is to posit $r'nr'$, to posit $r'nr'$ is to posit that self-contradictory meaning $r''nr''$ whose semantic moments are $r'nr'$ and the positive meaningfulness of $r'nr'$. The same must be stated with regard to the positing of the self-contradictory meaning $r''nr''$. It follows that the positing of the meaning RnR is the positing of the endless series of self-contradictory meanings $r'nr'$, $r''nr''$, $r'''nr'''$... This implies that the meaning RnR cannot be posited, given that its positing requires an endless development.”

The aporia can be formulated by considering, instead of the meaning RnR , the meaning “nothing”: “If the positing of this meaning is the positing of nothing, understood as concrete self-contradictoriness (which corresponds to $r'nr'$ in the previous formulation, and hence can itself be indicated with the symbol $r'nr'$), whose semantic moments are nothingness-as-moment and the positive meaningfulness of nothingness-as-moment, then that concrete self-contradictoriness too will be nothing. Hence, its positing will be the positing of a self-contradictory meaning, whose semantic moments are that concrete self-contradictoriness and the positive meaningfulness of the latter. In other word, the very synthesis between the absolutely negative and its positive meaningfulness is, as self-contradictoriness (= $r'nr'$), something absolutely negative, whose positing is the positing of a more concrete self-contradictory meaning ($r''nr''$) which includes that synthesis and the positive meaningfulness of the latter as its moment. The conclusion is as above”.

b) A first way of solving the aporia might be as follows: precisely because *every* self-contradictoriness is nothing, there subsists no difference between the terms of the series RnR , $r'nr'$, $r''nr''$, $r'''nr'''$... and nothingness-as-moment. Hence, in this regard not only is there no possibility of endless development, but nor is there the possibility of any development whatsoever. Before proceeding any further, let us briefly develop this first point.

Between the positing of the meaning “nothing” and the positing of any self-contradictory meaning – and therefore between the positing of that meaning and the positing of any term of the series RnR , $r'nr'$, $r''nr''$, $r'''nr'''$... – there is a merely verbal difference. Indeed, on the one hand, positing nothingness means positing, as something surpassed, the totality of the positive (which also includes the positive meaningfulness not just of nothingness, but also of the terms of that series); and the positing of a term of the series, for example RnR , is in turn the positing of what lies beyond

the totality of the positive (which also includes the positive meaningfulness not just of the terms of the series, but also of nothingness). If, in positing RnR , it is not posited (i.e. known) that, in positing RnR , one is positing what lies beyond the totality of the positive, then the positing of RnR results in the implicit negation of the principle of non-contradiction. (In another respect, if self-contradictoriness is, essentially, nothing, then positing self-contradictoriness and not positing it as nothing means not positing it – precisely because it is essentially nothing; hence, only the *intention* of positing it is realised: one claims to posit it, without actually doing so; and this is a self-contradictory claim, insofar as it amounts to stating that what is not a self-contradictoriness, is such).

On the other hand, if the manifestation of the positive is – as already noted – a development (and we will have to get back to this concept, as well as that of the totality of the positive, with particular attention), different levels of this development can be distinguished; and this distinction is the distinction of different levels of the positive meaningfulness of “nothing”. Hence, it is possible to conceive of a level of this meaningfulness in which RnR is not yet included within the horizon of the positive, which the concept of nothingness implies as something removed; and another level, in which RnR is included within that horizon. But the difference thereby produced between the positing of the meaning “nothing” and the positing of the meaning RnR has the same value as the difference produced between two ways of positing the meaning “nothing” that include the totality of the positive according to a different individuation or determination of this totality.

c) To sum up: there is no difference between nothingness and the terms of the series RnR , $r'nr'$, $r''nr''$, $r'''nr'''$... (in other words, there is no difference between RnR and the terms of the series. The argument can be developed in both ways because the endless development can be produced both by considering nothingness and by considering any self-contradictory meaning RnR).

However, it may be objected that, while that difference does not subsist, there is still a difference between the positive meaningfulness of those indifferent terms: while nothingness *qua* every self-contradictoriness (and hence too every self-contradictoriness constituted by each of the terms of the series) is nothing, it is nonetheless true that nothing is meaningful in a different way depending on whether what is posited is “nothing” or any of the terms of the series. It is precisely because of this difference in meaningfulness that the aporia cannot be avoided.

d) The aporia formulated under point a) is only removed if two types or senses of self-contradictoriness are distinguished: the contradiction (self-contradiction) and the content of the contradiction (the content expressed by the contradiction). If this distinction is not drawn – as is precisely the case in the aporetic argument – it will be necessary to state that the meaning “nothing” cannot be posited. Consider these two self-contradictory meanings: 1) “Non-red red” (let this be xnx); 2) “Nothing”, understood as self-contradictory meaning (let this be $\mathcal{E}N$)⁵, which is to say as nothingness-as-moment. Now, what has been established with regard to self-contradictory meanings in section 14 holds for xnx , yet not for N . Indeed, as already noted, N is a self-contradictory meaning not insofar as being (\mathcal{E}) is predicated of nothing (N), but insofar as what is predicated of nothing (i.e. its being other than the totality of the positive) is; in other words, being here is not predicated (given that the predicate consists in the ruling out that being be predicated), but is the being *of* the predicate. In other words, the proposition “Nothing is” has a different meaning, depending on whether it is taken to mean that “Nothing, *qua* nothing, is” or that “Nothing is nothing”. The former meaning is that according to which the proposition in question ranks precisely as $\mathcal{E}N$; the latter is what is ruled out not just by the principle of non-contradiction, but also by the contradiction “Nothing, *qua* nothing, is” (for this proposition refers being to nothing – and, in this sense, in turn affirms that nothing is not nothing – but refers being to nothing posited as nothing, which is to say as other than the totality of the positive and not as not-nothing). It is clear, therefore, that while it is correct to state that xnx is nothing (cf. § 14), it is not correct (which is to say, it is self-contradictory) to state that $\mathcal{E}N$ is nothing: being, the positive meaningfulness of nothing, is not nothing. It is true that thinking – positing – nothing means thinking something, which is to say a positivity, and because the determinateness or meaning of this positivity is what is absolutely other than the positive, it is correct to state that what is being thought is a self-contradictory meaning; but his self-contradictoriness, unlike xnx , is not a nothing, but rather a positive: it is the positivity of contradiction. What has been established for N must be repeated for the self-contradictory meaning, whose moments are xnx and the posi-

5 In the original text, the specification in parentheses is placed at the end of the sentence, but this can be misleading [Editor’s note].

tive meaningfulness of xnx : for this self-contradictoriness too is not a nothing, but a positive.

From what has been argued so far, it is clear that all self-contradictions of this type (type 2), whose moments are either nothing (as moment) and the positive meaningfulness of nothing, or a self-contradictoriness (such as xnx or RnR) and its positive meaningfulness, are not nothing. What instead are nothing (cf. § 14) are all those self-contradictions (type 1) in which self-contradictoriness constitutes itself within the meaning (or, rather, constitutes itself as the meaning itself), which is to say those in which the mutually contradictory terms are moments of the meaning – by contrast to type-2 self-contradictions, in which the mutually contradictory terms are the meaning (which is either nothingness-as-moment or a type-1 self-contradiction) and its positive meaningfulness.

This distinction resolves the aporia under investigation here: for the series $RnR, r'nr', r''nr'', r'''nr''' \dots$ is not homogeneous, since RnR is a type-1 contradiction, whereas all other terms of the series are type-2 self-contradictions. Therefore, while the positing of RnR is necessarily the positing of $r'nr'$ – since RnR is nothingness, and hence to posit RnR is to posit the positive meaningfulness of the absolutely negative (which is precisely the positing of $r'nr'$) – the positing of $r'nr'$ is not the positing of a $r''nr''$ which stands to $r'nr'$ as $r'nr'$ stands to RnR : for $r'nr'$ is a type-2 self-contradiction, which is to say that it is not nothingness, whose positing must thus be the positing of $r''nr''$. Therefore, the endless development ascertained by the aporetic argument cannot be realised; or, rather, the necessity of that development does not subsist.

Corollary: the self-contradiction expressed by the proposition “Nothing is not nothing” is a type-1 self-contradiction; hence, the positing of this self-contradiction is the positing of a type-2 self-contradiction, whose moments are that proposition and its positive meaningfulness.

The aporia of Nothingness II

Excerpts from *Intorno al senso del nulla* [*On the Sense of Nothingness*], part II, sections 2-8.

1. [...]

2.

Parmenides brings to light the absolute nullity of nothingness (*me eon*, “non-existent”). Precisely because it is such, nothingness cannot be *something* “knowable” and “expressible” (fr. 2). Indeed, one can know and express only what is, which is to say an existent, whereas nothingness, in absolute terms, is not an existent.

However, in the very act whereby these characteristics of nothingness are affirmed, nothingness presents itself as something knowable and expressible. Plato’s *Sophist* reflects a full awareness of this, which is precisely the fundamental form of the aporia of nothingness.

But Plato leaves this aporia unsolved, in order to focus on the elucidation of that other sense of “not-being” (not-being understood not as the “opposite” of being but as what is “other” than being), which enables him to “save” multiplicity from the destruction of it carried out by Parmenides. And this aporia remains unsolved throughout the history of philosophy.

3.

Even Carnap’s thesis that the word “nothing” is meaningless (a thesis which, through an entirely different procedure, confirms Bergson’s thesis that nothingness is foreign to genuine thought) disproves what it aims to affirm: for this thesis understands the absolute privation or absence of meaning as meaningful content; yet the absolute absence or privation of meaning is a synonym of nothing. It is precisely because “nothing” means

“the absence of all meaning” that Parmenides affirms the unknowability and inexpressibility of nothingness.

The fact that “nothing” *means* something, i.e. that it *means* the *absence of all meaning*, is precisely the *essential contradiction* of nothingness – which is to say, the essential aporia of nothingness.

In its broader sense, the term “meaning” describes *any* thing, which is to say *any* existent; and it is necessary that in Carnap’s thesis the term “meaning” be present in its broader sense, for if it were present according to a *partial* sense of “meaning” (e.g. as opposed to “meaningful” or “bearer [of meaning]”), then, in affirming that “nothing” has no meaning, one would be affirming that in another partial sense of “meaning” (different from that according to which one affirms the total meaninglessness of nothing) nothingness *has some meaning*, that it is somehow meaningful, i.e. that it is something, an existent. “Nothing” and “absolute meaninglessness” are therefore synonyms.

Even Carnap’s thesis that one must replace expressions used in common parlance such as “There is nothing outside” with expressions such as “There is not something that is outside” disproves what it affirms: for “there is not” or “not being there” is another synonym of “nothing” (as long as one does not take account – as happens with Carnap, by contrast to Heidegger – of the different semantic status which is determined by “there” in these expressions and understands them as synonyms of “not being”). That something, which we would expect to be outside, *is not* means that *it* is nothing.

As we shall see, this is precisely the starting point of the second part of the present essay: the identity between the meaning *nothing* and the *is not* which is present in the something-(that)-*is not* and the something-(that)-*is not* a certain other thing.

4. [...]

5.

In *Struttura originaria* (*Primal Structure*) it is shown that nothing is a *self-contradicting* meaning. Those pages quite explicitly affirm the distinction between the “contradictory” or “self-contradictory” – which is to say the impossible, the *nihil absolutum* – and “contradiction”, which instead is *not* a nothing. It is thus of the utmost importance to bear in mind the clarifi-

cation, provided in that text, that “the meaning ‘nothing’ is a self-contradictory meaning, *which is to say a contradiction*” (IV, 6, p. 213, emphasis added) – that is, precisely, a “*self-contradicting meaning*”. This “which is to say” is crucial in order to understand the pages in question.

Every time the text affirms the existence of that “self-contradictory meaning” – “*which is to say*” that *self-contradicting meaning* – it is not stating that the impossible, the contradictory in itself, is, but rather that the contradiction *is* (and it is not impossible, but rather necessary, that the contradiction *be*; notwithstanding the fact that its being has a “foundation” to which I have always drawn attention in my writings – cf. e.g. *Fondamento della contraddizione*⁶). Each time I speak of nothing as a “contradictory” or “self-contradictory meaning” in that book, it is thus necessary to understand such expressions as indicating the fact that the meaning *nothing contradicts itself*, which is to say as indicating precisely the *self-contradicting meaning* of nothing.

Contradictoriness (the contradictory) is the content of contradiction; contradiction is the appearing of contradictoriness. As the affirmation of something is, first and foremost, the appearing of this something, the affirmation that this lamp is-and-is-not is, first and foremost, the appearing of the being-and-not-being of this lamp as something impossible. The impossible is nothing; the aporia of nothingness is the aporia of the impossible.

The two self-contradictory moments of the meaning *nothing* (and of every impossible thing) are, on the one hand, the “positive meaningfulness” of nothing, which is to say its *being* nothing and the *appearing* of this *being*, and, on the other hand, the absolute nothingness and meaninglessness of nothing, which nonetheless is positively meaningful. On one side we have the positive meaningfulness of that which, on the other side, is the absolute negation of every positivity and meaning (and hence of every knowability and expressibility).

6.

These two sides or moments of the meaning *nothing* are originally and necessarily united *because* their separation, i.e. the *isolation* of one with re-

6 E. Severino (2005). *Fondamento della contraddizione* [*The Foundation of the Contradiction*]. Adelphi, Milano. [Editor’s note].

spect to the other, implies the being of impossibility, which is to say that it implies that nothing is an existent – it implies, precisely, the *aporia* of nothingness, i.e. the contradiction of thought thinking nothing.

Indeed, while the two moments are (more or less explicitly) understood as separate, the absolute nothingness of nothing *appears*, and it appears as *meaningful*, which is to say that it *is*: nothing inevitably appears as an existent. In other words, if the two moments are separated, the positive meaningfulness of nothing (the first moment) will inevitably occur again in the second moment, which is to say in the meaning “nothing” that is the content of that positive meaningfulness; hence, the inevitable *outcome* of that separation is the ascertainment that nothing is an existent.

(In this case, setting out from the absolute nothingness of nothing, we reach the positivity of nothing. If we instead set out from the positive meaningfulness of nothing, we reach that absolute negativity whereby not even the relation consisting in the not being nothing of being can constitute itself).

That outcome essentially differs from the authentic meaning of nothing, which is to say from nothing as a self-contradicting meaning. Indeed, this self-contradiction subsists because, within it, *nothing* (the meaning nothing) does not mean *existent*, which is to say that it is not an existent (and precisely because it is not, the meaning *nothing* contradicts the positivity of its own meaningfulness as an existent).

By contrast, in the outcome of the separation of the two moments of this self-contradicting meaning, we are forced to affirm that nothing, insofar as it is meaningful, *is*, i.e. that it is an existent; and hence that the impossible, the contradictory in itself, which is to say the identity between nothing and being, *is*.

As a result of the separation, therefore, the *aporia* of nothingness presents itself as unsolvable. Thought is bound to the absurdity of contradiction for good.

Thought which thinks nothing is (originally) free from the contradiction only insofar as it sees that *it is the meaning nothing which is a contradiction* – a *necessary* contradiction.

7.

[...]

Both sides or moments of the necessary contradiction which constitutes the meaning *nothing* are meanings. But that nothing which is the moment

of this contradiction and which means *nothing*, and not *an existent* – i.e. that nothing which is *not* nothing *qua* positive meaningfulness – *is*, certainly, meaningful (it is, precisely, a meaning); but it *is* only such (just as it *is* only a side and moment of that contradiction) in the sense that nothing, which is a moment, is a moment insofar as it is *distinct* from its *appearing as* something meaningful (and hence as a side or moment): for this *appearing-as* is the *other* moment of nothing *qua* necessary contradiction (this other moment being the positive meaningfulness of nothing, which is meaningful, yet only as something distinct from its own positive meaningfulness). We might say: nothing – which, as a moment of nothing *qua* necessary contradiction, means nothing and not an existent – is meaningful, yet is not posited as meaningful. We may say this, as long as this language, which is the language of idealism, is freed from the sense of “being” and “positing” that idealism assigns to such words.

8.

Heidegger aims to show that “Nothing” is not a being, but “also is never what is simply null” (cf. e.g. the pages of *Der europäische Nihilismus* (1940) entitled “Nihilism, *Nihil*, and Nothing”⁷): it is not the “simply null” with regard to which metaphysical thought would take for granted both the fact that it is opposed to the being, and the absence of any other form of opposition to the totality of the being.

Apparently, Heidegger wishes to enter a deeper dimension than that in which the opposition between “what is simply null” – the *nihil absolutum* – and the being is taken for granted; but in stating that “Nothing” (which for him is actually “Being” itself) “also is never what is simply null”, he is implicitly assigning a decisive function to the “simply null”: as that to which both the “Nothing” and the being are opposed. This opposition constitutes the greatest difference, which *contains* in itself the “ontological difference” between “Being” (“Nothing”) and “being” (and where the “simply null”, nothing, is a term of this opposition, insofar as it is a positive meaningfulness, which is to say insofar as it is a moment of the self-contradictory meaning *nothing*).

7 Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, vol. IV: Nihilism, Translated from the German by Frank A. Capuzzi, Edited, with Notes and an Analysis, by David Farrell Krell, Harper, San Francisco, pp. 18-23. [Translator’s note]

In such a way, all the connotations of the “simply null” from which Heidegger wishes to distance himself, and all the aporias which are raised by the “simply null”, but which Heidegger defines as consequences of the failure to rise up to the authentic meaning of “Nothing”, resurface, and do so in their not having been clarified and resolved. This first of all applies to the aporia – already envisaged by Plato (although Heidegger fails to note this) – according to which any consideration regarding nothing makes nothing “something”, which is to say a being.

(It should be added that in the language of nihilism expressions such as “to leave nothingness and return to it”, when properly understood, do not indicate something like a somehow positive dimension which beings would leave and return to, but rather the no longer being and not yet being of entities, an idea which not even Heidegger’s philosophy wishes to abandon).