

ISSN 1897-1652

POLISH JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY

Volume VII, No. 1 (2013)

Jagiellonian University

Kraków

POLISH JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY
SPRING 2013

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Reconsidering Metaphysical Nihilism

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Abstract. In contemporary analytic philosophy *metaphysical nihilism* is the thesis according to which there might be *nothing*, i.e. a possible world with no *concrete* objects in it, but that can contain (or must contain) abstract objects. After summarizing the set of premises from which analytic metaphysics deals with *nothing*, I propose a set of premises that could fit continental metaphysics. Then I propose a new set of premises for the question of *nothing* that derives from a synthesis of the two above mentioned sets. By means of this new set, I try to show that *nothing* as a possible world with no objects *at all* is not a self-contradictory entity and I propose an argument for proving that an empty possible world exists.

1. Introduction

I) In contemporary philosophical debate the question of *nothing* has attracted the attention of several thinkers, both in the so-called continental tradition, where it has enjoyed a prominent position at least from the first half of 20th century,¹ and in the so-called analytic tradition,² where it started to be considered later,³ probably due to the influence of Carnap's attack against (a certain type of) metaphysics⁴ (and in particular against Heideggerian sympathy for nothingness).⁵ However, we should note that the question of *nothing* has been treated in two significantly different ways, depending on the metaphysical background against which this *nothing* has been conceived. In order to avoid any misunderstanding, it is necessary to point out two main models according to which we can find an

¹ I recall in particular Martin Heidegger in Germany and Emanuele Severino in Italy.

² I use the distinction analytic/continental, although it is more and more clear that such a distinction is losing its meaning. Nevertheless, I think that it can be particularly useful to the question of *nothing*.

³ See Coggins (2010) for an overview of the question of nothing in analytic metaphysics.

⁴ Carnap (1932).

⁵ See Priest (2002) and Voltolini (2012) on the possibility of talking about *nothing* while avoiding nonsense and logical mistakes.

answer to each of the following questions: “What is *nothing*?” and “Might there be *nothing*?” (or “Could there have been *nothing*?”). Even if there are exceptions and nuances, we can recognize what I will call the *Parmenidean* model within the above-mentioned continental tradition⁶ and what I will name the *world* model in the analytic one. Furthermore, I signal that the *Parmenidean* model is not always explicit within continental philosophy, and thus it should be considered as my proposal, whereas in analytic philosophy the *world* model is usually more explicit; at this end, I will follow above all the excellent reconstruction of Coggins (2003) and Coggins (2010). I will consider each model as composed of a set of premises.

En passant, it is interesting to note that the two above-mentioned questions about *nothing* recall what Fredegisus of Tours asks in his work *De nihilo et tenebris*,⁷ a work that Franca D’Agostini considers—to some extent—a common matrix for both continental and analytic philosophers.⁸

In the last part of the paper I will offer a new model—say, a *hybrid* model—which might allow us to overcome the limitations of the previous models.

2. World-model [WM]

II) The premises of the world model could be the following:

- (W1) There are possible worlds;
- (W2) An object is either concrete or abstract;
- (W3) *Nothing* is a possible world with no concrete objects in it.
- (W4) An object is concrete if and only if it exists “in,, space and time, or at least in time.”⁹

As Coggins (2003) underlines, we will see that we can obtain different answers to the question of *nothing*, depending on the further premises that we add to (WM).

III) Let us now consider the question: “What is *nothing*?” by applying the (WM) account. *Nothing* is conceived as a possible world with no concrete objects in it. To understand this answer, we need at least to define a ‘possible world.’ There is no universal agreement about this definition;

⁶ Of course, the question of nothingness has been approached in very different ways within the so-called continental philosophy. Yet I think there are some implicit common premises that compose a common background.

⁷ Fredegisus of Tours (1998).

⁸ Fredegisus of Tours (1998).

⁹ Lowe (1998, pp. 51-53, 212-213).

following Coggins (2003), I will consider three views of a possible world that strongly determine the answers to the question of *nothing*.

Let (WM_x) be the account (WM) with the addition of

(W5) A world is the maximal sum of spatio-temporally related objects¹⁰

Let (WM_y) be the account (WM) with the addition of

(W5*) A world is an object that contains other objects.

Let (WM_z) be the account (WM) with the addition of

(W5**) A world is a sort of thing according to which objects exist, i.e. the maximally consistent way things could have been.¹¹

IV) At this point we can consider the question whether there might be *nothing*. In the analytic tradition (and so according to (WM)), the main argument that shows the possibility of *nothing* is the *subtraction argument* of Thomas Baldwin¹² or other versions of it.¹³ I briefly recall Baldwin's version.

The subtraction argument has three premises (Baldwin 1996, p. 232):

(A1) There might be a world with a finite domain of 'concrete' objects;

(A2) These concrete objects are, each of them, things which might not exist;

(A3) The non-existence of any one of these things does not necessitate the existence of any other such thing.

By (A1), starting from the actual world W , there is an accessible possible world w_1 , whose domain of concrete objects is finite. Pick any member x_1 of this domain: by (A2) there is a world accessible from w_1 , w_2 , which is just like w_1 except that it lacks x_1 , and any other things whose non-existence is implied by the non-existence of x_1 . Since, by (A3), the domain of w_2 does not contain things which do not exist in w_1 , it follows that the domain of w_2 is smaller than that of w_1 . This procedure of subtraction can then be iterated, until we get to a world w_{\min} whose domain consists of one or more concrete objects, such that the non-existence of one implies the non-existence of all. By (A2) the non-existence of one of these objects is possible, so there is a world w_{nil} just like w_{\min} whose domain lacks all these objects; and since, by (A3), the non-existence of these things does not require the existence of anything else, w_{nil} is a world in which there is no concrete object at all. If one now allows that accessibility between worlds is transitive (the characteristic S4 assumption), it follows that w_{nil} is

¹⁰ See for example Lewis (1986).

¹¹ Coggins (2003)

¹² Baldwin (1996).

¹³ See Coggins (2010) for an overview of this subject.

accessible from, or possible relative to, the actual world. (Baldwin, 1996, p. 232).

(S4 is the modal logic system according to which accessibility relation (R) between worlds is transitive: for all w_1, w_2, w_3 , if w_1Rw_2 and w_2Rw_3 , then w_1Rw_3 .)

As Coggins (2003) notes, the subtraction argument requires a certain account of a possible world as its basic condition. It could not work if we adopted (WM_x): since a world is the maximal sum of spatio-temporal related objects and since an object is concrete if and only if it exists in space and time (or at least in time), then w_{nil} would be impossible because it has got no concrete objects, so it would not be a world. (WM_y) could be consistent with the subtraction argument, but only by adopting an absolute conception of space-time, which would be quite a high cost to pay:

What would the container be? If the container is empty space-time then we have a fairly clear idea of what the relationship between the concrete objects and the world is. The world is the space-time within which concrete objects can exist and have a location. This suggestion requires that empty space-time could exist on its own, i.e. that absolutism about space and time is true. Many philosophers and physicists hold that space and time are relational, and so there would not be empty space and time if there were no physical objects (Coggins, 2003, p. 355).

(WM_z) seems to be consistent with the subtraction argument “because the non-existence of concrete objects seems to be a maximally consistent way things could have been” (Coggins, 2003, p. 357).

So, assuming that space-time is not absolute, (WM) is consistent with the subtraction argument *only* as (WM_z). Therefore, since—in the analytic tradition – we have not got alternative, relevant arguments for proving that there might be *nothing*, we can now state that it is impossible that *nothing* exists according to (WM_x) and according to (WM_y) (in this case it could be possible if we adopted an absolute conception of space-time); according to (WM_z) it is possible—at least *prima facie* —that *nothing* exists, if we accept the subtraction argument of Baldwin or its improvements.

V) In this paper I will not deal with the debate about the subtraction argument, all its modifications, or all the attacks against it, because all I want to point out is some results that I will use to build up the third model (see section 4). But first, let us consider the Parmenidean model.

3. Parmenidean model [PM]

VI) I will call the second model the *Parmenidean model* (PM), whose premises are:

(P1) For all things,¹⁴ a thing is identical to itself (self-identical) if and only if it is different from what (it) is not (*omnis determinatio est negatio*);

(P2) For all things, a thing transcendently exists if and only if it is self-identical;

(P3) *Nothing* is the thing that does not transcendently exist.

VII) Let us consider now the question: “What is *nothing*?” using this model. (PM) conceives it as a thing that does not transcendently exist, where *transcendental existence* means *self-identity* ($x=x$) [in this part I will use 'existing' or 'existence' as abbreviations for 'transcendently existing' or 'transcendental existence,' except where I indicate differently. Anyway, in the listed propositions I will use the full wording 'transcendental existence' and 'transcendently existing']. Therefore, in this model the puzzle of the thing that does not exist is not the same problem as the so-called negative existential, where, for example, *existence* means *being in space and time (or at least in time)* or *being in causal relations* or *possessing causal powers* or *esse in rerum natura*, and so on. Neither does that puzzle deal with—broadly speaking— a Meinongian object or a nonexistent object, i.e., an object that has properties even if it doesn't exist (for example, a *Chimera*), because also in this case *existence* doesn't mean *simply* self-identity, but something more. We could state that existence as self-identity is a necessary condition for existing in the other above-mentioned ways, but it is not a sufficient condition as well.

So, *nothing* in (PM) is what the traditional Western metaphysics has called *absolute nothingness*, what Plato considers *enantion* in the *Sophist*, and since I think the first philosopher to conceive of it was Parmenides, I name this account *Parmenidean*. One could object that Heidegger would not accept (PM), because the Heideggerian idea of nothingness is explicitly different from *nihil absolutum*, above all after Heidegger's *Kehre*. But what I need to show is just the set of premises of Heidegger's approach to the question of *nothing*—not the conclusion—and I think (PM) is quite faithful to it. If we consider, for example, *Was ist Metaphysik?* we can see that the starting point of the German philosopher

¹⁴ In this paper I use 'thing' as synonymous with 'entity' or 'being.' So it can refer to any universal (properties, relations) and to any particular (things in the strict sense, events, etc.).

is exactly absolute nothingness,¹⁵ although he abandons it for dealing with a 'new' kind of (extra-logical) nothingness. Anyway, my goal here is to point out the implicit model that works as the background for Heidegger and for the greater part of continental philosophers who have dealt with the question of *nothing*.

VIII) Let us consider now the consequences of the (PM)-set of premises.

By (P1) and by (P2) we can affirm that

(P4) For all things, a thing transcendently exists if and only if it is different from what it is not¹⁶

By (P2) and by (P3) we can affirm that

(P5) *Nothing* is not a self-identical thing.

By (P3) and by (P4) we can state that

(P6) *Nothing* is not different from what it is not.

(P5) states that *nothing* is not self-identical, but exactly for this reason it is identical to itself. In fact we can say that:

(P5*) 'the thing that does not transcendently exist' is identical to 'the thing that does not transcendently exist.'

Therefore, by (P2) and (P5*) we can say that:

(P5**) 'The thing that is not self-identical' is identical to 'the thing that is not self-identical.'¹⁷

¹⁵ Heidegger (1929).

¹⁶ Note that in (P1) 'if and only if' means that if a thing is self-identical, then it is different from what it is not; and if a thing is different from what it is not, then it is self-identical. Similarly in (P2), if a thing exists, then it is self-identical; and if a thing is self-identical, then it does exist. Similarly in (P4), if a thing exists, then it is different from what it is not; and if a thing is different from what it is not, then it exists.

¹⁷ This theoretical situation can be analyzed with Priest's scheme of transcendence/closure, as it is shown in Priest (2002) (note that here the word 'transcendence' is not related to the meaning of 'transcendental existence' that I use in this paper). According to Priest, "there is a totality (of all things expressible, describable, etc.) and an appropriate operation that generates an object that is both within and without the totality. I will call these situations *Closure* and *Transcendence*, respectively." In the case of nothingness, the totality can be the totality of all existent/self-identical things; the appropriate operation can be the negation of each existent/self-identical thing; the generated object can be exactly 'nothingness', i.e. the thing that is not self-identical. The object 'nothingness' is not self-identical and so it is beyond the totality of all self-identical things: transcendence. Yet it is self-identical to itself, so it belongs to the totality of all self-identical things: closure. We can also apply the transcendence/closure scheme in the following way. The totality can be the totality of all objects that are property-bearers; the appropriate operation can be

Since by (P2) and (P3) ‘the thing that is not self-identical’ is *nothing*, then by (P5**) *nothing* is *nothing*, so

(P5***) *nothing* is self-identical

Therefore, by (P5) and (P5***)

(P5.1) *Nothing* is not a self-identical thing and it is a self-identical thing.

Therefore, by (P2) and (P5.1)

(P5.2) *Nothing* does not transcendently exist and *nothing* transcendently exists

(P6) states that *nothing* is not different from what it is not. Given that—by (P3)—*nothing* is a thing that does not exist, then anything that exists is different from *nothing* and so *nothing* is different from anything that exists, i.e., anything that exists is what is not *nothing*. But—by (P6)—*nothing* is not different from what it is not, so *nothing* is not different from anything that exists. So we must say that:

(P6.1) *Nothing* is different from what it is not (i.e. anything that transcendently exists) and it is not different from what it is not.

(P5.1), (P5.2) and (P6.1) are contradictions. So it seems that (PM) is an inconsistent set of premises.¹⁸

How could we avoid these contradictions? All the premises seem reasonable and are linked to the universal (or transcendental) view of the traditional Western metaphysics that, at least since Parmenides, has tried to conceive the totality of all things by opposing the notion of being to the notion of absolute nothingness; in particular (P1) and (P3) rely on the validity of the law of non-contradiction (I do not consider dialetheism in this paper, but it could give us a solution to the puzzle that I am considering, for example according to Priest (2002), chapter XV: *Heidegger and the Grammar of Being*). We can find analogous premises in, for example, Plato’s *Sophist*. As Thomas (2008) notes, Plato’s metaphysical thesis about being includes self-identity (see P2) and difference from other beings (see P1) and ‘to exist’ means ‘to share in being’ and so ‘to share in self-identity’ (see P2).¹⁹

the negation of all the properties of an object; the generated object can be exactly ‘nothingness’, i.e. the object with no property at all (the object without any feature). Since it has got no property, it is beyond the totality of all objects that are property-bearers: transcendence. Yet it has at least the property of “...having no property at all” so it belongs to that totality: closure.

¹⁸ It is no coincidence that Heidegger explicitly faced a contradiction when he dealt with the question of *nothing*.

¹⁹ Thomas (2008, p. 645): “The things that are, are by sharing in being; and it is reasonable to suppose that to share in being is to exist.”

Yet the (PM) set of premises implies (at least) three contradictions. One could quit the question of *nothing* by considering it pointless, so that one could simply reject (P3) and make the set of premises consistent. But also in this way we could get in trouble, because there is a puzzling case that works as a counterexample to the thesis according to which the question of *nothing* would be pointless. I will consider that in section XII.

IX) Let us consider now the other question, i.e. whether there might be *nothing*. *Prima facie*, whoever adopts (PM) could not reply that *nothing* exists, simply because it would be in blatant contradiction with (P3) premise. Even if we distinguished between *existing* and *being*, one couldn't affirm the being of *nothing*, because—as I pointed out before—in (PM)-account *existence* as *self-identity* is the necessary condition for any conception of *being* or for any further and more complex and informative conception of *existence*. Therefore, however one conceives the occurrence of the verb 'to be' or 'to exist' in the question: “Might there be/exist *nothing*?” (or “Could there have been/existed *nothing*?”), whoever accepts the (PM) account should reply to our question in a negative way.

4. A new model for the question of nothing

X) It is quite ambiguous that Baldwin (1996) mentions Heidegger (in a footnote) while talking about the ‘fundamental question of metaphysics’, i.e. “Why is there anything at all?” and so “Might there be *nothing*?” It is ambiguous because I think it is quite reasonable to consider (PM) as the metaphysical set of premises on which Heidegger—implicitly or even “unconsciously”—bases his investigation about *nothing*, whereas it is explicitly clear that Baldwin (and then the subsequent analytical debate) moves from (WM). The clearest difference is—of course – between (W3) and (P3). Baldwin is aware of this deep difference: “the domain of w_{nil} still includes plenty of abstract objects, such as the natural numbers, so that its existence cannot properly be regarded as the possibility of there being nothing at all.” I think the genuine fundamental question of metaphysics is the question about nothing at all, i.e. nothing as it occurs in (P3), where existence is the logical equivalent of self-identity. Therefore (WM) is consistent (at least as (WM_z)), but it cannot deal with the genuine puzzle of nothing; on the other hand, (PM) can deal with the genuine question, but it is inconsistent. Therefore, I will try to propose a new model for the question about *nothing*.

I will call this account the *hybrid model* (YM),²⁰ whose premises are:

²⁰ We could also consider this model as a 'synthetic model,' by reporting the well-chosen title of a paper by Iain Thomson (2012): *In the Future Philosophy*

(W1) There are possible worlds;

(W5**) A world is a sort of thing according to which objects exist, i.e. the maximally consistent way things could have been;

(W4) An object is concrete if and only if it exists “in” space and time, or at least in time;

(P1) For all things, a thing is identical to itself (self-identical) if and only if it is different from what it is not (*omnis determinatio est negatio*);

(P2) For all things, a thing *transcendentally* exists if and only if it is self-identical;

(Y3) *Nothing* is a possible world with no transcendentally existent things in it.

By (P1) and by (P2) we can affirm that

(P4) For all things, a thing *transcendentally* exists if and only if it is different from what it is not.

So, what is *nothing*? By (YM), it is the maximally consistent way things are not self-identical, i.e. the maximally consistent way things do not transcendentally exist (a possible world at which there are no self-identical things). Let us consider now the theoretical difficulty that this answer implies.

It is efficaciously showed in Lowe (1998):

[...] even if—*per impossibile* [...]—there were no objects at all in existence, there would still be *facts*, such as the (putative) fact that there were no objects at all in existence. But if facts just *are* 'ways the world is' – and 'possible facts' are correspondingly 'ways the world could be' – then, evidently, there could not be facts without the world, nor, hence, without objects of some sort collectively constituting the world. [...] to say that there is a possible world in which 'the world' denotes nothing is to say that there is a maximal way the world could have been which is not a way *the world* could have been, which is a blatant self-contradiction. (Lowe, 1998)

It is interesting to note that the above-mentioned self-contradiction is similar to the contradictions we have inferred from (PM). According to (P5.1), *nothing* is not self-identical and it is self-identical. Similarly, the fact 'nothing' is a way the world could have been and it is not a way the world could have been. Since *nothing*, conceived like this, implies a blatant contradiction, Lowe rejects it.²¹ (However we will see in section

Will Be Neither Continental nor Analytic but Synthetic: Toward a Promiscuous Miscegenation of (All) Philosophical Traditions and Style.

²¹ Lowe also offers an argument against the possibility of a world with only abstract objects; but the main aim of this paper is to consider an absolutely empty

XII the puzzle which one will face by rejecting *nothing* and, since the characteristic premises of (PM) are also in (YM), I think we can't solve the question by rejecting *nothing*. Anyway, if we conceive a possible world as it is defined in (W5**), it seems *prima facie* reasonable admitting the possibility of a world with no transcendentally existent things in it. As we can read in Coggins (2003), we can think a possible world as a

club or association that is governed by certain rules. These rules would determine who could be a member, what the society does, etc. Now suppose the last members die: given that the identity and existence of the club depends on the rules governing it, we would not necessarily want to say that the club had ceased to exist.²²

So, the world 'nothing' is such that there are no self-identical things in it, but the world 'nothing' is self-identical.

XI) At this point we can see the main benefit of choosing (YM) rather than (WM) or (PM). (WM) cannot deal with the question concerning *genuine nothing*, i.e. the question about what transcendentally does not exist. (PM) deals with this question, but it is involved in contradictions (P5.1), (P5.2), and (P6.1). (YM) gives us a solution to these limitations of (WM) and (PM), as I will show. (YM) deals with absolute nothingness and it can also avoid the contradictions (P5.1) and (P5.2), because (Y3) can allow us to distinguish the *respects* according to which *nothing* is self-identical and not self-identical, and consequently the *respects* according to which *nothing* transcendentally exists and does not transcendentally exist. *Nothing* is self-identical and so it transcendentally exists *as world*, but at the same time it denotes a world with no self-identical things in it, and so a world with no transcendentally existent things. In this way the self-identity of *nothing* is due to its being a world, while its *not self-identity* is due to the nonexistent things it represents. Therefore the 'blatant self-contradiction' that Lowe points out can be avoided if we conceive the (alleged) contradiction as a conjunction of the following sentences: "nothing is self-identical" and "nothing is not self-identical", and then we distinguish the different respects according to which it is and it is not self-identical.

Besides, (YM) can avoid contradiction (P6.1) because *nothing* as world is self-identical and so it exists, therefore, by (P4), it is different from what it is not.

XII) Let us reply now to the other linked question, that is whether there might be *nothing*. But first we need to consider a puzzling case that works

world with no objects at all, and to show an argument according to which it is necessary that such a world exists.

²² Coggins (2003, p.357).

as a counterexample for the thesis according to which the question of *nothing* would be pointless:

(P7) The totality of all things that transcendently exist is a thing (i.e., it is a *determinatio* since it is determinate²³)

The totality of all things that transcendently exist is self-identical, so—by (P1)—it is different from what it is not. This remarkable case can be considered by using both (PM) and (YM), since they both use the transcendental meaning of 'to exist.' The totality is itself because it is composed by all the things that transcendently exist, i.e. there isn't any transcendently existent thing beyond it. Within (PM) we have two options: either we accept (P3) in order to respect (P1), by affirming that *nothing*, i.e. the thing that doesn't transcendently exist, is what the totality is different from; or—giving up (P3)—we don't respect (P1) because we cannot point out what the totality is different from. In both cases we fall into contradiction: in the first case because, by accepting (P3), we need to accept (P5.1) and (P6.1); in the second case because we don't respect (P1), which is exactly the ontological form of the law of non-contradiction as I will briefly recall in section XIII.

One could solve this problem by rejecting (P3) and stating that the totality is different from any part of it, so that also this case would be consistent with (P1):

(P7.1) The totality of all things that transcendently exist *is not* any part of it

But I think this solution cannot be accepted so easily. Since the totality of all things that transcendently exist is defined by the difference from what does not transcendently exist, the totality of all transcendently existent things is itself exactly because there are just nonexistent things beyond it. More broadly, we can state that the concept of existence is defined itself by the difference from nonexistence: without nonexistence, you cannot think existence, since (P1) is accepted.

Therefore in (PM) the puzzle is the following: if we accept the law of non-contradiction as undeniable, we need to reject at least one of (PM)-premisses in order to make this set consistent, i.e. to avoid (P5.1), (P5.2), and (P.6.1); but at the same time it seems that we could not reject any of those premisses, otherwise the law of non-contradiction—considering (P1)

²³ There is an important debate about the possibility of quantifying on absolutely everything.: see Rayo, A. – Uzquiano G. (eds.) (2006). In this paper I will not deal with it due to lack of space. I just assume that absolutely unrestricted quantification is possible, since there are good arguments for it.

as an expression of it – would be betrayed, at least when we consider the remarkable case expressed by (P7). In fact this case—i.e. the *determinatio* “totality of transcendentally existent things”—requires (P3) and the transcendental existence of *nothing* for respecting the principle according to which *omnis determinatio est negatio*, i.e. (P1). If *nothing* did not exist, there would be at least one *determinatio* that would not be a *negatio*, and this would be a contradiction (as I will better explain in section XIII). But if we accepted the existence of *nothing*, we could not respect (P3) itself. Within (PM) we cannot reject (P3) and we cannot accept (P3),²⁴ we cannot state that *nothing* transcendentally exists²⁵ and we cannot state that *nothing* transcendentally does not exist.²⁶

(YM) can solve the puzzle. (YM) can state that *nothing* transcendentally *exists* as a world of transcendentally *nonexistent* things (Y3); therefore the case expressed by (P7)—i.e. the *determinatio* “totality of all transcendentally existent things”—is not puzzling anymore, because according to (YM) the totality of all transcendentally existent things is itself because beyond it there are just transcendentally nonexistent thing(s),²⁷ i.e. there is a world of transcendentally nonexistent things. In this way (YM) respects (P1), and the law of non-contradiction because *nothing* as world transcendentally *exists*, and its transcendentally *nonexistent* things represent what is different from the totality of all transcendentally *existent* things. So also the above mentioned *determinatio* is a *negatio*.

Apart from the cogency or the ineffectiveness of the subtraction argument (or at least of one of its versions), we should say that <*nothing* transcendentally exists> is a necessary sentence, otherwise (P1), and so the law of non-contradiction would be betrayed, at least in the case expressed by (P7). So, we should state that, even if there are limits to the subtraction argument or flaws in it, we cannot deny that there *must* be *nothing*: the necessity of the transcendental existence of *nothing* is based on the necessity of the law of non-contradiction.²⁸ Therefore, we can use the puzzle that (P7) generates and its solution as an argument that can show that the sentence “*nothing* transcendentally exists” is necessary. It can be

²⁴ Otherwise (PM) would be an inconsistent set of premises, as I pointed out in section III.

²⁵ Otherwise we would be in contradiction with (P3) itself.

²⁶ Otherwise there would be at least one contradictory situation, i.e. a *determinatio* (the totality of all transcendentally existent things) that is not a *negatio*.

²⁷ In this paper I will not deal with the question of “multiple nothings.”

²⁸ Of course, this transcendental existence of nothing, i.e. its self-identity, is the self-identity of the world-nothing that refers to transcendentally nonexistent things, as I pointed out before.

an alternative to the subtraction argument: it doesn't simply show that there might be nothing, but it shows that there *must* be nothing. In fact, if the law of non-contradiction is true in every possible world (it is necessarily true (see section XIII)), then the sentence “*nothing* transcendentally exists” is true in each possible world, otherwise the law of non-contradiction would not be true for the case expressed by (P7). The transcendental existence of nothing in any possible world doesn't mean the paradoxical situation according to which any world and our actual world *is identical* to the world 'nothing' (since at least in our actual world there is something), but it means that the world 'nothing' is included in any possible world.²⁹

XIII) All the difficulties we have found in (PM) depend on the necessity of complying with the law of non-contradiction (LNC), and this principle can be considered as the distinctive background of (PM), so that rejecting it would be a complete distortion of the *Parmenidean model*. (It's no coincidence that—according to several academics³⁰ – Parmenides is the first philosopher who implicitly expresses LNC by opposing being and nothingness). Besides, the fundamental reason why we must admit the world-nothing, as I pointed out in the previous section, is that LNC is necessarily true, as I will recall in this section. In fact, I think there is a kind of formulation of LNC that is hardly debatable, so that the choice to respect LNC appears strongly reasonable. Let's consider the *metaphysical* or *ontological* kind of formulation of LNC, for instance:

$$(LNCm) \quad \forall x \forall P \neg(P(x) \wedge \neg P(x))^{31}$$

That is a logical formalisation of one of the Aristotelian formulations. As it is known, although (LNCm) cannot be subject to demonstration, Aristotle offers an argument to prove it undeniable, i.e. the *elenctic refutation*:³² if someone tried to deny (LNCm), he would at least have to accept that the negation of (LNCm) is itself and it is not (LNCm), otherwise he could not

²⁹ A similar situation is proposed by Rodriguez (2004), who claims that *nothing* as a world with only pure sets in it is included in any possible world. According to Rodriguez, this situation doesn't imply that the world *nothing* is in communication with the world in which it is included. In fact, pure sets (which are the only objects of the world *nothing*) are neither spatio-temporally nor causally related to anything. Therefore these worlds are isolated from each other as in Lewis (1986).

³⁰ See, for example, Reale-Ruggiu (1991).

³¹ Berto (2006, p.27).

³² As I said before, in this paper I will not consider dialetheism, which could undermine LNC. Anyway, I think at least the metaphysical or ontological formulation of LNC cannot be undermined by dialetheism. See Berto (2006, p. 221).

really deny (LNCm): either he says the same of (LNCm), or he keeps silent, or he speaks nonsense. In any case, he cannot *truly* deny (LNCm). Italian philosopher Emanuele Severino shows how to delve into this argument and find the authentic strength of (LNCm).³³ Let us consider a metaphysical formulation of contradiction such as:

$$(Cm) \exists x \exists P(P(x) \wedge \neg P(x))^{34}$$

Severino notes that the conjunction $P(x) \wedge \neg P(x)$ (in his own words: the identification of two different things: in (Cm) the two different things are respectively the thing x that has the property P and the same thing x that has not got the same property P) can work as a conjunction of $P(x)$ and $\neg P(x)$ only if we assume that P is *ab origine different* from $\neg P$, otherwise that conjunction couldn't state that P belongs to x and P doesn't belong to x . For example, one can state that an apple is red and at the same time it is not red (i.e. one can affirm a contradiction) only if one—whether he likes it or not—assumes that '...is red' is *different* from '...is not red', i.e. only if one assumes that (LNCm) is true. If one didn't assume the difference between '... is red' and '...is not red,' then the two properties would be the same property that, due to strange use of language, we name with different words. Thus one could not produce an authentic contradiction, because one would just be stating that $P(x) \wedge P(x)$. Therefore, any contradiction (at least in the form (Cm)) is impossible, because it is based on (LNCm) itself. One can deny (LNCm) just *in actu signato*, but one necessarily affirms it *in actu exercito*.

In the light of these considerations, we must argue that (P1) is a form of (LNCm).³⁵ In fact, if we consider the property I : '...is identical to itself,' then the contradiction $I(x) \wedge \neg I(x)$ rests on the difference between '...is identical to itself' and '...is not identical to itself'; therefore this contradiction—as any other of this logical form—is necessarily false. Now, since '...is not identical to itself' means '...is identical to what it is not,' then '...is identical to itself' means '...is not identical to what it is not,' i.e. '...is different from something else.' That is exactly what (P1) states. Now, if we considered (P7) without admitting that the transcendental existence of the world-*nothing* is necessary, (P1) and so (LNCm) would not be respected. Therefore we need to reconsider metaphysical nihilism by concluding that the world *nothing* is included in any possible world.

³³ Severino (1982)

³⁴ Berto (2006, p.23).

³⁵ Severino (1981).

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