

Abdication of the Sovereign Self

Abdication of the Sovereign Self:

*The Psycholinguistics of
Invalid Synthetic Propositions*

By

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CONTENTS

Preface	viii
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Part One: Preliminary: The Categorical Exclusion

Chapter One.....	2
1.1 Coming-into-being (<i>le devenir</i>).....	2
1.2 Iteration and recursion.....	28
1.3 Effect of quantization on progression.....	70
1.4 When there is nothing left to prove	82
1.5 Manufacturing discursive worlds (simulacra)	118
1.6 Beyond the synthetic world of the artifice	124
1.7 Lifting the veil of the linear equation	134
1.8 The set of all sets and its significance	152
1.9 Personal sovereignty and exclusion.....	210
Chapter Two	228
2.1 The language of the sovereign	228
2.2 The dictator of language	232
2.3 Lacan and the psycholinguistics of <i>jouissance</i>	240
2.4 Psycholinguistics of the “Social I”	297
2.5 Ethical aesthetics of the Categorical Exclusion	322
2.6 Recursion of the reset of <i>a posteriori</i> positions	334
2.7 The topology of language as thought.....	341

Part Two: The Apparatus of Language

Chapter Three	366
3.1 Ethical aesthetics of abdication.....	366
3.2 Extrinsic and intrinsic <i>argument</i>	369
3.3 Extrinsic and intrinsic <i>strategies</i>	374
3.4 Equality of all binary positions	377
3.5 What “no one” does for someone.....	382
3.6 Fallacy of the subject-object dichotomy	389
3.7 Being-as-subject and the eccentric position.....	392
3.8 Morality, ethics, and “no one”	395

3.9 Ethics of the automaton	401
3.10 Apparatus tests the subject.....	403
3.11 Universal Grammar and the <i>a priori</i>	406
Chapter Four	412
4.1 Discourse at the position of <i>a posteriori</i>	412
4.2 Taxonomy of simultaneous parallel ontologies	414
4.3 Language, thought, and ontic threads	415

Part Three: The Discourse of Space and Time

Chapter Five	420
5.1 Dialectics as parallel ontologies.....	420
5.2 Transcendental self-consciousness.....	429
5.3 Space and time as synthetic propositions.....	432
5.4 Subject-predicate as analog of the <i>a priori</i>	434
5.6 <i>Read-to-hand, present-at-hand</i>	437
5.7 Discourse as language and thought.....	440
5.8 “Making-known” as propaganda	442
5.9 Assigning semantic significance.....	445
5.10 A place in the world.....	448
Chapter Six	451
6.1 A doctrine of Us and Them.....	451
6.2 Valid synthetic propositions.....	455

Part Four: The Psychology of Discourse

Chapter Seven.....	460
7.1 Politics of time and space	460
7.2 Being-for-self as objective freedom.....	469
7.3 Intellectual consequences of the speech-act.....	475
7.4 Father as signifier.....	483
7.5 Dialectical historicity of discourse.....	488
7.6 Testing Forces the Progressive Fallacy.....	493
7.7 Developmental ontology and morphology	498
7.8 Differentiation + Body-Image Development	503
7.9 Practicing and Rapprochement	506

Chapter Eight.....	512
8.1 Object Constancy + Individuation.....	512
8.2 Etiology of abdication pathology	522
8.3 Abdication in the social order	528

Part Five: Conclusion: Possession, Abdication, and the Apophantic

Chapter Nine.....	542
9.1 Being possessed by a possession	542
9.2 <i>Verifiable verifiability</i> and the <i>apophantic</i>	590
9.3 “21 st Century Schizoid Man”	598
Bibliography	618
Index	623

PREFACE

Do I contradict myself?
Very well then I contradict myself,
(I am large, I contain multitudes.)

Walt Whitman, “Song of Myself”

The truth is, my notions about things of this kind are so indigested, that I am not well satisfied myself in them; and what I am not satisfied in, I can scarce esteem to fit to be communicated to others; especially in natural philosophy, where there is no end of fancying.

Sir Isaac Newton¹

Welcome to Room 102

Two things have become clear to me in writing this book: 1) it is an invalid synthetic proposition for those who live in modern democracies and republics to say that their freedom is being “taken away” from them by the hegemonies and authoritarian states they build and support, and 2) that the idea of the existence of a great global cabal working tirelessly to enslave mankind for its nefarious purposes is a symptom of paranoid schizophrenia.

In this book one will *not* find yet another voice decrying the loss of our freedom at the hands of a rapacious surveillance state hellbent on totalitarian hegemony in order to provide a small group of plutocrats with untold riches and power. Nor will one find revelations about shadowy international organizations working together to create a Slave Planet where one will be forced to labor for a ruthless central government that will track one’s every move and stick one’s head in a rat cage to make sure that happens.

Such propositions, I argue, are products of the same fatal logical contradiction pervading nearly all public discourse in the modern age—whether for or against these propositions and their myriad permutations. *This* proposition about *these* propositions, however, does not allege that

¹ Letter from Sir Isaac Newton to Robert Boyle, 28 February 1679.

they are false. Rather, it means that we cannot *prove*, analytically, that they are true or not. So why waste any more time trying?

If we get nowhere with analytic logic and verification, could we do any better with invalid synthetic logic? The idea that we could do better with faulty logic lacking in evidence than we could with sound logic backed up by irrefutable proof is itself a symptom of the mental illness infecting what is said in the media, the pulpit, the courtroom, the legislative chambers, the street, on the Internet, and at millions of breakfast tables each day.

To understand this book, then, it is critical to understand that an “invalid” proposition is not *ipso facto* false. An *invalid* proposition is not the same thing as a *false* proposition, since whether or not a proposition is true or false must be *proven*, and proof requires a valid proposition. It just means that one is going about trying to prove its premise, or even express it, in a way that is logically doomed because it is based on a fundamental *categorical contradiction of a categorical contradiction*.

However, almost always a *part* of the invalid proposition (subject or predicate) is verifiably true. Otherwise, it would just be the ravings of a madman. Unfortunately, that we use a fatally flawed way to prove what might very well be *true* is an even worse situation than peddling outright falsehoods which time would inevitably discover without a lot of problem solving and fuss. Why? Because it *hides the truth* (which is its purpose) until the consequences of ignoring it are upon us and we can no longer do anything about it or benefit from the truth’s power of revelation.

An example of the difference between an invalid synthetic proposition and a valid one can be found in a legendary but fictitious anecdote regarding F. Scott Fitzgerald and a character in one of Ernest Hemingway’s short stories.² In “The Snows of Kilimanjaro,” Hemingway relates the following anecdote: “[P]oor Scott Fitzgerald and his romantic awe of [the rich] and how he had started a story once that began, ‘The very rich are different from you and me.’ And how someone had said to Scott, yes, they have more money.”

Here we have two propositions that look, at first glance, like they are not much different from each other:

1. The very rich are different from you and me.
2. The very rich have more money (than you and me).

² For a thorough description of this story’s provenance, see: letter to the editor, “The Rich Are Different,” *New York Times*, 13 November 1988, National Edition, Archive Page 7007070.

However, there is a significant and categorical difference in the *logic* of the two statements. The first is what is described in this book as an invalid synthetic proposition. The second is what is described as a valid one. Why the difference?

In the first the subject and the predicate disagree in category. “The very rich,” as the subject, establishes the attribute of the category. But the object in the predicate “you and me” fails to show us that it too is in the same category, which would require some indication of relative value based on an attribute of the same class. Therefore, it is in some other, unknown category. (We could quibble about the negligible difference between “the rich” and “the very rich,” but it would belabor the trivial.)

The phrase “you and me” is not to say that “we are poor,” or even that we are only “rich” and not “very rich.” Furthermore, it says nothing about the poor being “different,” an allegation which implies more than the obvious and, to Marx, for instance, a literal and logical class exclusion. In fact, it insinuates that “the very rich” are somehow *categorically different* and not just because of their relative wealth—a difficult argument to make even with *valid* logic.

Put simply, the invalid synthetic proposition, which we shall from time to time call the ISP, is the *third kind* of proposition compared to the analytic and synthetic proposition. Using Aristotle’s Rules of Thought, we can say that the analytic proposition is a tautology and is always true, though trivial: $A = A$ (or $B = B$). Both elements are drawn from the same class (A, or B, but not both). The synthetic proposition requires a different kind of reasoning because we find ourselves in what Aristotle called the “excluded middle” where two elements of the proposition are drawn from a different class: $A = B$. For example, A may be drawn from a class of “real” elements, whereas B is drawn from “imaginary” elements. Therefore, each is in a different universe of discourse. Provided the same degree of verifiability is not claimed for both, they coexist in noncontradiction.

In his poem “The Ballad of East and West,” Rudyard Kipling uses the excluded middle to make a point about what he sees as the incompatibility Eastern and Western culture: “East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet ...” This is not to say that therefore it is invalid for us to argue that perhaps there are cultural intersections where the two “meet” in some way, which sensibility would indicate. If there were such common ground, then in set theory we would say that there is a “symmetric difference” (Δ , or sometimes Θ) between them, as there is in the following sets:

$$A = (3, 9, 14)$$

$$B = (1, 2, 3)$$

$$A \Delta B = (1, 2, 9, 14)$$

Where set $A \Delta B$ contains numbers that sets A and B *do not share* (and therefore they do not “meet” in this way), though the number they both *do share* is 3. We do not violate Aristotle’s rule of the excluded middle, since we still cannot say that $A = B$, though they have a common element. The beauty of the synthetic proposition is that it allows us to begin an argument without positive verification. From there we may form a hypothesis and then go about attempting to see how much of it is verifiable.

Therefore, the excluded middle does not invalidate a proposition; it just makes it impossible to prove, as we could with $A = A$ which, though always true, is trivial. A symmetric difference in the degree of ready-to-hand verifiability between the analytic and synthetic proposition does not mean that the latter is therefore meaningless and cannot lead us to verifiable proofs of related propositions. If this were not the case, effective language would be impossible.

However, in the ISP, a *fatal contradiction* is added to the proposition, namely that $A = B$ is the *material equivalent* of $A = A$, or what we might call “the same thing” ($A = B \equiv A = A$) and is therefore verifiable as being true or false. In effect, then, it is saying that the universe of discourse of the *real* is the *same thing* as the universe of discourse of the *imaginary*, or that the *imaginary is real* and the *real is imaginary*. The best we can say about such an ISP is that it is a *metacontradiction*. The ISP takes the standard contradiction of the synthetic proposition ($A = B$), which we cannot prove because it embraces the excluded middle and *negates* any possibility of meaning by insisting that it is verifiable. It is one thing to say that a synthetic proposition is unverifiable. It is categorically something else to say that it is verifiable. Here we have a fatal contradiction for reasons it is the mission of this book to analyze.

While this may seem like an abstract argument, the ISP it is indeed *the main form of discourse in the modern age*. It underlies most ideas and statements. It abounds in the so-called news and in nearly all political and public discourse. And, of course (and who would argue with this?) it is the basis of the willing suspension of disbelief necessary for *entertainment* to be a marketable, profitable commodity. Furthermore, the fatal contradiction of the ISP is nowhere more abundant than in the discourse of finance and economics, which, being the so-called dismal science, lays claim to the verisimilitude of “the numbers” and, as we all know, “the numbers don’t lie.”

Around the same time Hemingway and Fitzgerald were having their debate on this topic, John J. Raskob, a political party boss who was instrumental in the building of the Empire State Building and regarded as an authority on the rich, tried his best to arrive at a popular definition of the term.

Being rich is, of course, a comparative status. A man with a million dollars used to be considered rich, but so many people have at least that much in these days, or are earning incomes in excess of a normal return from a million dollars, that a millionaire does not cause any comment. Fixing a bulk line to define riches is a pointless performance. Let us rather say that a man is rich when he has an income from invested capital which is sufficient to support him and his family in a decent and comfortable manner to give as much support, let us say, as has ever been given by his earnings. That amount of prosperity ought to be attainable by anyone. A greater share will come to those who have greater ability...³

Raskob's definition, despite its sincerity, deconstructs itself into the proposition that "everybody ought to be rich," thus rendering the term meaningless. He advises investing in the stock market as the shortest path to being "rich" or even "very rich." Never mind the fact that two months after the publication of this article the world is plunged into the Great Depression where new distinctions regarding disparities of wealth emerge.

While Fitzgerald's statement might seem to imply that the rich are in some other category than "you and me," and therefore would justify the violation of the law of noncontradiction of categories, it in fact only serves to invalidate the proposition. Besides, it does not say that. Instead, it just pairs the woefully vague and unverifiable "very rich" with the equally vague and unverifiable "different." As this is a synthetic and not analytic proposition, valid or invalid, there is no possibility of verification, which to a certain extent is Marx's ultimate problem despite the fact that his propositions are noncontradictory.

To say *A* is different in any way at all from *B* we must first specify *in what way*, which requires a specification of attributes of the same class. Otherwise, we simply have to admit they are in different classes and that there is, therefore, no possibility of rational comparison. Maybe they are "very" different in some fundamental way, but this argument is not going to "prove" anything to us unless we already believe it to be true, in which case the argument is specious.

³ Samuel Crowther, "Everybody Ought to Be Rich: An Interview with John J. Raskob," *Ladies' Home Journal* (August 1929).

The second proposition, however, while no more verifiable in the analytical sense than the first (since the attribute “very rich” cannot be verified), is nevertheless a *valid* synthetic proposition in that *there is no contradiction*. If I think someone is “very rich,” and I think that person is “different” from me because of it, then the only possibility of “difference” is that I have less money and that person “has more money”—whether it be a little (rich) or a lot (very rich). Therefore, the second proposition is based, at least, on the verifiable fact that I have less money than the person I describe as *A*) different from me, and *B*) rich (or very rich). Therefore, *A* and *B* agree. This fact does not “prove” the proposition, but it does allow for the possibility of *validity*.

Hemingway seems to be deliberately allowing the valid statement to exhibit its blasé banality: “The very rich are people who have more money than you and me.” He also seems to be giving unspoken commentary on the lazy, irrational use of this kind of faulty logic employed to alienate the nominally “very rich” from the equally nominal non-very rich (which is not necessarily to say “the poor”). If Fitzgerald had taken the approach Marx does and called these two groups “classes,” then he would have had the beginnings of the possibility of a nontrivial statement about categorical differences. Hemingway, the author of *To Have and Have Not*, seems to be attempting a correction of this invalid proposition—with some success, judging by Fitzgerald’s frantic attempt to have the publisher strike the alleged conversation from the short story.⁴

Another example is the seemingly sensible assertion some evolutionary biologists make that if humans disappeared from the earth life would likely flourish, whereas if insects vanished it would likely come to an end. “Touché,” we say to the biologist, “you have us there!” Until we realize that *humans* are a *species* whereas *insects* are a *phylum*.

Indeed, removing any *phylum* from the ecosystem will result in disaster—this few will argue against. In this particular invalid proposition, a scientifically verifiable proposition is exploited to form the invalid one. Here we have a typical pattern of invalid discourse where a dubious, unverifiable, or even knowingly false proposition is gussied up by pairing it with the truth. The result is not the “half-truth” of, for instance, the stereotype, which is bad enough, but the ugly aesthetic of the unethical lie.

The extinction argument falls apart when we realize that these same biologists say they have proven that the majority of species that ever existed are now extinct, and yet life goes on. To further push home the point, we must consider that there are over 12,000 identified *species* of ant alone, whereas there is only one species of human, they say. Would the

⁴ Op. cit., “The Rich Are Different,” *New York Times*, 13 November 1988.

loss of any one of these ant species bring about global extinction of all phyla? Here we have a classical category error and therefore an invalid synthetic statement because it violates the law of noncontradiction.

What is most sinister about the rich being “different” in some undefinable but critical way is that it dehumanizes them and therefore sets them up to be targeted for possible inhuman treatment. There is no verifiable, analytical way to tell them apart from the “non-rich,” such as if they had the “rich” virus which we could find in a blood test. It makes the them at best a subspecies of humans which, for all their faults, they are not. Nevertheless, it is the kind of statement that is wielded by the haters of the rich, whoever the rich may be. Consequently, it has from time to time led to the slaughter of both the innocent and not-so-innocent alike.

What is sinister about the evolutionary biology statement is that it leads one to the conclusion, perhaps, that the world would be better *without* humans—or at least so many of them or those of the “wrong” kind. The bumper sticker “Save the world. Kill yourself!” says it all. Therefore, if humanity wipes itself out, or if a certain elite group (the rich?) decides that it is time to reduce the number of those threatening the wellbeing of insects, which by this logic threatens the wellbeing of all creatures, such action is justified by biological science.

In both invalid statements the faulty reasoning goes that since the statement is *a priori* true, then it needs no valid logic to be so nor does it need any logical proof since the “evidence” speaks for itself. Therefore, they are “self-evident.” What is self-evident needs no discovery or challenge of that evidence. In fact, to challenge their *a priori* evidentiality is downright heretical and shall be suppressed and punished. In such a situation, this “evidence” simply becomes an *a posteriori* rationalization for an *a priori* conclusion which, at best, is a fallacy of the *post hoc ergo propter hoc* (after the fact, therefore before the fact) sort. However, this is not the same thing as the propositions being false. They could be true. However, it is not even possible to determine their truth value because they are invalid.

While the old saw that one must compare apples to apples and not to oranges is an attempt to explain the law of noncontradiction, it fails because apples and oranges just happen to be in the same class of “fruit.” Not only that, but they have many other attributes (such as their shape) which shows that they are so much alike that their differences are trivial from the point of view of logic. It would be a profitable argument to say that the same is true of the alleged racial differences between human beings, but there is neither the time nor the space here for that one.

Unfortunately, it is typical of prevailing public discourse that even our attempts to explain the law of noncontradiction in everyday idiom is also fatally contaminated with a violation of the law that we attempt to describe! Perhaps the ubiquity of the invalid synthetic proposition gives us an idea of how inescapable it is, while at the same time underscoring the seeming impossibility of the rare attempt to escape.

The object of this book is to show that the faulty, contradictory logic of the invalid synthetic proposition has invaded the territory, or topology, of much of modern public discourse. As such, it has also infiltrated private discourse and, worse, the fundamental schemata of our thought structure. Moreover, I seek to show that it has been institutionalized as the only possibility of The Truth, and that anything which does not conform to its schema is *de facto* False and shall be searched out and silenced.

What is to be found here is an analysis of how we use language in the modern state, East or West. This book also looks at the psychology of the ideas and behaviors of the citizens of the modern empires where the discourse of the invalid synthetic proposition reigns supreme. It is applied to determining all the most important decisions individuals, business, financial markets, policy makers, and states must make. Such an analysis entails also looking at what the discontents of civilization might be and what effect they may have on our wellbeing and intelligence.

As such, you will find here not only a linguistic analysis of the prevailing discourse of modern life but also a psychological probe into the mechanics and motivations of the citizen of the modern state, whom we shall call the "subject." This creature gets a thorough going over here with little mercy. Therefore, linguistics and psychology find themselves, for lack of a better word, codependent throughout this discussion.

The temptation is to say how I came to conclusions 1 and 2 in the first paragraph. But I think that is what the rest of the book does. To do so here has its limitations and problems. The book is meant to be read more as a scholarly novel with some dramatic characters we have seen before in other guises than as an academic exercise in linguistics or a philosophical or psychological treatise.

I have always thought that what distinguishes literature from entertainment is that the former is discursive while the latter is distractive. Discourse, though, has its dangers. I set out to delight and instruct. My experience is that delight is too often sacrificed for the sake of instruction in purely academic discourse. Therefore, I have done my best here to avoid the academic and go for what I can only describe as the scholarly and thoughtful.

I am inclined, then, to call this preface “Room 102” in homage of Orwell’s infamous Room 101 in *Nineteen-Eight Four*, a book to which this one owes much in spirit *but more importantly in logic*. His book is the perfect unity of discourse, instruction, and delight. It unifies a compelling narrative with an analytical discourse.

In this book I seek to discover how it is possible for a person to accept as “true” in the logical sense such propositions Orwell presents as the foundation of Newspeak and Ingsoc: War is peace, freedom is slavery, and ignorance is strength.

Aside from eventually sticking Winston’s face into a rat cage in Room 101, an act which his torturer O’Brien refers to as “the worst thing in the world,” O’Brien engages Winston in a remarkable lesson in the importance to the state of the citizen-subject embracing invalid synthetic logic. It is worth quoting this passage in full because it expresses the great drama of what might otherwise seem like the promise of a rather bloodless linguistic argument and clinical psychological analysis, scholarly or academic.

He paused for a few moments, as though to allow what he had been saying to sink in.

“Do you remember,” he went on, “writing in your diary, ‘Freedom is the freedom to say that two plus two make four?’”

“Yes,” said Winston.

O’Brien held up his left hand, its back towards Winston, with the thumb hidden and the four fingers extended.

“How many fingers am I holding up, Winston?”

“Four.”

“And if the party says that it is not four but five—then how many?”

“Four.”

The word ended in a gasp of pain. The needle of the dial had shot up to fifty-five. The sweat had sprung out all over Winston’s body. The air tore into his lungs and issued again in deep groans which even by clenching his teeth he could not stop. O’Brien watched him, the four fingers still extended. He drew back the lever. This time the pain was only slightly eased.

“How many fingers, Winston?”

“Four.”

The needle went up to sixty.

“How many fingers, Winston?”

“Four! Four! What else can I say? Four!”⁵

⁵ George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (London: Martin Secker & Warburg Ltd., 1949), 315.

Winston's situation, only 20 years after the publication of Orwell's book, would be duplicated in Stanley Milgram's obedience-to-authority experiments we still find shocking today⁶. In these experiments "normal" people, rather than finding themselves faced with Winston's ordeal of holding onto his sanity when confronted with the demand to abandon it, instead *took O'Brien's position* as torturers. They would have obediently harmed or even *killed* the test subjects if the experiment were not ingeniously controlled by Milgram to be covertly staged, leading them into believing that they were shocking the subjects when in fact they were not.

Many years later, Milgram's work is even more relevant to our surrender to the dictates of authority. This book picks up where Winston's dialogue with O'Brien, and Milgram's experiment, leave off, which is why I call this preface "Room 102."

Perhaps one of the greatest acts of literary revenge in history against one's detested employers is Orwell's allusion in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* to the *actual* Room 101 where he worked for the BBC before writing the novel. In the novel, this is the place where Winston faces (literally) "the worst thing in the world." That Orwell is no longer with us but the BBC (and perhaps Ingsoc) is, says something about why such a book as the one you are, I hope, about to read could still find fertile soil to grow more ideas about the systematic, institutionalized manipulation of language.

The purpose of this manipulation today, as it is in Orwell's novel, is the creation of an imaginary and symbolic world that at once gives us what we want the most: to be totally controlled in thought and deed, in exchange for our personal sovereignty and self-determination.

This world, particularly through digital technology, seeks to replace the otherwise unattractive demands the real makes on our ethical aesthetics with the infinitely attractive distractions and titillations of the imaginary and symbolic, which are called here "simulacra." The hallucinatory world of simulacra is much more to the liking not only of the control-loving citizen of today's global Oceania, in thrall to his handheld gadget, but also of the state's relentless attempts to satisfy that love while maintaining homeostasis for its own self-preservation. But I digress.

It could be said that the premise of this story is based on the question of what if Orwell's Room 101 were enlarged to include the whole world in one way or another? How many of us are willing to say "five"? Or better yet, how many are willing to say "*four*"? There is no doubt about it that the idea of living in a global Room 101 is a bit *paranoid*. Also, the

⁶ Stanley Milgram, *Obedience to Authority: An Experimental View*. (Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2009).

metaphor that we are brought *by force* to Big Brother's torture chamber is nothing short of saying just what I say I set out *not* to say here.

Nevertheless, I feel exonerated by my own words throughout this book which work to dispel the effects of both invalid synthetic thinking and the paranoid delusions of the 21st century schizoid man. To think that Big Brother, Ingsoc, and the dystopian state of Oceania are now our daily milieu would miss the point not only of these scenes in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, but also of the reality of our situation.

We could even say that Orwell would be astounded at how much farther we have gone in this respect than anything he tried to shock his 1949 audiences with. Had he described our world of today, he would have been considered a crank and a crackpot, never mind just a plain old bad science fiction writer. I think what he would find most disturbing of all is the degree to which we are complicit in this digital totalitarianism, and to what degree we long for, cultivate, and support a kind of fascism that could only have been dreamt up by advertising and marketing departments.

Nevertheless, what we see today as the pan-global society of the modern digital state is a wildly metastatic manifestation of the dystopia he describes. Orwell takes great pains to show that Winston ultimately *chooses* to accept what amounts to O'Brien's invalid synthetic proposition regarding the sum of two and two, though in a much worse form as his ultimate betrayal of his lover Julia to the state, bearing false witness to boot.

O'Brien, for his part, finds no value in torturing someone to the point where he will say anything. What he wants is voluntary, willful, conscious, intentional, desired, preferred, welcomed, chosen *abdication of the subject's sovereignty and self-determination*.

Only abdication has value to Ingsoc, just as it is all that is required from the creature we shall call the Apex Consumer by the commercial apparatus that springs into being to provide for his every need—as long as he makes the monthly payments and maintains good credit. Whatever follows from that, such as a loss of sanity or even schizophrenia, O'Brien rightly understands he really has no control over.

While Winston seems to be able to resist the Milgram-like electrical torture for something as trivial as embracing O'Brien's illogical proposition regarding arithmetic, he finds “the worst thing in the world” too much to bear, compelling him to give false witness against Julia, the woman he loves, by calling on O'Brien to torture *her* in his stead—despite her innocence and his de facto guilt. What kind of “logic,” then, is this that holds such power of persuasion? It cannot be pain, or even terror, since

Winston had already had his share of both up to that point and yet had not cracked.

Instead, Winston *voluntarily abdicates* the last bit of control he has over himself and his actions while at the same time betraying the only person who can confirm his humanity because he wants to be *free* of the burden of self-determination. The “worst thing in the world,” then, is to find ourselves responsible for our own fate in a vast universe of utter mystery and indifference. Worse than rats in the face is the Truth we must face that the universe just does not care if we live or die, if we are miserable or happy, and, ultimately, if we are free or enslaved.

To hold one’s fate in one’s hand is to admit that *one must die*, for the will ceases to function the moment we convince ourselves of the lie that our ego will live forever. If immortality is guaranteed, then why struggle to survive? The struggle to live, on our own terms, is a *de facto* admission that we will die. Therefore, turning this nasty problem over to someone else is our first step toward immortality not only of the ego, but, thanks to the promises of commercial technology, the body as well.

Winston is swayed by an invalid synthetic argument which *negates* his power to act as a sovereign human being. In so doing he *negates himself* and in the process his humanity in favor of the prerogatives of the state. “Do it to Julia! Do it to Julia! Not me! Julia! I don’t care what you do to her. Tear her face off, strip her to the bones. Not me! Julia! Not me!”⁷

We begin face “the worst thing in the world” by discovering how many times a day we betray Julia to the hegemonic powers to which we willingly surrender our self-determination and sovereign humanity. The next step is to acknowledge how blithely we consume the sovereignty and self-determination of others so that we might live in perpetual comfort, convenience, and immortality.

Room 101 is not (just) the BBC, the state, Big Brother, Oceania, or the New World Order. It is *the way we think*. It is in each individual, each person, who carries around in his heart “the worst thing in the world,” which is fear of the death of the ego brought on by the act of self-determination and the maintenance and cultivation of sovereignty. While a rat cage on the face is a strong motivator for anyone (not just rat-phobic Winston Smith), Nonbeing is an even *greater* terror. That it is the only absolute, inevitable certainty in our lives and therefore what might be considered the only thing we know for sure renders us even more ignorant and cowardly.

The purpose of this book, then, is to bring us to look at ourselves and see how culpable we are in this humanitarian catastrophe taking place in

⁷ Orwell. Op. cit., 362.

our own thought process day to day. How far do things have to go before we crack?

To make it interesting, this story has all of the characters anthropologist Vladimir Propp says are necessary for the folk tale: a villain, a hero, the hero's helper, the object sought, the donor of the object, and the receiver of the object.⁸ The intent of the narrative, though, is to leave the casting direction up to the reader.

In the meantime, the ensuing scenes are fraught with moral and ethical ambiguity and implicative uncertainty. There are many inversions of the roles, particularly those of the hero and villain, as the narrative proceeds. Also, we sample, in a scholarly way, what many others have to say about these and related matters. But if the reader follows the story, he might just find out something not only about his fellow citizens and the society they comprise, but also himself.

Those who live in modern democracies and republics have a desperate choice to make: whether or not to abdicate their personal sovereignty and self-determination in exchange for the dubious rewards of modern civilization and its digital empires. The machine we typically like to rage against is an expression of our collective schizophrenic hallucination of a great global cabal seeking our universal enslavement. Ironically, this illusion makes it possible to exploit us *en mass* which in turn reinforces this illusion.

None of this would be possible without our willing abdication of our sovereignty. And our abdication itself would not be possible without a prevailing social discourse, embraced in its most fundamental and minute detail around the globe, of invalid synthetic logic. We *choose* the invalid over the valid, the false over the true, because we find that "the truth," whatever it may be, is "the worst thing in the world." If this were not the case, there would be no hope at all.

Shanyang, Liaoning, China
2018

⁸ Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1968).

PART ONE

PRELIMINARY: THE CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION

CHAPTER ONE

In the proposition a state of affairs is, as it were, put together for the sake of experiment.¹

Wittgenstein

So we can envisage the linguistics phenomenon in its entirety—the language, that is—as a series of adjoining subdivisions simultaneously imprinted both on the plane of vague, amorphous thought, and on the equally featureless plane of sound.²

Ferdinand de Saussure

In self-trust, all the virtues are comprehended.³

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Oh as I was young and easy in the mercy of his means,
Time held me green and dying
Though I sang in my chains like the sea.

Dylan Thomas, “Fern Hill”

1.1 Coming-into-being (*le devenir*)

Why do we talk about reality as if it were something outside of and other than ourselves? To answer this question, we must set aside some assumptions about what reality is and analyze the ideas we use to describe it. By doing so, it becomes possible to see that, psychologically, language has as much to do with what a thing *is* as what it happens to *be* apart from language. Therefore, “reality” has a solid basis in language, which we typically see as something within us that moves outward *toward* reality through the power of our will and thought.

If we begin with what we know, then, we can say with some certainty that things, which must be represented in language, derive a part of their

¹ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, C. K. Ogden, trans. (New York: Barnes & Noble, 2003), 45.

² Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics* (Chicago: Open Court, 2008), 110.

³ Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The American Scholar, Self-Reliance, Compensation*, Orren Henry Smith, ed. (American Book Company, 1911), 37.

being or *thingness* from what we say and think about them. This is so because our idea of “being” or “thingness” has a psychological component that is as inextricable from phenomenological reality as we are from the idea of our own existence.

To what degree, then, are we responsible for the *coming-into-being* (*le devenir*) of things in a phenomenological sense? Is it fair or even accurate to say that we have *nothing* to do with it, as sometimes religion and science suppose, but in contrary ways? Is the arrival of phenomena upon the plane of reality the result of forces over which language has little or no control? Or does language determine, in whole or part, what we come to regard as phenomena?

Even without giving it much thought, it does not seem possible that we, the creatures who otherwise consider ourselves to be the “masters of the universe,” macro and nano, have nothing to do with the coming-into-being of what we regard as objective phenomena. To leave this matter entirely up to God or Nature seems not only an attempt to dodge responsibility for the way the world is but also inaccurate to some appreciable degree.

Therefore, let us look at what we *can* say about how language leads us to conclude that something *is*. We may then get a better idea of how responsible we are for the world we perceive and our role in it. We will look at three perspectives of the evolution of the language and its relation to the collective idea of reality, as well as how the idea of sovereignty, or self-determination, has migrated from the individual to the state.

(I.) First, it is possible to say that something *comes into being* when it crosses a certain linguistic threshold where it may be said that it *is*. But *where* is this threshold in the topography of our subjective experience? A common example may help us here.

Most of us would say that we know what a unicorn *is*, but none of us have seen one the way we see ourselves in a mirror. We can say that we have seen one in art and movies, and therefore “know” what it is the way we know other facts we may have had direct, empirical experience of or learned in some second-hand way. But seldom do we step back from this knowledge and consider the epistemological difference between such categorically exclusive forms of knowing.

The threshold in this case, then, is clear. We are by necessity forced to maintain two categories of “seeing”: one reserved for the world of what we regard as *imaginary*, and another that we reserve for what we regard as *real*. The two, we think, are mutually exclusive, categorically different, and separated as antonyms in language and thought.

In the case of the unicorn, however, we think of what may be called a *simulacrum* of such a creature, a mental *copy* of the “real thing” that nevertheless does not and never did exist. Despite this obvious difficulty, we are still ready to say that we “know” what a unicorn is, even though we cannot testify to the empirical existence of unicorns as we could to our existence as beings.

However, little of what we consider to be our existence could be verified except for, perhaps, the bare facts of it. These facts we discover such on our birth certificate and other official government and church records. The rest, such as gender, ethnicity, and so on is not in any way unique to us. It therefore belongs to a *type*, as apart from who we are as a unique and discrete entity. It may be said, then, that this image (*imago*) we have of *who* and even *what* we are is, perhaps, even *less* substantial than the evidence for unicorns which, at least, are universally acknowledged in almost every culture (objectively) as being one-horned, horse-like, mythological creatures.

(II.) Second, language does not only indicate, represent, or describe; it *performs*. Consequently, we are performers and, as such, are responsible for the performance of our role in life just as we are for our crimes. Because there are things we know about and can describe that do not exist (such as unicorns) and things we are *certain* exist (such as ourselves), we naturally divide these phenomena into two categories: the *imaginary* and *real*.

This act of dividing the mythical unicorns from the sheep and goats in the pasture has consequences. Mixing them up, we observe, can negatively affect the way we are regarded by society. People might think we are crazy or simpletons for “believing in” unicorns. Conversely, we also observe that it may propel us into a position of power if we can indeed convince others to “believe in” unicorns, whether our performance is honest credulity or an outright act of dissimilitude.

What often matters to us the most, then, is the *social effect* resulting from our perceptive discretions and indiscretions when we profess what we believe in and then ask others to join us in our discrimination between what is real and imaginary. Whether or not this or that notion is one or the other we leave up to the theologians and scientists, depending upon the cultural framework of our belief system.

Regardless, how good are we at distinguishing the real from the imaginary? What empirical and analytic tools have we at our ready-to-hand disposal? Do we even consider ourselves “qualified” to make such distinctions, or do we think it is better to leave it up to the “professionals” such as psychiatrists and physicists?

When it comes to imaginary beasts, we do not hesitate to deny they exist in any way other than as the productions of fantasy, though we will flock to any media representation of them that looks increasingly “realistic” in the hope that we will be distracted from a world that is, sadly, without unicorns in the flesh. But when it comes to distinguishing the real from the imaginary among the myriad manifestations of phenomena, confusion reigns, particularly when we deal with ideas, values, ethics, morals, and aesthetics. But the same confusion may be extended to how we regard various phenomena, as well as strangers, foreigners, and aliens from across the border or even from outer space.

If this were not the case, court trials would not be necessary, experimental results would never be challenged, referees and umpires would not be necessary at sporting events, armies would stand down, fortune tellers would be out of a job, and there would not be such a significant epistemological difference between religious and scientific *knowing*.

We also have a vague sense that giving ideas and things names has a certain magic power affecting the potential verisimilitude of their existence. It is hard for us to escape this impression. It is particularly obvious when it comes to ideas, which do not even seem to exist until they are named, making their *coming-into-being* and their naming a simultaneous and even spontaneous *event*.

As for concrete phenomena, we have a sense that they are just waiting *out there* for us to notice, name, describe, and analyze, them so that they can be logged in the official book of *realia*. The need to refer to them and endow them with our subjective perception arises not only from the utility it thus affords, but also from our ego’s compulsive need to exercise its godlike role as the creator of the world we inhabit.

The performance of a power that has discernable consequences in the world, therefore, is of concern to us all. The process of *naming*, then, gives us yet another dimension of existence which we may call the *symbolic* and add to the *real* and *imaginary* orders of our perceptive experience (as described in the work of Lacan).

Once the symbolic attaches itself to the real and imaginary in our psychology as language and thought, the real and imaginary are never again the same. The effective appearance of *language* and consequently *thought* gives rise to a dimension of experience lying in a metaphysical space somewhere between the real and imaginary. “There is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so,” says Hamlet. To negotiate this “zero-width space,” then, we must develop a sophisticated power of what Kant calls

“judgment” which, as he describes it, is largely synthetic in that it may or may not be subject to verification and categorical noncontradiction.

Therefore, our capacity for judgment also gives rise to our ability to take ideas, values, ethics, morals, and aesthetics seriously in the sense that they can begin to seem to be “more real” than empirical reality, natural law, and the law of the jungle. After all, if God created the heaven and the earth, then this invisible Being, all-powerful and all-knowing, *must* be and *has* to be “more real” than that which he created from his imagination. Meantime, science never ceases to remind us that what appears to us as reality is often at odds with the analytical truth of what we see as verified by experiment and mathematics.

Such judgments become the foundation of our social relationship with others and consequently of society, civilization, and empire. For this foundation to be made of more than brute force and de facto affinity there must be a special kind of language which introduces yet another symbolic element into our experience in the form of the Law or *nomos*.

As we enter into this social realm of simulacra, populated with the “unicorns” of religion and technology, anything becomes possible. The physical universe of the real becomes the metaphysical universe of the imaginary, mitigated by the language, and thought, of the symbolic apparatus of conscious awareness in which all is represented to us in various ways but chiefly in words. Society feels the overwhelming need to curtail the infinite possibility of existence not only through the laws of man but the laws of God. Legal codes, such as the Ten Commandments, then, strive to make sense of society’s metastatic impulse to forge reality from the *prima materia* of a universe that is *more real* than what might have existed prior to mankind’s judgment and interpretation of existence.

For example, by the standards of society, we may think it is of greater moral, ethical, and legal consequence to kill another than to kill ourselves. More people, however, make the decision to *kill others* than to kill themselves, despite this apparently greater cosmic consequence. (There is also the matter of “self-murder” which will be discussed at some length later.) The Commandment not to kill (murder), then, far from resolving the matter, *metastasizes* it into a moral and ethical dilemma no civilization since has been able to conclusively resolve, particularly when it feels the urge to go to war.

We are compelled to embrace or reject beliefs about existence based on our judgment, which is in turn ruled by what symbolic universe we are born into or later espouse. While few would make a case for the existence of unicorns, there are many that make a convincing case for the idea that space aliens walk among us. Why would anyone believe such an idea? Is it any

less plausible than the idea that the Devil walks among us, hellbent, as it were, on cheating us out of our reward of eternal life in the heavenly hereafter?

It is easy to make a mockery of such beliefs, but difficult to scrutinize our own unverified and perhaps unverifiable beliefs often of a more ridiculous sort. Meantime, science, which is the prevailing ethical aesthetic of modern society, demands that we accept its ever-shifting and often contradictory paradigms of physical reality as well as whatever speculation it may offer as to what is “really” behind existence (if not God).

No sooner does science raise an objection to, for instance, space travel at the speed of light, than it turns around and suggests, with abstruse math and exclusive movie rights, that there are more imaginative ways to traverse astronomical distances. The public is regaled with worm holes, space-time warps, event horizons, string theory, black holes, and an n -dimensional “multiverse” where any number of universes exist in parallel to our woefully limited one where such feats of quantum derring-do are simply not feasible.

Each of these exciting possibilities has been deemed credible “in the future” by one Nobel Prize winner or another. All we need is the right equation, which the old college try will eventually reveal. Long-term, at-times publicly funded scientific research projects such as SETI (Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence) have kept the hope alive for something more entertaining than the human race “out there.” At the same time peripatetic public intellectuals roam the earth hawking their proof that God is a delusion.

It is no wonder, then, that the belief that UFO’s have planted their alien cargo throughout the earth is widespread. The almost constant presence of this topic in various forms of fringe, alternative, and even mainstream media attests to how widely held this belief has become (of course mostly since the time when humans also learned how to fly like their extraterrestrial brethren). To be a “UFO denier” can be a dangerous public position to take for those who like to use this belief as an example of delusional thinking. After all, applying Karl Popper’s principle of *falsifiability*, can we *prove* that UFO’s *have not* visited earth as easily as we seem to be able to prove that God does not exist?

It is the thesis of the present argument that the logic of language and consequently of thought has been fatally corrupted by what will be called invalid synthetic propositions, or ISP’s. Kant indeed makes it clear that natural thought, including the operations of mathematics, depends upon valid synthetic propositions. The present argument, however, asserts that these propositions, for reasons discussed at great length here, have been

corrupted in the mainstream of public discourse in such a way as to render them *invalid*.

We work at this linguistic magic act in our daily transactions with others, as they do with us, which shapes our thoughts and ideas whether we are aware of it or not. It consists, in part, of representations or indications of persons, ideas, phenomena, and things as thought and language with little reference to what kind of logic is being used in the process. What is more important to us than logic is the rhetorical power of a statement: *Is it convincing?* If yes, then it is true. If no, then it is false. Therefore, rhetorical power is greater than empirical or analytical power in the ethical aesthetic of the modern world's epistemology in public discourse.

We might be able to lay the blame for this asymmetry in public communication at the feet of modern politicians, corporate advertising, and the mass media, but that would be too simple as well as inaccurate. Most unfairly, it would place the blame somewhere other than the individual subject who is, after all, the originator of public discourse. State politicians and other mouthpieces of the prevailing hegemony serve at the subject's pleasure, often confining their utterances to what their research data and professional intuition tell them the subject wants to hear.

A great rhetorical communicator, or *rhetor*, is the one-eyed man in the land of the blind. The authority of the academic in these matters is considerable, though indirectly. It is a holdover from a more credulous time, particularly the Middle Ages of Europe, when the *Artes Liberales* of rhetoric, grammar, and logic, were considered the only vehicles worthy of the Truth; whereas the products of the *Artes Mechanicae* of agriculture, industry, commerce and so on were regarded as vulgar and profane and the domain of the simpleton. The chief reason is that the former is concerned with what has long been regarded as the *sacred*, whereas the latter is inherently *profane*.

The concept of a "liberal" education comes to us from the idea of the Greek "freeman" (as opposed to the slave) who must be trained in the *trivium* of grammar, rhetoric, and logic to be a full participant in democratic society; he is "at liberty" to determine his own fate and is therefore the custodian of his personal sovereignty. Without these lawyerly skills, the free citizen of ancient Greece was at a marked disadvantage to his compatriots, particularly in a court of law where the plaintiff (if it was not the state) and the defendant often had to play the role of lawyer.

The idea of the *academic and legal verifiability of truth* and consequently of reality in Western civilization burgeoned into an arm of control in the hegemony's arsenal of public rhetoric. In so doing, it

gradually ceased to be the instrument of the individual's defense of his own sovereignty. The rise of the professional academic and lawyer (*domini*) who spoke the rarified languages of *theologia*, *humanitas*, *scientia*, and the *nomos* (law) came to overshadow the individual's power to defend his own sovereignty. The role of the professional class in society took on a quasi-sacred aura which prevails to this day. It is belied by their ecclesiastic ceremonial attire and grim social gravitas.

Meantime, the *hoi polloi* (οἱ πολλοί) was often unaware that such a concept as personal sovereignty even existed until it was made aware of it through an encounter with the *nomos* or some other official priesthood of sacred and profane knowledge. Therefore, abstract ideas, such as *res publica*, transmogrification, freedom, privacy, government, and sin, "did not exist" until society had words for them handed down from on high by the most convincing rhetors as well as the authorities who codified, enforced, and prosecuted the law. Meantime, discursive orthodoxy determined the linguistic Shibboleths of society so that the hegemony could distinguish the *hoi polloi* from the *domini*.

(III.) Third, since language is, as an expression of the mind, both outside of and within us, then we must admit that part of what we think of as the *being* of things is in *us* as well as in the *thing in itself* (or what Kant calls *das Ding an sich*). However, we must also acknowledge that this power is in *others* in the same way that it is in us and is therefore "outside" of us as well in the form of the social consensus that makes communication possible.

Since others are "outside" of us, what makes language effective and necessary is that we have a technical and semantic *agreement* with others as to how we will communicate. Such a social contract demands that there is also agreement regarding what is real and imaginary. How, then, do we accomplish this task on a massive and popular scale?

In other words, we are responsible to a nontrivial degree as accessories after the fact for the way things are in a phenomenological sense. But we share this culpability with others in the form of social discourse. How much, then, of what we believe something *is* results from our subjective understanding of it and how much results from our unexamined acceptance of what others *tell us* it is, which we may regard as either subjective or objective? Also, how acute are we at distinguishing what we have discovered for ourselves from what we have been told? Is it even possible to discover anything for ourselves without referring to what others have told us?

Regardless of the answers to the above, the fact is that we tend to think of *everything* as being entirely outside of ourselves however it is that we

have come to “know” it; therefore, why should it seem odd that we prefer to be *told* what reality is rather than take the trouble to discover what it is with whatever equipment we may have on board to do so? We interact with it, or it interacts with us. But do we also *call it into being* through language?

As such, things seem to go about their existence quite independently of us until the moment when we decide that we want them to be *different* from the way that we perceive them to be. For example, during one period of mankind’s history (in one part of the world) God may be the most important and adored principle of reality. During another, God may be the most insignificant and even reviled. During yet another the two factions may battle it out on what Matthew Arnold called the “darkling plane” for dominance over civilization’s discourse and *ethical aesthetic*. Therefore, even God is not immune from the ego’s rampage, making science’s “proof” that there is no God seem more an excrescence of the ego’s jealousy and competition with the idea of a Creator than yet another one of the “cold hard facts” Scientism adores.

By its nature, the ego is autocratic; but it is also pragmatic in that it understands that there are other egos like itself which also long to be Masters of the Universe. It therefore needs from time to time to use them get what it wants for itself. While it concerns itself with orthodoxy, it never loses sight of *praxidoxy*. This situation forces it into a systematic compromise we like to call “civilization” which, through a process of *metastasis*, must and shall seek to be an exclusive Empire “in the future” through perpetual and infinite Progress.

Long before this historic drama plays out, though, *wishful thinking* leads the ego into imagining how much “better” life would be if it could indeed call all things into being (and send them out of it) at will through the power of language—with or without any agreement from its fellow egos. This is the fundamental principle of social and political power. The result is the *nomos*, or the Law, whether it has been arrived at by autocratic fiat or the ritual of democracy. Therefore, it tends to be an expression of the ego’s psychological imperative to get what it wants through the codification of social contracts with others who want the same thing for themselves.

When the nonexistence of God is unthinkable, progress and the social contract is not as big of a concern as it is when God is dead. But when we consider ourselves to be the lords and masters of the universe, we tend to give more consideration to how things could be bigger, better, brighter, happier, richer, and more to our liking without begging for intercession from the Supernatural. Instead, we turn to the “right of man” to be free to