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METAPHYSICS: THE LOGICAL APPROACH
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Metaphysics and logic appear at first glance to be different subjects–one concerned with the fundamental nature of everything that is, the other with the nature of validity. A closer look reveals that one's view of the basic nature of what is and one's view of the nature of logic are, if they are distinguishable at all, simply different vantage points on the same landscape. For instance, one can hardly provide a serious account of validity without presupposing something about the concept of truth, which is as traditional a notion for metaphysical debate that one can imagine. Also, one cannot adequately formalize our inferences about mathematics or human actions without committing one's self on what are to be the objects of quantification; neither can one characterize the meanings of the logical constants without finding one's self in the middle of the realism/anti-realism debate, nor can one even begin to have an adequate formalization of modal logic without taking a stand on the nature of modality, essence, and accident. Such, at least, are the themes which unite much that is called 'analytic philosophy', and such also are some of the many themes of José Benardete's *Metaphysics: The Logical Approach.*

Specifically, Benardete's unifying thesis is that the philosophical tradition from Frege to Quine, with its emphasis on mathematical logic, provides new found insight into the classical metaphysical legacy of Aristotle. He says, 'Classical metaphysics has thus been given a new lease of life [sic], albeit in the most clandestine fashion, in the work of Frege' (p.4). This topic is a laudable one, and there is certainly room in the literature for a book-length work that unites a large number of metaphysical problems with insights into the nature

of logic. But one may begin to have one's doubts about the insights the book will afford when one reads at the very beginning just how original Benardete believes his theme to be. He writes, 'A professional mathematician, Frege is acclaimed for having revolutionized the entire science of logic at a single blow in 1879; but philosophers have been extraordinarily slow in bringing that revolution specifically to bear on the metaphysical agenda as bequeathed by Aristotle' (p.3) and talks of 'the protracted failure of philosophers to recognize the metaphysician in Frege' (p.4). To hear him tell it, Benardete's contribution will be to set this failure straight, but all this talk should be quite a surprise to anyone who has read any of the work of Michael Dummett in the last quarter of a century. The theme of this book is, at least, Dummett's; he has played it long and hard, and it has resounded throughout analytic philosophy. (Yet, Dummett is hardly mentioned in the book.) One is told that 'Frege could only be astounded by the suggestion that he was a metaphysician' (p.4), yet it is hard to believe that the author of *Die Grundlagen* had so little awareness of what he was doing as not to realize that he was up to his ears in metaphysics. Benardete's originality lies not in his basic unifying thesis, but if anywhere, in his style of presentaion. Even in that case, however, or especially in that case, 'original' is not necessarily a term of praise.

Benardete's strategy is a dialectical debate that bounces back and forth between two questions which he takes as constitutive of Aristotelean metaphysics:

> How a property might belong to thing – whether essentially or accidentally–is one sort of complication, which supplies the theme of Chapter 1. A further complication, namely, how a property might belong to a thing – whether relatively or absolutely speaking – is the topic of Chapter 2. The rest of the book is simply more of the same, as I back and fill, veer and tack, in an extended metaphysical investigation that, in the end, will be seen to feature essence and the absolute (p.2-3).

Benardete's dialectic takes one on a frenetic trip over a huge metaphysical terrain that covers a plethora of interesting and exotic topics. Unfortunately, one never stays in one place long enough to get one's feet wet, learn the language, or get the feel of the surroundings – except perhaps for the feel of having been in a foreign land. A review of all the interesting issues discussed by Benardete is an impossibility unless one wants to write a book at least as long as his. So, the

sections that follow will concentrate on several topics which are among the most interesting and which reveal the character of the book as a whole. What remains untouched is more of the same. Section 1 will focus on what Benardete calls 'Frege's ontological argument'. Section 2 concerns Benardete's idea of metaphysical relativism, its connection with Tarski's theory of truth, and the principle of identity, that everything is self-identical. Section 3 covers a variety of specific issues in order to raise a fundamental question about how Benardete construes the relationship between logic and metaphysics.

I

Anselm's argument for the existence of God assumes a simple definition and by the pure logic alone 'derives' a contradiction from the denial of God's existence. God's existence cannot coherently be denied. What makes the argument controversial is the move from non-existential premises and logic alone to a pure existence claim. If one understands an *ontological argument* to be any argument of this kind, then, according to Benardete, Frege provides an ontological argument for the existence of numbers. In fact, according to Benardete, Frege's argument is much bolder than Anselm's. Frege supposedly assumes no definitions, merely certain logical truths and what can be derived from them. The existence of numbers turns out to be a logical necessity. This discussion of Frege sounds familiar, but Benardete makes a much wilder assertion: Frege's argument, based on his new logic, can be turned into an ontological argument for anything whatsoever. Using Frege's logic one can derive the existence of anything as a logical necessity! This shows, according to Benardete, that in Frege's new logic, as in Hegel's, 'logical form and empirical content cease to be severed from one another' (p.24) and thus logic and metaphysics cease to be clearly distinguishable. The claim that Frege's logic provides us with 'all the machinery necessary to execute' (p.22) such an 'ontological argument' of anything whatsoever is quite astonishing. Although there is an intimate connection between logic and metaphysics for Frege, Benardete's misunderstanding of Frege's logic leads him to misrepresent the connection.

Anyone at all familiar with Frege's *Grundlagen* will recognize that Frege did attempt to provide in the above sense, an ontological argument for numbers. As an ontological argument it failed; the premises involved a crucial existential claim concerning classes. This argument, however, is not the one Benardete has in mind. According to

Benardete, Frege's 'ontological argument' is implicit in his discussion of first-order derivation in the *Begriffsschrift* and a single logical truth–the principle of identity. In other words, from the principle of identity Frege could provide one with a proof of the existence of absolutely anything. Consider anything whatsoever, for example, Herr Krug's pen (Herr Krug being the person who asked Hegel to derive the existence of his pen from the Absolute.) Does Herr Krug's pen exist? Given that the principle of identity is a logical truth the argument is as follows. Let 'p' be the name of Herr Krug's pen, then:

1.	(x) (x=x)	Logical truth
2.	p=p	1, universal instantiation p/x
3.	(∃x) (x=p)	2, existential generalizaion p/x

So, there is something that is Herr Krug's pen; but also, denying the existence of Herr Krug's pen leads to a contradiction and so it is logically incoherent that Herr Krug's pen not exist. This strategy is obviously generalizable by letting some constant be the name of the object under consideration. Frege's logic supposedly provides one with an endless store of 'ontological arguments'.

Now if Frege did argue in this way, he was either a sophist or he understood logic no better than Hegel. Fortunately, Frege was no sophist but he was a great logician. So it should be easy to point out the flaws in Benardete's construal. First, he misunderstands the nature of the universal quantifier, logical truth, and the intuitive *validity* of universal instantiation and existential generalization. The universal quantification '(x)(x=x)' says that everything which *exists in a certain domain* is self-identical. The range of the quantifier is always assigned to a certain domain or universe when the statement is interpreted. If the statement is true on an interpretation, it is true of everything (which exists) in the universe specified by that interpretation. To call '(x)(x=x)' a logical truth is to say that it is true on every interpretation in which the universe is non-empty. So, given '(x)(x=x)' as a logical truth, one knows that it is true of whatever exists already in a non-empty domain of discourse. On this understanding, universal instantiation and existential generalization are obviously intuitively valid. If everything which exists in a universe is self-identical, then anything named in this universe cannot fail to be self-identical. Also, if a named individual existing in a particular universe is self-identical, then there exists an individual such that it is identical with the

individual so named. Obviously, these rules are valid (truth-preserving) for any non-empty universe, but they cannot possibly have the ontological force that Benardete supposes. The existence of the individuals being talked about in such inferences is presupposed in the very domain of discourse used to interpret or provide truth-values for those statements.

A second mistake which Benardete makes in connection with universal instantiation and existential generalization is that he thinks that the proper names represented by individual constants, like 'p' for Herr Krug's pen, may or may not refer to objects. In Benardete's version of the argument, one is to prove that Herr Krug's pen exists without presupposing that 'Herr Krug's pen' refers to any existing object, otherwise the argument would not be an *ontological* one. Not only would Frege's logic not permit such a move, Frege took pains to ensure that it would not. Frege ensures that such inferences as Benardete's 'ontological argument' will not get off the ground by insisting in section 28 of the *Grundgesetze* that 'correctly formed proper names must always denote something' (ed. M. Furth, University of California Press, 1964, p. 83). This convention of Frege's logic disarms absurd ontological arguments like the ones Benardete suggests and also preserves the intuitive validity of existential generalization in his formalism. If, by convention, the 'p' in 'p=p' must refer to an object existing in a domain, then it is trivial that there exists in that domain something identical to p. Existential generalization never has any less trivial ontological import. As Quine so aptly puts it, existential generalization 'is a principle only by courtesy' ('Reference and Modality,' in *From a Logical Point of View*, Harvard: 1953, p. 146). The principle is a courtesy because in order to infer the existential statement from a statement with an individual constant one must first stipulate that the constant names an object existing in the domain! Moreover, although Frege did not develop this option, one could eliminate singular terms from logic altogether in the manner of Russell's theory of descriptions, as Quine suggests, and thereby enable one to eliminate universal instantiation and existential generalization from logic. How could Benardete have failed to pay attention to this development of first-order logic in the tradition of Frege? If he had, he would have never been tempted to suggest the incredible claim that Frege's development of first-order logic allows for ontological arguments.

Benardete is, in all fairness, uncomfortable with the reasoning of these so-called 'ontological arguments,' but the reasons he provides are confused because of his initial misunderstanding of Frege's logic. The trouble, he claims, is that Frege's logic which is used in the above ontological argument violates the *aprioristic thesis* 'that the conclusion of any valid argument ought to be deducible from its premises on a purely apriori basis' (p.24), and 'that the conclusion of any formally valid argument ought to be somehow "contained" in its premises' (p.23). Because Frege's logic violates this aprioristic thesis by allowing 'ontological arguments,' Benardete concludes that, like Hegel, Frege has failed to separate form from content in his logic. Had Frege's logic violated this thesis then the comparison with Hegel might be appropriate. Frege's logic, however, in no way violates the aprioristic thesis. On the contrary, his logic is a paradigm of a priori or deductive logic. The intuitive semantic notion of validity, on which Frege's logic is based, is that *if* the premises are true, then the conclusion *must* be true. In Frege's logic this validity becomes a purely formal notion. The argument from 'p=p' to '$(\exists x)(x=p)$' will be obviously valid in the intuitive sense. If 'p=p' is true, then '$(\exists x)(x=p)$' must be true. Of course, as was emphasized above, Frege insisted that *properly formed* names must refer to objects in the domain of discourse. So, if 'p=p' is to be a well-formed formula 'p' is the name of an object (existing) in the domain. Thus, 'p=p' will never be false, but only because the object named 'p', whose existence is presupposed in the domain of discourse, is self-identical. This claim, however, is trivial for a non-empty universe. Universal instantiation will also be intuitively valid. If '$(x)(x=x)$' is true, then 'p=p' must be true, given the trivial restriction on well-formed proper names. Frege's formal restriction on proper names is natural given that his interest was to develop a formal logic which captured the intuitive semantic notion of validity for the arguments of a *purely scientific* language. For Frege, all proper names in a purely scientific language referred to objects, unlike proper names in ordinary, imperfect discourse. In order to preserve the validity of universal instantiation and existential generalization, one does not have to make the restrictions that Frege does; but some such restrictions are necessary. For example, instead of placing restrictions on proper names, one could interpret the quantifiers substitutionally and not objectually and thereby allow 'existential' generalization or universal instantiation on any proper name. (Of course, the 'existential' quantifier interpreted substitutionally has no

particular ontological import.) This strategy, however, solves the technical problem only by changing the formalism into one not best suited for Frege's purpose, namely, providing a theory of validity for arguments in a perfectly scientific discourse. The point is that none of Frege's moves constitutes an extension of logic beyond the a priori realm of pure deduction. Moreover, these moves are exactly what one should expect if one wants to develop an adequate formal system in which the *formally valid* derivations coincide with *semantically valid* arguments and vice versa. Frege's logic is a beautiful example of such a system.

In this same context, Benardete worries that the possibility of deriving the existence of anything whatsoever from a contradiction also violates the aprioristic principle. If a statement 'p & ¬p' were true, then would the existence of anything, like Herr Krug's pen, be assured? The appropriate answer here is that ordinary intuitions are unclear. What would follow if it were raining and not raining? Intuitions waver. But a formal logic, like Frege's, which countenances the inference from 'p & ¬p' to any 'q' has in no way violated the aprioristic thesis. Fortunately, a contradiction is always false, so a principle which allows one to infer anything from a contradiction will never lead one from truths to falsehoods. The premises will never be true but the conclusion false. This principle of logic does not confuse form with content. One can easily adopt this formal principle and still explain why an 'ontological proof' of Herr Krug's pen from a contradiction is never intuitively compelling. Since a contradiction is always false, such an 'ontological proof' of Herr Krug's pen will never be a proof because it will be unsound. To call an argument sound or unsound is to make a claim about the *content* of its premises, but to call an argument valid is to say it has a truth-preserving form. In no way do the concepts of soundness and validity collapse into one another in Frege's logic, and so, unlike Hegel, Frege keeps issues of form and content perspicuously separate.

Finally, Benardete shows the extent of his misunderstanding of Frege when he quotes a passage from Frege to support his idea that Frege has followed Hegel's lead and collapsed the distinction between form and content in logic. The quotation, which Benardete does not cite, is from Frege's 'Boole's Logical Calculus and The Concept-script' (*Posthumous Writings*, ed. H. Hermes et al, University of Chicago Press, pp. 9-46). The full quotation (which Benardete also does not provide) is as follows: 'Right from the start I had in mind the

expression of a content. What I am striving after is a *lingua characterica* in the first instance for mathematics, not a calculus restricted to pure logic.' (p. 12). Only wrenched from its context could this quotation ever support Benardete's interpretation of Frege's logic. Frege in this passage is not expressing his intention to develop a logic where form and content are inseparable. Instead he is contrasting his motivation with that of Boole. Boole, as Frege says, 'represents judgements in the form of equations that he constructs out of letters and arithmetical signs such as +, 0 and 1. Logical laws then assume the form of algorithms...' (ibid, p. 12). Frege's formalism had to be different because he wanted to develop a logic which could be used to derive arithmetical truths as theorems. Therefore, he developed his formalism with this intention in mind and thus his formalism had to differ from Boole's. This intention, and not some Hegelian motive, is what Frege is explaining in the above quote. Frege was, not surprisingly, in no sense an Hegelian logician and his logic in no way provided ontological arguments based simply on the principle of identity.

II

Benardete in his *Metaphysics* is concerned to show how developments in modern logic are connected with the revival of traditional metaphysics. There are indeed important connections between formal logic and metaphysics. As one can see from his discussion of Frege however, Benardete obscures these connections with harm to both logic and metaphysics. If traditional metaphysics is the study of being *qua* being, then logical truths will be metaphysical truths. The truths of logic will hold *essentially* for all existing things under the description 'an existing thing.' This connection between logic and metaphysics is an interesting one. (Lesniewski, who called his logical system 'ontology,' explicitly recognized this connection.) Unfortunately, if one reads Frege as obliterating the distinction between form and content in logic in such a way as to provide ontological arguments, one cannot help but risk misconstruing this interesting connection. Yet, this connection between logical truth and metaphysics is just the one Benardete intends to develop. In particular, he builds his metaphysics on a logical truth which he calls 'the Principle of Identity': '(x) (x=x)', 'which allows us to insist that to be as such is to be self-identical' (p.25). He even calls this a 'logico-ontological' principle.

According to Benardete, the Principle of Identity answers both of the basic theoretical concerns of Aristotelean metaphysics 'of (a) what each and everything is essentially qua itself and (b) the attributes that belong to the thing per se' (p.14). He says, 'Being self-identical is thus seen to be the metaphysical property par excellence, affording us access at once to essence and the absolute' (p.25). Nonetheless, Benardete worries that this move might result in trivializing metaphysics. How can a tautology be informative concerning the fundamental nature of what is? He feels he must answer this question: '... it is incumbent on me to explain how I can now propose to accord the Principle of Identity, itself an analytic proposition, the pride of place that was assigned by Aristotle to the Principle of Non-contradiction' (p.27). He answers appealing to a methodological principle: 'nothing can count as a basic principle of metaphysics that fails to excite serious controversy' (p.27), and then explaining exactly how the Principle of Identity is controversial.

In fact, the Principle rates as metaphysical not because it excites serious controversy but because of the *kind* of controversy it excites. His methodological principle would be better put: nothing can count as a basic principle of metaphysics that fails to excite serious *metaphysical* controversy. This statement emphasizes the heart of the matter. How is the Principle of Identity embroiled in metaphysical controversy? It is threatened by Protagorean, metaphysical relativism in the guise of Tarski's account of truth! Protagorean or metaphysical relativism is the position that nothing 'can be said to exist in itself, absolutely speaking, but only relative to other things' (p.13). Tarski's semantic account of truth supposedly leads to the conclusion that nothing is self-identical, absolutely speaking, but only relative to something else. So, confronted with Tarski, the Principle of Identity excites serious metaphysical controversy concerning relativism. And it is precisely this particular kind of metaphysical controversy that a *basic* principle of metaphysics ought to confront since, according to Benardete, metaphysical relativism is the foremost worry of traditional metaphysics:

> In its concern with both being *qua* being and the attributes that belong to a thing *per se*, ontology has a secondary, as well as a primary, mission. First and foremost, it seeks to determine, in its theory of what it is to be as such, whether relativism is true, in either its classical, Protagorean form or its modern, post-Kantian

> version. Only if relativism turns out to be false can ontology embark on its secondary mission. For it is only after we are satisfied that things exist in themselves, absolutely speaking, that the quarrel between essentialists and anti-essentialists acquires bite; only then can we investigate whether the *per se* attributes of a thing are merely to be identified with its non-relational features (p.18-19).

This order of priorities seems fine, but why must the metaphysician challenge Tarski's account of truth? How could Tarski's account of truth, by itself, vindicate metaphysical relativism? Tarski emphasized, 'I do not have any doubts that our formulation does conform to the intuitive content of that of Aristotle' ('The Semantic Conception of Truth and The Foundations of Semantics', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. 4 (1944): 341-375, p.355), but he does not add that it also has the counter-intuitive result of construing what there is as relative. What does Benardete see concerning Tarskian truth that Tarski himself either overlooked or failed to mention?

Benardete's 'insight' is extremely simple. Motivated by the Liar Paradox, Tarski recognized that 'is true' is a semantic predicate that can only be understood as implicitly relativized to a language. Moreover, any coherent definition of $\ulcorner$is true-in $L_n\urcorner$ must be formulated in a language richer than L_n, say L_{n+1}. The result of such a definition is a hierarchy of languages or levels. With this much clarified, Benardete asks concerning his basic principle

> ... what are the truth conditions of the sentence '(x) x=x'? Here again we need to distinguish $truth_0$ conditions, $truth_1$ conditions, $truth_2$ conditions, and so forth. As long as we stick to everything on the object level – that is, nature *sans* mind – we are on safe ground. On this level, the Principle of Identity is of course $true_0$, but we are no longer making a statement about everything, and in fact any such statement is ruled out as incoherent in principle. Since logic itself is replaced by $logic_0$, $logic_1$, $logic_2$, and so on, where each operates on its own level, the very expression 'the Principle of Identity' ceases to refer to one thing, 'it' (and here I am violating the Tarskian taboo) must be taken to assert on each level that everything to be found on the levels below it is self-identical (p.30).

Only if one can refute Tarski is one 'entitled to insist that to be as such and not merely to be on this or that level is to be self-identical' (p.30). So Tarski's threat is metaphysical relativism.

This interpretation is surely confused. That there are substantive problems in Benardete's understanding of Tarski is foreshadowed by several infelicities in the above passage. First, is the Principle of Identity '(x)(x=x)' or is it the ordinary English sentence 'Everything is self-identical'? If it is '(x)(x=x)', then he should hardly be surprised that '(x)(x=x)' is true only relative to a domain of discourse. Without a domain of discourse, or a model, '(x)(x=x)' is simply an uninterpreted string of symbols. If the Principle is the ordinary English sentence, then it is not clear how Tarski's definition of truth for formal languages undermines the *intuition* behind this sentence. In fact, the content of the English sentence 'Everything is self-identical' is far from clear. There may well be no clear, coherent intuition behind the sentence. The ascent to a formal language may be the best way to discuss clearly and coherently what is confused in ordinary discourse. But '(x)(x=x)' does not have the same content as the ordinary English sentence 'Everything is self-identical'. Otherwise, any problems with the clarity of the latter would infect the former and the move to formalism would be fruitless. The formal sentence is simply a surrogate for the ordinary one. Tarski's point is that ascent to formal language allows one to define precisely and rigorously a scientifically respectable concept not to be found, but only hinted at, in ordinary language. One would never think of criticizing Einstein's theory of relativity on the grounds that 'simultaneity' as it is defined does not do justice to the phrase 'at the same time' as it is used in ordinary English. Benardete is careless in disregarding any such distinctions between formal languages and ordinary language and the theories concerning them. In his talk of the Principle of Identity, he moves back and forth between first-order quantification and English as if they are the same language. In some philosophical contexts this leeway is harmless enough, but when the topic is the theory of truth it cannot help but engender confusion.

A second infelicity which is related to the last occurs where he says 'logic itself is replaced by logic_0, logic_1, logic_2, and so on'. This is another result of Tarski's account of truth. At this point, one should truly be puzzled. What is 'logic itself'? Benardete's phrase suggests that he believes the extensions of the notions of 'logical truth', 'logical consequence', and 'validity' have some sense independent of how one

interprets the terms of a specific language. How can one determine what a logical truth is independent of some specification of which terms are logical constants and how they are to be interpreted? That logical truths differ when the terms fixed as logical constants differ is not surprising. To ask which of these are the truths of 'logic itself' is senseless.

A third worry created by Benardete's passage is that he thinks the Principle of Identity, according to Tarski's definition of truth, 'must be taken to assert on each level that everything to be found on the levels below it is self-identical'. He must be taking the Principle of Identity to be the formula '(x)(x=x)'. But in what sense is this formula about objects at a lower level of discourse? Claims about truth-in-Ln can only be made at a higher level of discourse than L_n, but '(x)(x=x)' does not contain a semantic predicate such as '$\ulcorner$is true-in-$L_n\urcorner$'! '"(x)(x=x)" is true-in-L_n' can only be expressed in a language L_{n+1} richer than L_n. If '(x)(x=x)' can be expressed in L_n, then, if it is true, it will be true of everything in the domain of discourse of L_n itself and not simply of the domains of discourse below L_n. With this infelicity one worries about Benardete's understanding of Tarski.

The most glaring example of either misunderstanding or misappropriation of Tarski occurs when Benardete says of '(x)(x=x)': 'As long as we stick to everything on the object level – that is, nature *sans* mind – we are on safe ground'. What Benardete is trying to say here is unclear, but whatever it is, it is clear that his statement turns on the grossest equivocation over the phrase 'the object level'. The object level or language, for Tarski, is the language for which truth is being defined. Let '(x)(x=x)' be expressible within the object language. ' '"(x)(x=x)" is true-in-L_0' will thus need to be formulated in a richer language than L_0. Where in this relation between object language and metalanguage is there even the slightest indication that an 'object' language must be about physical objects or 'nature *sans* mind'? The domain of discourse of the object language may be only abstract objects or it may be only mental events. '(x)(x=x)' may still be a truth-in-L0! L0 must not contain its own truth predicate, but that does not imply that it cannot talk about and express truths about all kinds of things.

Although all this might be enough to make Benardete's interpretation of Tarski dubious, it would be constructive to show why Tarski's account of truth is not a form of metaphysical relativism. The reason is that it is not clear that any substantial metaphysical

relativism can even be coherently formulated in Tarskian terms. The point is analogous to a familiar lesson undergraduates learn concerning moral relativism. One kind of moral relativist wants to say, 'What is right in one society is not right in another because "right" simply means "right-in-a society" '. But, if this position is to have any bite, the relativist must admit that the first two occurrences of the word in this formulation are used in a non-relativistic sense. The absolute term 'right' has different extensions in different societies. Otherwise, the moral relativist is simply uttering the philosophical triviality: 'What is right-in-society-A is not right-in-society-B because "right-in-society-A" is a different predicate from "right-in-society-B"'. The philosophically interesting version is self-refuting. (Moral relativism may be coherently formulated, but not in this simple form.) Analogously, any simple version of metaphysical relativism which is to be read off from Tarski's account of truth fails. Benardete admits that 'truth as such is no longer recognized by the Tarskians' (p.30). But if 'truth' as such is no longer recognized, then one can no longer, without contradiction, express metaphysical relativism as 'What is true in one language or conceptual scheme is not true in another language or conceptual scheme because "true" simply means true-in-L'. If this formulation is not to be trivial the relativist must use 'true' in its first two instances in a non-relativistic sense. However, a non-relativistic sense is what is not countenanced by Tarskians.

The point might be illustrated in another fashion. One might recognize that, according to the appropriate Tarskian definitions of truth-in-L_1, and truth-in-L_2:

(a) 's' is ture-in-L_1 iff p

but

(b) 's' is true-in-L_2 iff q

Recognizing this consequence of the Tarskian definitions, however, would not tempt one to metaphysical relativism simply because p is distinct from q in the metalanguage. On the contrary, one would expect the right-hand sides of the biconditionals in (a) and (b) to differ since 'true-in-L_1' is not the same predicate as 'true-in-L_2'. Another, perhaps more intuitive way to put this point, is simply that one should expect p and q to differ in the respective conditions (a) and (b) because, since L_1 and L_2 are different languages, 's' in one language and 's' in another language will not necessarily have the same *meaning*! In fact, one way to put Tarski's insight is to say that 'meaning' and 'truth' are inextricably connected concepts, and so no one should be surprised that

'truth' is a semantic notion that applies relative to a language. How could a sentence mean anything independent of a language? Yet Tarski's is a theory of truth because he tell us how true-in-L is to be defined for all consistent languages formulated or formalizabale in first-order quantification.

One could try to formulate metaphysical relativism in Tarskian terms relative to a language, but this move will also not work. Consider a particular language L. Intuitively, if truth-in-L is relative, then two different speakers could rightly assert 's' in incompatible circumstances. That is, the definition of truth-in-L would contain both

(T_1) 's' is true-in-L iff p

and

(T_2) 's' is true-in-L iff q,

where p and q are incompatible. But any Tarskian formulated definition of truth-in-L which had both (T_1) and (T_2) as theorems would be inconsistent. Again, it is not possible to imagine a consistent and substantial formulation of metaphysical relativism which one can simply read off from Tarski's account of truth. (Not that a coherent formulation of metaphysical relativism is not possible, just not one in these simple terms.) Sometimes Benardete seems to realize this. He says at the beginning of chapter 6: 'Himself a relativist in regard to truth, Alfred Tarski allows a statement to be true – that is, $true_0$, or $true_1$, or $true_2$ and so so – only relative to some restricted universe of discourse, thereby ruling out the Protagorean doctrine, with its unabashed reference to everything, as semantically ill-formed' (p.31). Yet only three sentences before he claims that only after the metaphysician provides an alternative to Tarski's account of truth and the Liar Paradox can metaphysical relativism be overcome. He says, 'Only after completing that task [of finding a non-Tarskian solution to the Liar] is the metaphysician entitled to insist that to be as such and not merely to be on this or that level is to be self-identical' (p.30). There may very well be good reasons for wanting an alternative to Tarski's account of truth, but Benardete's worry about metaphysical relativism is not among them. Moreover, it is surprising that after challenging the metaphysician with this goal early in the book, Benardete never mentions it again. There have been substantial recent attempts at non-Tarskian accounts of truth by Kripke, Barwise and Etchemendy, and McGee. Benardete takes no notice of these.

The reason Benardete brings up Tarski is to illustrate that his fundamental principle of metaphysics – the Principle of Identity – is

controversial enough to count as metaphysical. The detour through Tarski and relativism seems unnecessary however. That 'everything is self-identical' provides any deep metaphysical insight is dubious from the beginning. As Wittgenstein said in the *Investigations*:. '"A thing is identical with itself." – There is no finer example of a useless proposition . . .' (sec. 216). Benardete reminds the reader of this Wittgensteinian passage only to ignore it: 'Wittgenstein's position strikes the contemporary philosopher as so tendentiously perverse, at any rate in its raw form, that he can only brush it aside with impatience' (p.28). One should caution more patience here. Even if Wittgenstein's comments on self-identity are difficult, a cursory reading should have given Benardete worry. One might glean from Wittgenstein the following idea (although Wittgenstein certainly had something more specific in mind). The Principle of Identity is a logical truth, a tautology. Because it is a tautology it has no content. How can a principle with no content provide any understanding concerning the nature of what there is? Benardete's answer is to provide the principle content by understanding it in terms of 'controversial' Tarskian semantics. But that this diversion is simply a smokescreen is easy to show. '(x)(x=x)' is supposedly shown to have metaphysical content because it can be given the 'controversial' Tarskian interpretation. But on any adequate account of logical truth, logical consequence, and logical equivalence, every logical truth is *logically equivalent* to every other logical truth. So Benardete's strategy seems to give the same metaphysical content to *all* logical truths or tautologies! Surely this conclusion is not what Benardete is after. This strategy could never show why his logical foundation for metaphysics – the Principle of Identity – is an improvement over Aristotle's – the Principle of Non- contradiction, although it is this worry that he thinks he is addressing. (There are systems of logic in which the principle of identity is a logical truth and the principle of non-contradiction is not, but that is not Benardete's point.)

Why should the Principle of Identity be important? That everything is self-identical does nothing to help one with substantial philosophical worries over identity, such as identity of an object over time or across possible worlds. Or in the Wittgensteinian case, it does not provide any handle on what it means 'to go on in the same way'. Benardete believes that being self-identical is an essential property of all existing things. 'What it is to exist proves to be scarcely distinguishable from what it is to be self-identical' (p.61). Again, if

metaphysics is the investigation of the essential nature of things, focusing on such essential properties simply seems to trivialize metaphysics. The question Wittgenstein raises is: why believe that 'being self-identical' is a property in the first place? In the formulation '$(\exists x)(x=x)$' existence is already affirmed by the quantifier. In what sense is existence a property being predicated by 'x=x'? To see that this verges on the senseless, consider '$(\exists x)(x\neq x)$'. What imaginable non-empty model could be constructed for this last formula under the normal interpretation of the logical constants and quantifiers? Of course, the same can be asked of the negation of any tautology which contains an existential quantifier. For example, it is hard to imagine any object in any model that would satisfy the negation of $\ulcorner(\exists x)(\phi x \vee \neg \phi x)\urcorner$. But $\ulcorner \phi x \vee \neg \phi x \urcorner$ is a complex predicate involving the logical constants 'v' and '¬'. There is no simple predicate $\ulcorner \phi x \urcorner$, that is, one containing no logical constants, such that $\ulcorner(\exists x)\ \phi x\urcorner$ is a tautology. So, in these cases, $\ulcorner \neg(\exists x)\ \phi x\urcorner$ always makes sense. One is always able to imagine a model in which these are true. Consider as a simple predicate, 'x=x' is an exception to this. Therefore, there are good reasons for not thinking of 'x=x' as a simple predicate which ascribes a property at all. And no one would construe identity as a complex predicate. In all cases of substitution into the schema $\ulcorner(\exists x)\ \phi x\urcorner$ except where 'ϕx' is replaced by 'x is self-identical', existence is a presupposition of truthful predication. But predicating self-identity is redundant at best. Self-identity, like existence, is not a predicate. Benardete does recognize this difficulty, '. . . if existence is expressed therein by the identity predicate, it is equally, and redundantly, expressed by the quantifier as well, suggesting in fact that when it comes to expressing existence quantifier and predicate must be allowed to divide honors' (p.63). Benardete's solution to this difficulty is to rewrite 'something is self-identical' as

'$(\sum x)(x=x)$'.

He calls '$(\sum x)$' 'the particular quantifier' and reads the last formula as saying 'some x is identical with x'. How does this change in formalism solve the problem? 'The quantifier merely contributes the word "something", while the existence of the thing is secured entirely by the predicate. Mere sleight of hand?', Benardete worries, 'Perhaps' (p.63). Perhaps? How can this change of formalism be anything but sleight of hand until Benardete provides an interpretation of the formula which distinguishes it semantically from '$(\exists x)(x=x)$'. How does the role of '$(\sum x)$' in a theory of valid inference differ from that of '$(\exists x)$'?

Until this point is made clear one should not be convinced that 'x=x' is a predicate ascribing an essential property. Ordinarily, identity is introduced into first-order quantification as a logical constant not as a predicate. The schema $\ulcorner(x)\phi xx\urcorner$ is not a valid formula although the sentence '(x)(x=x)' is, so in order to streamline the extension of the semantic definition of validity in first-order logic to first-order logic with identity, '=' is treated as a constant. But as Russell pointed out long ago, identity is introduced into logic only because our language contains different terms for one and the same object. First-order logic with identity allows one to express claims about an object picked out in more than one way. Identity is a relation that holds between the object and itself and no other objects. This relation is obviously utterly trivial if there is only one manner in which to pick out the object. That this trivial relation ever comes at our attention is due to the nature of our language, not the metaphysical importance of the relation itself. As Wittgenstein emphasized in the *Tractatus*, a language in which every distinction in reality is mirrored by a distinction in terms has no need for '='. Even if such a language is only an ideal, its example shows that there is no need to recognize self-identity as a property of any metaphysical import.

Moreover, even if one grants that self-identity is a property, a little reflection reveals that 'being self-identical' and 'existing' are not the same thing. Even possible but non-existent objects are self-identical (granted being self-identical is a property). Can one even imagine a possible, non-existent object that is not self-identical? If not, then by Benardete's principle, one has an easy argument to the existence of possible, non-existent objects! As witnessed in the last section, such simple ontological arguments are not beyond Benardete, but surely something is amiss in identifying existence with being self-identical. At any rate, Benardete's attitude to brush such questions aside with impatience is unjustifiably cavalier.

III

Benardete's *Metaphysics* covers many more interesting topics with the kind of approach and results reflected in his discussions of Frege, Tarski, and the Principle of Identity, but there is a fundamental problem which undercuts all his discussions of issues of logic and metaphysics. The worry surfaces early on when Benardete, borrowing a metaphor from Frege, 'defines' metaphysics: 'Metaphysics can even be defined, in sharp distinction to physics, with which it might be

otherwise confused, as the theory of what lies founded deep in the nature of things' (p.4). If this 'definition' is intended to dispel any confusion over the subject matter of metaphysics, it is surely a failure. This reader, at least, fails to see the 'sharp distinction' between physics and metaphysics that Benardete claims to have pinpointed. Indeed, the fundamental weakness which pervades the entire book is Benardete's inability to draw this distinction and his failure even to recognize that drawing such a distinction is difficult if possible at all. This failure is all the more surprising given that one of Benardete's major motifs is that Quine's philosophical emphasis on mathematical logic has revised Aristotelean metaphysics. How can one recognize that Quine's philosophy of logic intimately connects with traditional metaphysical questions without also recognizing that his philosophy of logic places logic on a broadly empirical plane with the rest of the physical sciences? Benardete seems simply to ignore the possibility that philosophy of logic is of a piece with the theoretical concerns of the physical sciences.

The refusal to admit this holistic possibility into his discussions prevents Benardete from penetrating deeply into the interesting questions and connections which arise. For example, Benardete is keen on differentiating the 'prose' from the 'poetry' of philosophy. (The distinction is Wittgenstein's, but there is little to nothing of Wittgenstein in Benardete.) A paradigm case of philosophical poetics, according to Benardete, is Goodmanian nominalism:

> If poetics in the broad sense of the term is the study of the non-literal, as opposed to the literal, use of language, where the very contrast between the two is decisive, the nominalist's refusal to construe abstract singular terms at face value, as at least undertaking (whether successfully or not) to refer to trans-empirical entities, can only be regarded as an audacious exercise in poetics (p.82).

To consider what this means, take the following ordinary English sentence 'The number of apples on the table is two'. According to Benardete, this literally commits one to abstract objects. Poetic license is necessary in order to construe it as quantifying over only ordinary physical objects:

$$(\exists x)(\exists y)(Ax \cdot Tx \cdot Ay \cdot Ty \cdot x \neq y \cdot (z)(A_z \cdot T_z) \supset (z=x \vee z=y))),$$

where 'Ax' is the open sentence 'x is an apple' and 'Tx' is the open sentence 'x is on the table'. The insight here is supposedly that 'poetry and ontology alike may thus be seen to be incipiently

emerging in the ambiguous role played by the abstract singular term of our mother tongue, though one is surprised to find that it is the down-to-earth nominalist and not the visionary Platonist whose ear is peculiarly sensitive to the 'poetry'. . .' (p.82-83).

There are two glaring problems with this twist on the poetry/prose distinction in regard to philosophical theses and both are related to Benardete's insensitivity to holism. First, if nominalism is less than literal in its reading of ordinary English, then so is most of physics. For instance, the ordinary English sentences 'The sun always moves' and 'the earth never moves' are at best rendered by physical theory as 'Under frame of reference x, the sun always moves' and 'Under frame of reference x, the earth never moves'. Is the theory of relativity also an 'audacious exercise in poetics'? Moreover, why think that any ordinary English sentence has a literal meaning independent of any theoretical context of other sentences? Considering any of these sentences in isolation should not convince anyone that the nominalist or the physicist is the poet instead of the ordinary English speaker or the Platonist.

The second problem is based on a misunderstanding of the status of nominalism. Goodman's attempt at nominalism was never intended to produce translations of ordinary English sentences, so one cannot accuse nominalism of providing too metaphorical translations. Benardete seems to realize this when he says the nominalist attempts to provide 'an adequate paraphrase of (the purely cognitive content) of [the sentence] in its pragmatic use' (p.82). But then why is a paraphrase non-literal? The Goodmanian nominalist believes that the theory of what there is, including our physics, is best understood in terms of the first-order quantifications whose variables range only over individuals instead of the commitments of the sentences of ordinary language. Whether such a substitution for our ordinary talk can be found is to be determined where logic and physics intermingle. (Hartry Field's nominalism is also presented in this holistic, naturalistic spirit.) Of course, this nominalist project may be a dream, but there is no reason for construing it as less than literal. It is difficult to see what interesting conclusions could be drawn from Benardete's oversimplified distinction. Worried, however, that he might be accused of poetry himself, Benardete assures the reader that his philosophy can be couched in purely literal terms: 'Never has one of my more profound thoughts struck me as in any way resisting articulation in purely literal terms' (p.95). Unfortunately, one feels that this promissory note

cannot be cashed in, and Benardete's 'prose' is not the kind of collateral one will trust to advance him the credit.

The same mistake of ignoring how holistic concerns can influence decisions on logical form is found in Benardete's presentation of the Kim-Davidson argument for events. He writes:

> Granted the nominalist is right when he insists that the truth of 'Tom is walking' commits us only to the existence of Tom, he turns out to be mistaken when it comes to the only slightly more complicated statement 'Tom is walking slowly'. The a posteriori truth of 'Tom is walking slowly' is found – by a tricky consideration of logic itself – to entail a second entity – namely, a certain event – and since each event is found to supervence on three items, one of which is a property, Plato proves to be right after all (p.132).

This passage has several problems. First, Davidson's version of this argument simply commits one to quantifying over events; he need not countenance properties. So, appealing to such an argument to vindicate Platonism is much too quick. Second, although the Davidsonian argument does commit one to events, it leaves the nature of events up in the air. What an event is will have to be determined relative to other theoretical concerns. What is not clear is that countenancing events commits one to a 'second entity' other than physical objects or time-slices of physical objects. Quine, for one, in 'Events and Reification' (in *Actions and Events*, ed. Ernst LePore and Brian McLaughlin (Blackwell, 1986): 162-171), accepts the Davidsonian argument but construes events in such a way that he is not reifying any new kind of object above and beyond physical objects or time slices of such. But finally, and most importantly, Benardete suggests that such arguments for events 'turn on a tricky consideration of logic itself'. Again one hears the phrase 'logic itself' from Benardete, as if there were some privileged discipline which dictated these conclusions. As in the case of nominalism, Davidson's argument for the logical form of action sentences is that construing such sentences as quantifying over events is the best way to fit talk of actions into an overall theory of the world. No appeal to logic alone, whatever that might mean, will convince anyone to believe in events. Obviously, Benardete has oversimplified the relationship between logic and metaphysics here.

Finally, this neglect of holism infects Benardete's understanding of the relationship between logic and metaphysics in general. He seems to give logic the foundational role in answering metaphysical questions. He says '. . . metaphysics comes into play only secondarily, providing a rationale for specifically logical considerations' (p.50). But why could one not just as easily say in regard to these matters that logic comes into play only secondarily, providing a notation for specifically metaphysical considerations? Both of these seem oversimplified products of wishful thinking. Separating one's theory of logic from one's theory of what there is seems to be an impossibility. Both concerns inform the other in such a way as to be, at least at times, indistinguishable. This lesson of contemporary philosophy in the age of Quine is the one Benardete has not learned, nor has he taken seriously the later Wittgenstein's worry that '"mathematical logic' has completely deformed the thinking of mathematicians and philosophers, by setting up a superficial interpretation of the forms of our language as an analysis of the structures of facts,' adding, 'Of course in this it has only continued to build on Aristotelean logic' (*Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*, revised ed., trans. G.E.M. Anscombe, (M.I.T. 1978) p.300). Maybe there is a way of revising Aristotelean metaphysics, but Benardete's 'logical' approach is clearly a deadend.

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