

LEIBNIZ, HUME AND ARISTOTLE ON WHAT IS POSSIBLE

1. Truth as Containment

Leibniz was the first philosopher to ever state with precision the difference between «truths of reason» and «truths of fact». And the first to undermine it immediately after. A truth of reason, he said, is one the opposite of which is impossible and so it is itself *necessary*. A truth of fact, on the other hand, is one the opposite of which is also possible and so it is itself *contingent*¹.

After having thus sharply separated between truths of reason and truths of fact or between necessary and contingent truths Leibniz exhibits clear signs of dissatisfaction with this (his own) distinction. By a most remarkable change of perspective, he subsequently turns to affirm that *ultimately* there can be no other truths in the world, save ones of reasoning. Which implies that what is true is necessarily true and what is false impossible. On the whole, a view not all that surprising for a rationalist, such as he was, to hold. Let us capture the main thread of this argument step by step: (1) Truth is always either *expressly* or (else) *implicitly identical* [FT, 246]. Truths of any kind are one and all tautological (to be precise, either tautological or reducible to a tautology); but others are *trivially* so and others *not* trivially so. At best, there is but a difference of degree here, not one of kind. (2) All contingent propositions have *reasons* why they are thus rather than otherwise or, what is the same thing, have *a priori* proofs of their truth [DM, 262]. But to furnish an *a priori* proof for a contingent judgement essentially amounts to denying that its opposite is also possible. (3) Even when a proposition is not identical, the subject must always *include* the concept of the predicate in such a way that, if one understands *perfectly* the concept of the subject he will know that the predicate apertains to it also [NACT, 302]. (4) The analysis of infinities kindled this light for me (him), that concepts too are *resoluble to infinity* [NACT, 303]. So if there is a mind powerful enough to complete such resolution, to this

1. *Monadology*, propos. 33. For a similar definition see «Contingent and Necessary Truths». For Leibniz's works I will be using the following abbreviations: For *Monadology* M and number of proposition. For «Contingent and Necessary Truths» NACT. For *First Truths* FT. For *Discourse on Metaphysics* DM. Page numbers are from the compact edition *The European Philosophers from Descartes to Nietzsche*, Monroe Beardsley ed., New York, Modern Library, 1960. Italics will be mine unless otherwise stated.



mind all truths would be tautologies. (5) Accordingly, it is for God alone, *comprehending the infinite all at once*, to perceive how the predicate is in the subject and to understand *a priori* the perfect reason for contingency, which in his creatures is furnished *a posteriori* by experience [NACT, 302].

Doctrines (1) to (5) jointly imply that there is no contingency in the world, except when judged from our own human standpoint and its limitations. Because God himself is in the privileged position of conceiving as necessary this which to us mere mortals appears as merely contingent. Rather than an act of piety, this is essentially a *logical* doctrine. A doctrine on the modality of contingent truth. It has already been appropriately observed that Leibniz understands (authentic) truth as *containment*². [This is more than evident in (3)]. Which of course immediately leads to an inconsistency with the supposition of an *authentic* contingency in the world. Nor is the recourse to a superhuman intellect all that necessary for establishing the point. No doubt a divine intellect *is* required for unpacking in all infinite detail the ramifying reasons due to which it can be *proved* that the complete concept of a subject includes the concepts of its predicates (past, present and future) in *advance* of their (historical) attribution. And unless the existence of such an intellect is granted, the point cannot be established positively. But even if the presence of such an intellect were withdrawn, the doctrine that truth is containment can still be established negatively. Suppose simply that a predicate is not essentially contained in the idea of its subject. *Why* then is it at all ascribed to it? Normally, when we truthfully ascribe a predicate to a certain subject we do so because we judge that the former *belongs* to the latter (in some sense of «belong» or other). For unless it *really* belongs to it, the ascription will not even be true in the first place.

Consider Kant's later treatment of contingent judgements (hardly an advance on Leibniz's own), in his case called «synthetic»: «The latter (the synthetic judgements) add to the concept of the subject a predicate which has not been *in any wise* thought in it»³. Kant here manages to define «synthetic» in such a way as comes close to rendering all synthetic judgements false in advance. For how can a predicate be in *no wise* thought within the concept of its subject, just so much as if it were something entirely *foreign* to its total state, and still the judgement express something *true*? For in making the relevant subject-predicate judgement I either affirm that the latter *is* thought in the concept of the former or I *deny* this,

2. D. FRIED, Necessity and Contingency in Leibniz, *The Philosophical Review*, 87, 4, 1978, p. 575 ff.

3. Imm. KANT, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Norman Kemp Smith transl., London MacMillan Press, 1973, p. 48.



but then the latter is *not* thought in the former after all, and hence the judgement which says that it is must be false. Or, conversely, if the predicate *is* thought within the concept of the subject, then it *is* contained in it, and then it is impossible to continue claiming that «it is in no wise» thought in it. In defining «synthetic» thus Kant proves that he has learned little of Leibniz's following, revealing, bewilderment: I did not understand how the predicate could be *in* the subject and yet the proposition be *not necessary* [NACT, 303]. It is a most important puzzle, one which Kant and the empiricists should have done well to carefully consider prior to affirming that the synthetic-analytic or, rather, the contingent-necessary distinction reflects an *objective* property of independent reality. Leibniz seems to be facing here the very sort of dilemma described just above; either a judgement is *true*, but then the predicate is *contained* in the subject, but then truth is containment, but then no genuine contingency exists in the world (it cannot then be that the judgement is not necessary), or the predicate is *not* (virtually) contained in the subject, in which case, however, rather than merely contingently true, the judgement actually turns up false: «We must inquire what it is to be an attribute in *reality* of a certain subject. Now it is evident that every *true* predication has some basis in the *nature* of things, and even when a proposition is *not* identical, that is, when the predicate is not expressly contained in the subject, it is still necessary that it be *virtually* contained in it» [DM, 256]. It follows that *there are no purely extrinsic denominations* which have no basis *at all* in the denominated thing itself. For the concept of the denominated subject *necessarily* involves the concept of the predicate [FT, 246; first emphasis is Leibniz's own].

In other words, what is true is *necessarily* true and what is false impossible. The passages above quoted, NACT 303, DM 256 and FT 246, have an additional interest to our case. They conclusively establish that the existence of a Divine Intellect is not really necessary for disputing the existence of contingency. Contingency can be eradicated independently, by a line of reasoning which can stand on its own two feet, once it is realized that all truth is essentially containment. What the Divine Intellect can do thereafter is to merely complement and integrate the argument. If contingency is independently undermined, as immediately follows from the conception of truth *properly* so called as one of containment, we no longer require the mediation of a Divine Intellect to support this in addition. We can confidently assert that in all true judgements the predicate *must* be contained in the subject (otherwise they would not *be* true), and be confident of this in advance.

Yet, on the other hand, this is as far as created (human) intellects will go. They can demand truth to be containment but may never fully know, or even come close to knowing, the *basis* of such containment. Why or *how* the predicate is «in



the subject» we may never be able to analyze, visualize or fully grasp. We can only affirm that it is. And here is how the Divine Intellect integrates the argument. For by comprehending the infinite all at once, God is in the privileged position of also perceiving *how* the predicate is in the subject (on top of knowing that it is) and to understand *a priori* the perfect reason for contingency, which in his creatures is furnished *a posteriori* by experience. That is to say, doctrine (5). We can perhaps *postulate*, and even postulate in the stronger, logical sense, that all authentic truth must be containment. But God could *explain*, why all authentic truth is essentially containment. For He could carry out the requisite resolution of the concept of the subject to such an immensely complex extent [according to doctrine (4) right down to infinity, but one needn't go that far] that it would be obvious to Him by sheer *analysis*, why the predicate was contained in it all along. In short, He would not only know *that* the judgements is necessary. He would also know *why* it is. Which latter is not available to us. Either way, nevertheless, there'd be no objective contingency in the world. Contingency, at best, is a property of *judgements*. Not a property of *reality*. It has been suggested that Leibni'z doctrine of truth as containment is inconsistent with his parallel doctrine of contingency [Fried, *op. cit.*, 575 ff.]. And it may indeed appear so, superficially. But the preceding remark clearly shows their implicit compatibility. Leibniz's entire epistemology can be quite easily construed as if speaking of necessary and contingent judgements; and not about necessary and contingent reality. In actual fact, not only is this latter possibility most emphatically excluded by all the passages I have so far cited (and several others, which I have not). It is *ipso facto* excluded by the presence of Divinity. Authentic contingency in the world would entail that Leibniz's God can neither make up His mind as to how it will thereby proceed from now on (!) nor, far worse, even *know* how it will thereby proceed from now on. For radical contingency implies radical *unpredictability*, something inconceivable in itself (to a rationalist) and blatantly contradictory besides with Leibniz's omniscient divinity.

2. Scepticism about what is Familiar or Dogmatism about what is Possible?

If truth is containment, and no extrinsic denominations truly exist, and if all true predication has its basis in the nature of things, then whatever predication was true of a thing, was part of its concept (or constitution) all along, and whatever predication was untrue of it, was ruled out in advance, even if we didn't know it at the time. Things could not have been other than they are. This is Leibniz's doctrine of one way possibility⁴. «God, seeing the individual concept (...) sees

4. It has been suggested that this conclusion contradicts Leibniz's thesis of alternative possible

there at the same time the predicates which can be truly uttered regarding him [Alexander]; for instance that he will conquer Darius and Porus, even to the point of knowing *a priori* and not by experience, whether he died a natural death or by poison - facts which we can learn only through history» [M, 257]. To the Divine Intellect truth is implicitly *analytic* [doctrines (1) and (5)], hence *only one* course of events is really open. Whatever we deem as possible (on what standards of possibility will be discussed below), we deem so due to insufficient information. The above passage of Leibniz's, if not indeed all the rest put together, leaves little room for doubt. *Objectively* speaking, there are no conflicting possibilities of *equal* logical status in the world. One of them is predetermined⁵, and the other ruled out in advance, even though it always remains true that *we* may not be able to pick out the right alternative beforehand.

Hume, on the other hand, provided an entirely different account of matters on the basis of the very same logical distinction, namely, Leibniz's contrast between necessity and contingency. Understanding contingency in its objective sense, he thought that there is simply no limit to possibility, except that of imagination (a curious commitment for an empiricist, who is otherwise notorious for his *lack* of imagination). Anything is possible, if we can only imagine it with clarity, and in satisfaction of the Law of Contradiction (which is roughly the same thing). Actuality sets no limits to possibility; I disagree. Not *anything* is possible. I think that there is a great deal wrong with Hume's account of possibility and a great deal right with Leibniz's essential limitation of it. Someone dies at the age of sixty five but, if

worlds, the possibility of which latter must be guaranteed, if God is to be able to really choose the best possible one among them. But I am not convinced that this is so. Could God choose any *other* world, except the best possible one? Obviously not. Much rather, only the Devil would do so. Hence He hardly has any choice on the matter. Besides, even if it were true that God was *once* confronted with several conflicting alternatives to choose from, once he did choose the best possible one, which is the actual world we live in, He must have been forever committed. For in being omniscient He could clearly foresee that the impending evolution of the world of his choice would be *preferable* to all others in advance. But then, to continue speaking of alternative possible worlds, once His final choice was made, would be to directly dispute the correctness of His initial judgement of preference, which, in being fallible, He subsequently set forth in amending. But God neither makes mistakes nor, had He made one, is He known to confess to this.

5. This, of course, spells out *fatalism*. Leibniz himself is duly worried about this consequence of his doctrines (1) to (5) for he queries: «Does it not seem that in this way the difference between contingent and necessary truths will be *destroyed*, that there will be no place for human liberty and an absolute *fatalism* will rule the world?» [FT, 260]. It most certainly does. And whether or not Leibniz himself might wish to go back on his earlier commitments (1) to (5), the very *relevance* of his foregoing question implies that it would be anything but inappropriate to conceive of his doctrines as if indeed entailing such consequence.

Hume is to be believed, he *could* have died later (or sooner). Someone else *could* have died a natural death, but, he actually died of poisoning [Leibniz's Alexander] and so on.

Now I am not at all sure that this is so; for instance, is it true to suppose that a particular individual could have had a *different* father than the one he actually had? It does not seem so. *What* (or who) a person's father is, determines to an essential degree, what this *person* is. Nor would it do to retort that a father-son relationship is far more intimate than one would expect of ordinary contingency. For intimate it may be, but that would certainly be to no benefit of Hume's overall case in the slightest; for whatever this intimacy may consist of, it is still one erected on *facts*, which would only demonstrate that there may well be genuine *intimacy* between distinct facts, a conclusion hardly consonant with Hume's understanding of them. But let us first see what this understanding is: All the objects of human reason may naturally be divided into two kinds, «Relations of Ideas» and «Matters of Fact». Of the first kind are the sciences of Geometry, Algebra and Arithmetic and, in short, every affirmation which is either intuitively or demonstratively certain. Matters of fact, which are the second, are not ascertained in the same manner, nor is our evidence of their truth, however great, of a like nature with the foregoing»⁶. So far, there is no difference observable between Leibniz's understanding of the relevant distinction and Hume's own. But none is, because Humean contentions about possibility have not entered explicitly. Subsequently they do: «The *contrary* of every matter of fact is possible, because it can *never imply a contradiction* and is conceived by the mind with the same facility and distinctness *as if ever so conformable to reality*. (...) We should in vain therefore attempt to demonstrate its falsehood» [*ibid.*]. «As if ever so conformable to reality». As if it is almost *there*. To integrate this conception with the bold assertion that «whatever *is* may *not be*. No negation of a fact can involve a contradiction. The non-existence of any being, without exception, is as clear and distinct an idea as its existence» [I, 171; Hume's emphasis]. This is a two-way, *fundamental*, possibility. I.e. an objective contingency, according to which the world can accommodate two equal and opposing possibilities, either of which may be as forceful as the other even at a split second prior to actualisation of either, as if the world itself could take a discontinuous leap right to the opposite direction. («The course of nature may change»; [I, 49]).

Of course, much has been said about this argument, mostly favourable but some times also unfavourable, that stands in need of no repetition. I will therefore

6. D. HUME, *Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (I hereafter), New York, Bobbs-Merrill, 1955 p. 40. An identical passage in p. 49.

focus over Hume's treatment of what is possible, a notion that may prove tricky in a number of respects. Hume claims, to start with, that this is possible, which is free of contradiction. Is this claim true? I think not. As I have already twice emphasized elsewhere⁷, freedom from contradiction is a *necessary* not a *sufficient* condition for possibility. That all self-contradictory statements are impossible is certainly obvious. But the *converse* of this is not obvious in the least, and it is by no means certain, or even clear, that all impossible statements are *ipso facto* self-contradictory. But Hume's quoted passages make it absolutely certain that he understands absence of contradiction as a sufficient condition for possibility. There is, therefore, something definitely wrong with his proposed criterion. Hume is confident that he is gifted with an insight into the possible which is not available to the ordinary man. In fact, it is ordinary man's uncritical faith in *induction* which he is intent on demolishing. Thus, although he disputes nearly everything which the ordinary man assumes as certain, when it comes to what he says is possible, he feels perfectly unconstrained in declaring that anything whatsoever can so be, if only self consistent. To be precise, it is *because* he deems that anything whatsoever can be possible, that he is at all permitted to proceed and shake the ordinary man's faith in what is certain, by proving (allegedly) that its opposite is no less possible and hence that it is itself *un-certain*. That the sun will not rise tomorrow, we cannot preclude [I, 69]. That the entire familiar structure of our experience may at any moment turn chaotic, we certainly cannot exclude⁸. That, in general, whatever *is*, may *not be*, we cannot ever rule out.

All these claims appear on the face of it far more risky and extravagant than anything even rationalists ever dared to affirm. For someone with so little faith in ordinary things, Hume exhibits a disproportional gullibility for the extraordinary! A methodological imbalance which is the trade mark, and the fatal disease, of the sceptic. For a sceptic, by definition (and vocation), is someone who insists on doubting the ordinary. And this can hardly be accomplished without affirming the extraordinary. The charge of gullibility on the part of Hume as concerns the scope and the range of what is possible, is a well warranted one. Hume's own criteria render it so: «if we take in our hands any volume, let us ask; *Does it contain any abstract reasoning concerning quantity of number?* No. *Does it contain any experimental reasoning concerning matter of fact and experience?* No. Commit it then to the flames, for it can contain nothing but sophistry and illusion» [I, 173; Hume's

7. C. ANTONOPOULOS, Leibniz on the Modality of Contingent Truth and the Interpretation of Probability, *Explorations in Knowledge*, vol. 12, No 2, 1995, p. 34, and Arguing From Consistency Alone, *Analysis and Evaluation*, Intern. Center for the Study of Argumentation, Amsterdam 1995, p. 25.

8. See the following description: «Hume gives the impression that our experience may at any moment turn chaotic», Jon. BENNETT, *Kant's Analytic*, Cambridge, University Press, 1966, p. 155.



emphasis]. On those standards, only analytical certainty (abstract reasoning concerning number) and matter of fact or experience, are recognized as reliable sources of knowledge. Well, then, let us ask; do Hume's contentions about what is possible contain any abstract reasoning? No. Well, on second thought they do, but in this case *invalid* reasoning, for they confuse between a necessary and a sufficient condition for what may be possible, fallaciously reversing «what is inconsistent is impossible» into «what is consistent is possible». So as concerns abstract reasoning it has to be No. Do they then contain any experimental reasoning or matter of fact and experience? No. In fact, they contain the very *contrary*. They one and all contain *counterfactual* suppositions, and therefore suppositions running contrary to matter of fact and experience, about what may be possible. Commit them then to the flames for they contain nothing but sophistry and illusion.

Hume contends that what *is*, may *not be*! Is this perhaps an instance of *analytical* reasoning? No. For from what is, the sole safe conclusion that analytically follows is, that it *is*. Not that it may *not be*. Is this perhaps an instance of experimental reasoning or matter of fact and experience? No. What is a matter of fact and experience, is what *has* been, and what *is*. Not what *might* have been or *may* not be. What are the grounds, therefore, for Hume's self acquired confidence, that anything is possible, *other* than what has hitherto been recorded? If insight into possibility is grounded on some special kind of knowledge, what is the basis for it? It cannot be analytical certainty, for this latter yields necessity; not possibility. And it cannot be past or present experience, for this last can only establish what has been and what is. While Hume says that what has been, might not have been at all, and that what is, may not be. *Whence*, therefore, does it follow, from what *has* been - as a premise - that it might *not* have been at all - as a conclusion? The last thing which seems to follow from what *has* been, is that it might not have been at all. For however deep I may peer within my own conception of what has been, the idea that it might have been otherwise instead, is not one I can discover in it. Of course, it is one I can *add* (without contradiction, presumably) but this is hardly the same thing. For I can add «broken» to «chain». But this hardly implies that «broken» is contained in «chain».

We have seen Hume condemn his doctrine of possibility by his own words, and so essentially condemn his own empiricism, already once. Let us then complete the picture. This is what he has to say about containment (with emphasis): «There is nothing in any object, considered in itself, which can afford us a reason for drawing a conclusion *beyond* it»⁹. Well, then; is our notion of what «may be»

9. D. HUME, *Treatise of Human Nature* (T hereafter), Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1968, p. 139; all with emphasis in the original.

contained in our notion of «what is»? Or is it an inference *beyond* it? I submit the latter. From which immediately follows that Hume's assessment of possibility, the very instrument of his own scepticism, is inconsistent with the rudiments of his own doctrine, besides being dogmatic in itself. Ironically, Hume, the notorious sceptic about what is truly necessary, is a committed *dogmatist* on what is truly possible. Something which seems to be an inherent, and hence an irredeemable flaw within the very core of all forms of scepticism. For it is part and parcel of a sceptic's armament in his war against what is generally acceptable, to counter-propose what is generally *unacceptable*, by postulating all weird sorts of possibility. This is what the inner pressures and necessities of his preferred epistemology themselves demand and is something which simply cannot be helped; for by *limiting* or cutting down his number of alternative, weird possibilities to a bare minimum or even down to none, the sceptic will end with nothing in his hands to go by for undermining the convictions of ordinary men on what is and what will be.

If I am to doubt, whether the sun will rise tomorrow, I must be told that it is *possible* that it will not. If I am to doubt, whether like causes will always be followed by like effects, it must be patiently explained to me that it is *possible* that they will not. For only then can I begin to doubt. Hence postulating all sorts of weird possibilities is the sceptic's method of arguing. For were he to challenge our well established convictions by postulating alternative possibilities of the kind «I may not come by your house tomorrow» (!), which is definitely not a dogmatic attitude towards what is possible, he'd have no reason whatever for being a sceptic in the first place. The weirder such possibilities are postulated, the better. Hence a sceptic (about all other things), is by nature *a dogmatist about possibility*. Once we realize this, we can also visualize what it takes to confront him. If he is a dogmatist about possibility, and a sceptic about nearly everything else, we must in fact do the converse, and become sceptics about *possibility*, if we wish to become certain about nearly everything else.

3. Contrary to Fact Possibility

The previous line of reasoning suggests the following definition of generic possibility: this is possible, which is first *actual*. For whatever *has* happened, *a fortiori can* happen. Nor is there any room for doubt about this. So this is certainly possible, which is known to have already happened at least once before. Consider the following argument between two people; one of them says: «It can't be done!». The other replies: «Can't it? It *has* been done!». All debate on what is possible ends right there. The first speaker may proceed to doubt whether the thing, whose possibility the two are debating about, *has* actually been done. But that would



concern the truth of the other speaker's assertion. Not the possibility of the thing debated about, once the truth of the relevant assertion is conceded. If the latter speaker's assertion is conceded, the *possibility* is automatically warranted. I *has* been done; therefore it can be done. Or, more generally, it has been known to happen; it can again happen. This, then, is an *empiricist* criterion of possibility, and one which Hume should in principle have no objections towards. In fact, the very same criterion which he would have done well to adopt himself. Such assessment of what is possible directly depends on what has already existed, as a matter of actual fact. This, therefore, is *de facto* (or factual) possibility. And to its category belongs «I will come by your house tomorrow». But that the sun will not rise tomorrow, does not appear to belong to the same category. It is certainly true that the supposition does not contain a contradiction. But even if it be admitted that the criterion is *sufficient* (which it isn't), still few of Hume's consecutive, related claims would seem to follow. For concede the claim that the assertion states something possible. What *sense* of possibility is this? Is it the *same* sense of possible, by which I previously affirmed that I may come by your house tomorrow? Obviously not. I *have* come by your house before. But the sun has not failed to rise *ever* before. This is *non-factual* possibility. It is the product of *imagination*. Not an idea borrowed from the operations of the real world. Hence the difference between these two senses of «possible» is that, essentially, which exists between the real and the imaginary, appropriately extended to include possibility. A great difference by all accounts. Nor is it serious to suppose, on the other hand, that when I affirm that I may come by your house tomorrow, I mean this in this sense that the idea does not contain a contradiction! For this is quite silly. It doesn't, but that's irrelevant to my meaning. Therefore, the two senses of «possible» here encountered differ considerably in meaning and, once this much is realized, that the sun may not rise tomorrow may no longer look *quite* as possible as that I may come by your *house* tomorrow.

Let us peer somewhat deeper into this (obscure) criterion. It is the very same, famous criterion, by means of which Hume undermined the necessity of the causal nexus, by first showing that the cause-effect connection is not analytic and by subsequently (and relatedly) proceeding to deny it without involving himself in contradiction [T, 73, ff.]. Let us epitomize this Humean thesis by the statement «events may (after all) be uncaused». Now here is yet another conception of what is possible. That I may come by your house tomorrow is possible, because grounded on past experience. It *has* happened once, so it can happen again. That the sun may rise tomorrow, on the other hand, if possible at all, then surely not because grounded on past experience. The claimed possibility now names an *unprecedented* occurrence. So it reflects an unprecedented possibility. Is the sense



of «possible» appropriate to «events may be uncaused» the same as either of the former two? Again not.

On Hume's own standards, the cause-effect connection, independently of its objective status in the world beyond us, does at least correspond to their «constant conjunction» [T, 91, with emphasis, and ff.], which the observers' habit (plus their lack of analytic skills, which Hume alone was endowed with, presumably) transforms into a connection of mutual *dependence*. Hume implicitly denies the dependence. But he does not, nor could he ever, deny their constant conjunction as such, for this much at least experience itself fully bears out and confirms. In this situation, he would surely permit us to at least conceive of them in *constant* conjunction ourselves and then enquire, on *his* standards, whether «events may be uncaused» reflects the same kind of possibility as either of the previous two.

If two events, A and B, are invariably observed in constant conjunction (or succession, to be precise), so that the presence of the former will just as invariably be accompanied by the presence of the latter, it should never be the case that they are observed in *separation*, meaning by that, that A may be occasionally posited, but B failing to follow. Of course, it does occasionally happen that an apparent A is not accompanied by a B. But then, just as invariably, closer inspection of the situation reveals that either A was not at all present, but rather something like A, or, else, A was present as such, but *other* factors were present at the same time as well. Whereupon, by repetition of the event (experimentally), on condition that the other factors potentially influencing the incident are removed, a purified A will once again be accompanied by B. This being the case, the following question becomes of interest. Is it *ever* likely (which «likely» is even stronger than merely «possible») that we will observe A without observing B? Hume might wish to emphatically assert this possibility in the logical sense, but he has, on the other hand, made allowances for habit and human *psychology*. And the causal «addiction» of the human psyche¹⁰ may indeed refuse to ever accept and come to terms with the idea that an A can be posited but a B fail to follow, even in the rare occasion that beyond this psychology an occurrence of A was not accompanied by an occurrence of B. Causal addicts would simply assume that yet again A itself did not properly occur, whence it would only be natural that B has failed to follow. Having a near infinite variety of directly or indirectly relatable, and criss-crossing phenomena to choose from, one would surely fit the bill and act the part of the

10. Observe HUME's following concession, of considerable importance to our case: «Being *determined* by customs to transfer the past into the future in all our inferences, where the past has been entirely regular and uniform we expect the event with the *greatest* assurance and leave *no room* for any contrary supposition» [I, 71]. Force of habit must therefore lead to addiction.

factor (or «hidden variable», as it has been called in the case of quantum mechanics) responsible for the failure of their constant conjunction. And as the foregoing line of reasoning is indefinitely repeatable, no failure of their constant conjunction is ever likely to be even *recorded*.

Now that the sun will not rise tomorrow, is also a possibility that has never before been recorded. But failure of constant conjunction between A and B, as the preceding analysis implies, is not merely unrecorded. It may well be down right *unrecordable*. For if *all* instances of a failure of A to be followed by B can be convincingly explained away, «A and -B» states not merely a possibility which has not been recorded yet. It states a «possibility» which in a certain sense of «can», and for the reasons above mentioned, simply *cannot* be recorded to begin with. So that «events may be uncaused» involves yet another, and very different, sense of possibility. Not just the sense of «so far unrealized, but still quite possible» but, I am tempted to say, the sense of «*unrealizable*, but still quite possible». Which is not just profoundly different from either of the previously encountered two other senses of «possible». But a conception which is weird in itself. And I, for one, am most curious to see now just what can it be possibly *meant* by the assertion that something unrealizable, or just potentially unrealizable, is nevertheless possible. I would think that something unrealizable is *not* possible.

A Humean would no doubt accuse me here of cheating. *Hume's* sense of «possible» is not «unrealizable (but still possible)» as I claim, he would retort, but possible, period. That is to say, possible in the sense that it *is* realizable. But this, so far as I can see, would only mean that, after all, there *can* be an A which is not accompanied by a B, and then Hume's risky concession to causality, in the form of their *constant* conjunction, could have been handsomely avoided at no cost to his case. If constant conjunction were dispensable or dedundant, then Hume would surely discard it, and I can think of no one motivated more strongly than he, towards *willing* to discard it. Hume above all others had every possible reason in the world to dispute *even* constant conjunction, in which case he had but to affirm that there can, in fact that there *will* be A's not accompanied by B's, which, if I'm not mistaken, is the very contrary of what the concession of constant conjunction implies. I therefore find no cheating in the process.

Or one might reply that Hume here pays the price of not being *radical* enough, in having conceded something that he shouldn't, namely, constant conjunction. Still, the psychological argument from habit forming repeated observations and their correlative «causal» addiction is sufficiently self contained to be adopted independently of Hume's unnecessary concessions and leveled against the more radical version of his analysis, without stepping for that reason outside Hume's *initial* terms of formulating the problem. The psychological

reconstruction of causality does not assume, contra Hume that causes *essentially* produce their effects. It merely assumes that the two events appear in regular succession for a number of instances sufficiently high for a causal addiction or establish itself irrevocably (as indeed all addictions do). Were one radical enough to even dispute the latter, one would simply be asserting something empirically *false*, for it is a fact of experience that the instances are indeed sufficiently high.

Then one could simply proceed by pointing out that, once the causal addiction is established, we would all be rendered *blind* to non causal occurrences and have no conception of them. Then the possibility of «events may be uncaused» *would* be an unrealizable possibility, in a very definite sense of «unrealizable». If this be a psychological (rather than an objective) sense of «unrealizable»..., then so be it. Still, that the sun may not rise tomorrow, would express a possibility unrealized but (psychologically) realizable, (we can *think* what it would be like, were the sun not to rise tomorrow, if only to play along with Hume's rules), but that events may be uncaused, would express a possibility (psychologically) *un-realizable*. And, given that what is psychologically unrealizable is next of kin with *inconceivable* (is this term a psychological or is it a logical one?), that events may be uncaused, would then express an *inconceivable possibility*. What sort of possibility this would be, one cannot even begin to fathom. But I doubt whether it would render Hume's views on possibility, moderately or radically stated, any more credible than they presently are.

Hume's «hitherto unrealized» and/or «unrealizable» notions of possibility waver between a ghostly constitution, as concerns the former, and the borders of sheer incoherence, as concerns the latter. The former (unrecorded or hitherto unrealized) possibility is a possibility which simply refuses or accord itself with the *facts*. The sun has risen billions of times so far, but the contrary possibility is still wholly unaffected. Double or triple this figure. The possibility will simply not go away. One can hardly resist the temptation of concluding here, that if such possibility consistently fails to be at all *affected* by the facts, this is simply because it says *nothing* about the facts. It is an *idle* possibility. And as such can claim no more than a ghostly existence. Ghosts, admittedly, are not self contradictory entities. But they are ghosts nonetheless and it is the sign of intellectual underdevelopment and plain superstition to believe in them. I choose to believe in real things.

The latter, unrecordable or unrealizable, possibility fares even worse. This is not merely a contrary to *fact* possibility. It is a contrary to *concepts* possibility. The notion of «possible» with which it operates does not merely challenge our powers of imagination. It challenges our very powers of *conception*. We cannot even begin to visualize or give content to the idea that events may be occurring of themselves. I do not wish to deny that stripped bare of any physically imported content, the



idea may after all balance on the borders of coherence, however precariously it manages to do so. At least not at this point. What I wish to emphasize, and have emphasized, is its claimed logical status in *comparison* with ordinary, fact-dependent possibility. For that alone suffices. Hume claims success for his empiricism, by indiscriminately throwing all distinct senses of «possible» in a single, undifferentiated cauldron. Provoking, no doubt, Austin's just exasperation (as is witnessed by what Austin had to say about Hume's intellectual descendants, the positivists) when he spoke of «the pervasive error of neglecting the *circumstances in which* things are said - of supposing that the words *alone* can be discussed, in quite a general way»¹¹. Once one does that, one is well on one's way to affirming that the sense in which it is possible that I may come by your house tomorrow is the *same* with the sense by which it is affirmed that events may be uncaused. And hence that, just as much as the former possibility is less than a *hair's* distance away from coming true, so also is the latter. (As if ever so conformable to reality). But once the specific logical *context*, in which something features as possible, is closely attended to, these various shades of possibility are immediately distinguishable, and even *contrasted* to one another, and then that events may seriously be uncaused, rather than being a hair's distance from actually coming true, suddenly looks like it is an infinity away; at least on *those* standards.

4. Mutually Exclusive Alternatives

This, so far as weird possibilities are concerned. Which leaves us with *de facto* possibility. And, contrary to what one might initially suppose, the latter is no mean obstacle. *De facto* possibility, as recorded within our past experience, has always proceeded as two-way traffic. It has rained in mid-September in Athens in the past, but then again, on a different occasion it has not. The wind has put out a fire in the past, but then again, on a different occasion it made it all the stronger. Were we to project such past experiences of ours to the immediate or far future, on the motto of *de facto* possibility *both* of the former, incompatible alternatives would appear equally warranted and lay an equal claim on possibility. So the future would turn up open and undecided, even if we were to confine our assessments of possibility to strictly recorded occurrences. And that in itself is sufficient reason for scepticism. So we must integrate the argument with a limitation of even this type of possibility.

11. J.L. AUSTIN, *Sense and Sensibilia*, Oxford, University Press, 1964, p. 118.

The first argument which comes to mind regarding an open and undecided future refers us to Aristotle's problem of «future particulars»¹², to be found in chapter 9 of *De Interpretatione*. Aristotle's argumentation divides in two stages; a first stage which begins by *conceding* the assumption that the future is fixed and predetermined, and that of two mutually exclusive alternatives only *one* is ever really possible in advance, and a second stage, where absurd consequences are derived from this assumption, and where, therefore, the assumption is dropped in favour of its contrary, that the future *is* open and undecided. Let us capture the argument from the first stage: «If every affirmation or negation is true or false it is necessary for everything either to be the case or not to be the case. For if one person says that something will be and another denies this same thing, it is clearly *necessary* for one of them to be saying what is true - if every affirmation is true or false; for both will not be the case together under such circumstances (...). So it is necessary for the affirmation or the negation to be true. It follows that nothing either is or is happening, or will be or will not be, *by chance* or as chance has it (since either he who says or he who denies is saying what is true). For otherwise it might *equally well* happen or not happen, since what is as *chance* has it is no more thus than not thus, nor will it be»¹³. So far, then, the Law of the Excluded Middle (LEM) holds, and when it does, every proposition being thereby rendered either true or false, our only permissible two alternatives (or «values») would antagonize each other, *either* one of them being true at the expense of the other. So the future event spoken of, will either *necessarily* happen or, else, it will necessarily *not* happen. No third alternative is possible. This is how this conclusion is refuted immediately below: «But in things which are not always *actual* there is the *possibility* of being and of not-being; here *both* possibilities are *open*, both being and not being, and consequently, both coming *and* not coming to be. Clearly, therefore, not everything is or happens of necessity: some things happen as chance has it, and of the affirmation and the negation *neither* is true rather than the other. Clearly then, it is not necessary that of every affirmation and opposite negation one should be true and the other false. For what holds for things that are does not hold for things that are not but may *possibly* be or not be» [*op. cit.*, 19⁷]. Hence LEM must be withheld for the case of future particulars or mutually exclusive alternatives. Of course Leibniz would have none of that, as is only to be expected: «The complete concept of an individual substance involves all its predicates, past, present or future. For certainly it is *already true now* that a future predicate will be a predicate in the future, and so it is contained in the concept of the thing» [FT, 247; the first

12. The term belongs to J.L. Ackrill; *De Interpretatione*, p. 132.

13. ARISTOTLE, *De Interpretatione*, ch. 9.

statement of the passage italicized in the original]. The conception of truth as containment once again reigns supreme. And on its presence the future is neither open nor undecided. Speaking for myself, the choice is easy. I have been held captive of Aristotle's argument - and of its contemporary version by Lukasiewicz¹⁴ - far too long to let the matter rest without further comment. The spell was suddenly dissolved by the specific needs of a different work of mine¹⁵, which practically dictated a long overdue answer to Aristotle's (and Lukasiewicz's) circular and incoherent argumentation.

The argument in stage 2 is circular; for it entails the rejection of LEM on the grounds that the future *is* open and undecided, whereas, only if LEM is *independently* disproved, will it be true that the future is open and undecided. And, *conversely*, LEM itself can be disproved, only if it is *independently* shown that the future *is* open and undecided. Hence the argument is hopelessly circular. But it is also incoherent. The gist of Aristotle's (and Lukasiewicz's) argument is the following: Consider a pair of mutually exclusive (or contradictory) alternatives, X and - X, of a future reference. Both of them are equally possible. Now assume that X is true today. Then X will *necessarily* occur, in which case it is not merely possible, but indeed necessary. Which contradicts the initial assumption that it was merely possible. Assume then that -X is true today. But then X will now become *impossible*, which also contradicts the initial assumption, that it was possible. It would follow that we can neither afford to call X true today nor call it false today, because by either ascription we contradict the initial assumption.

I do not think so. The *necessity* of a judgement cannot ever be decided in this way, i.e. by *experimentally* ascribing either value, as if almost out of curiosity to see what follows, or, in effect, just as if we were tossing a coin! If a judgement is necessary *at all*, this cannot possibly depend on whether the coin will land heads or tails. For a necessary judgement is necessary *independently* of how our coin will land. And an impossible judgement impossible again independently of how our coin will land. Nor, for that matter, will my *calling* a judgement necessary (provisionally), *make* the judgement necessary, if it is not one such already. Hence Aristotle's (and Lukasiewicz's) argument operates with an utterly incoherent notion of necessity and, accordingly, of impossibility. Therefore the *second* stage of the argument must be rejected, for there is clearly *no absurdity* involved in supposing the future to be fixed and predetermined. Which leaves us with Aristotle's former, and erroneously rejected, alternative. In which it is conceded that it is

14. J. LUKASIEWICZ, *Selected Works*, Amsterdam and London, North Holland, 1970, p. 175.

15. C. ANTONOPOULOS, Neither-Nor Statements and Neither-Nor States, *History and Philosophy of Logic*, 14, 1993.



necessary for either conflicting alternative to be true and hence for its opposite to be impossible. And that therefore nothing will happen by chance or as chance has it. It will not, I might add, because there is clearly no sense contained in the assertion that two mutually exclusive alternatives may both be *equally* possible. With the defense of this point I will conclude my remarks.

Aristotle has spoken of equal but conflicting possibilities. And Leibniz himself has done this more often than not¹⁶. Indeed, on the face of it there appear to be excellent reasons for speaking in this way about the issue. First and foremost, any good empiricist would have to make room for chance, else he'd have no reasons for complaining about our epistemological status. The very strength of the sceptic's position, if a strength it is, lies in the fact that, when confronted with a pair of mutually exclusive future alternatives, we should be completely unable to reach a decision, as to which should receive *preference* over the other. This, to all intents and purposes, yields exactly the same thing, as what the predicate «equally» itself intends to say (Just as if their respective probabilities were 0.5 each).

Moreover, it must not be forgotten that there is a *number* of criteria involved, which, presumably, both of the competing assertions should be able to equally satisfy: (a) freedom from contradiction, (b) reference to the future, (c) comparable indecision of choice, (d) expression of *de facto* possibility etc. (And there could be others discoverable). I presume that on simultaneously satisfying all these, any two contingent and incompatible assertions well deserve to be called equally possible. All in all, application of the term «equally» would seem well warranted, if it were simply taken to mean that, no matter how *many* things we could list in support of the positive possibility, we could cite *just as many* in support of the negative one. Surely no one, and least of all the sceptic himself, would object to *this* sense of «equally». It would therefore seem to follow that, if one were to speak of an open and undecided future *at all*, this is the sole expressive means available to one for putting the point in words. Possibility is not a *graded* concept (or a magnitude), which can be greater or smaller. Possibility is a *quality*, which either is or isn't. Hence, for sheer lack of any other values permissible for it, save 1 and 0, if either of the two incompatible alternatives is graded with *less* than 1, it will have to be graded by *zero*. And then would turn up not be possible at all. So we either speak of an undecided and open future in terms of *equal* and conflicting possibilities, or we do not speak of it at all. But this will not go to show that, in speaking thus, we necessarily make good sense. For though this be the *only* way to speak about equal but conflicting possibilities, if little or no sense can be attached to such speaking even so, then it would but follow that it is *nonsensical* to

16. E.g. in DM, 262. But he uses similar expressions nearly all of the time.

speak of equal and conflicting alternatives in the first place. And this is exactly what obtains. What indeed are the semantics of «equally»? Or, more specifically, what are the respective semantics of «equally», on the one hand, and «possible», on the other? We usually say of a man that he is equally strong as another if, say, they can lift the same amount of weight from the ground, no more, no less. Or we say of two people that they are just as fast, if they can run the one and two hundred meters at identical times. We say of someone that he is just as intelligent as someone else, if they both can produce the same results in intelligence measurement tests, or of two people that they are equally heavy, if they weigh the same.

In general, what characterizes every single one of the foregoing uses of «equally» is the fact that it presupposes an expected *comparison* between two (homogeneous) sets of measurable quantities, which *comparison* must yield identical values for both quantities compared. Formally, then, to say that «X is equally F with Y» means that item X can furnish *just as much* of F as Y can and conversely. And that, therefore, if the foregoing assertion is true, we should then expect of X *just as much as we should expect of Y*. (And conversely). But if it is this which holds between X and Y, how can it possibly hold for X and -X? I can certainly proceed to *compare* the F - value of X with the F-value of Y and decide whether these two values are equal or not. But this presupposes that *both* the values of the items compared will, or *can* simultaneously *actualize*! Otherwise the job cannot be done. If in speaking of any two things to which the term «equally» can legitimately apply we imply that there should always be an opportunity of *comparing* them, then one is indeed most curious to see how this precondition can be satisfied by a pair of *mutually exclusive* alternatives. When in their case, actualization of either one will leave nothing at all in the place of the other for *making* the comparison. I submit, therefore, that although it makes perfectly good sense to speak of equal but *co-realizable* possibilities, it does not make particularly good sense to speak of equal and *conflicting* possibilities, at least not if meant in the *objective* sense of this opposition. Because objectively we cannot but obtain only one of them at the eternal expense of the other. Leibniz's doctrine of one way possibility would therefore seem vindicated. And though we may not always (or ever) be able to determine with certainty *which* of the two conflicting alternatives is bound to actualize, *that* only one of them will would seem the safest assumption to make. Leibniz's conception of contingency, ultimately rejected by its author, or Aristotle's conception of chance, ultimately adopted by its author (Hume is not particularly easy to classify), are involved in all sorts of weird assumptions, extravagant claims and severe conceptual incoherence, if understood in their *objective* sense. Yet observe how easily all these difficulties would be removed if, with due humility, we said that the two conflicting alternatives simply *seem* to be both possible instead.



And then it would also make perfectly good sense to say of them that they even seem to be *equally* possible. For that indeed they clearly can.

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(Athens)

ΛΑΪΜΠΝΙΤΣ, ΧΙΟΥΜ ΚΑΙ ΑΡΙΣΤΟΤΕΛΗΣ ΓΙΑ ΤΟ ΤΙ ΕΙΝΑΙ ΔΥΝΑΤΟ

Περίληψη

Ὁ Χιούμ, στηριζόμενος στὴ διαίρεση τοῦ Λάμπνιτς ἀνάμεσα σὲ ἀλήθειες δυνάμει τοῦ λόγου καὶ ἀλήθειες δυνάμει τῶν γεγονότων, διαίρεση γιὰ τὴν ἀντικειμενικότητα τῆς ὁποίας ὁ ἴδιος ὁ Λάμπνιτς εἶχε εὐλογες ἐπιφυλάξεις, διακήρυξε ὅτι κάθε πρόταση ἢ ὁποία δὲν ἀντιφάσκει μὲ τὸν ἑαυτό της εἶναι πλήρως δυνατή. Χρησιμοποιώντας αὐτὸ τὸ κριτήριον, τὸ ὁποῖο, εἰρήσθω ἐν παρόδῳ, εἶναι συνθήκη ἀπλῶς ἀναγκαία γιὰ τὴ δυνατότητα κάποιου πράγματος καὶ ἄρα ὅχι καὶ συνθήκη ἐπαρκῆς, ὁ Χιούμ συνεπέρανε ὅτι ὁποιαδήποτε πρόταση δὲν περικλείει ἀντίφαση, ὅσοδήποτε καὶ ἂν φαίνεται κατὰ τὰ ἄλλα ἐξωφρενική - π.χ. «ὁ ἥλιος δὲν θὰ ἀνατεῖλει αὐριο» - ἐκφράζει μία κανονικὴ δυνατότητα καὶ ἐπ' οὐδενὶ μπορεῖ νὰ προαποκλειστεῖ. Τὴν ἴδια ἰδέα ἐπεξέτεινε καὶ στὴν περίπτωση τῶν αἰτιατῶν κρίσεων (ἐκφερομένων ὡς ὑποθετικῶν λόγων μὲ ὑπόθεση καὶ ἀπόδοση - conditionals -) τὴν ὑποθετικὴ πρόταση τῶν ὁποίων μπορεῖ κανεὶς νὰ δεχθεῖ, ἐνῶ τὴν ἀπόδοση ὅχι, χωρὶς ὥστόσο νὰ ἀρθρώσει κάτι τὸ ἀντιφατικόν, δεδομένης τῆς λογικῆς τους διαφορᾶς. Συνεπῶς καὶ τῶν αἰτιατῶν κρίσεων τὸ ἀντίθετον θὰ εἶναι ἐπίσης δυνατό, καὶ ἄρα οἱ ἴδιες δὲν θὰ εἶναι ἀναγκαῖες.

Σὲ ἀντίθεση μὲ τὸν Χιούμ παρατηρῶ ὅτι ὑπάρχουν **περισσότερες** τῆς μιᾶς ἔννοιες τοῦ δυνατοῦ σ' αὐτὴ τὴν ὑπόθεση, ἄρρηκτα συνδεδεμένες μὲ τὸ συνολικὸ πλαίσιο ἐκφορᾶς (context), οἱ ὁποῖες σχεδὸν τίποτα τὸ κοινὸ δὲν ἔχουν μεταξύ τους, καὶ τὶς ὁποῖες ὁ Χιούμ συγχέει. Οἱ προτάσεις

- (α) Θὰ ἔρθω ἀπὸ τὸ σπίτι σου αὐριο
- (β) Ὁ ἥλιος δὲν θὰ ἀνατεῖλει αὐριο
- (γ) Τὰ φαινόμενα δὲν ἔχουν αἰτίες



στοιχειοθετοῦν διαμετρικὰ ἀντίθετες ἔννοιες τοῦ δυνατοῦ, ἢ (α) ἐκφράζοντας μία ἐκ τῶν πραγμάτων δυνατότητα μὲ τετριμμένο ἱστορικό προηγούμενο, ἢ (β) μία δυνατότητα χωρὶς ἱστορικό προηγούμενο, ἢ (γ) μία (τυπική) δυνατότητα ὅχι ἀπλᾶ χωρὶς ἱστορικό προηγούμενο ἀλλὰ χωρὶς καὶ ἐποπτειακὴ ἀντιστοίχιση μὲ τὴν ἐμπειρία. Πρόκειται συνεπῶς γιὰ τρεῖς ἐντελῶς διαφορετικὲς ἔννοιες δυνατότητας ἐπὶ τοῦ προκειμένου καὶ ἐπ' οὐδενὶ λόγῳ μπορεῖ πλέον κανεὶς νὰ βεβαιώσῃ μὲ τὴν ἴδια ἔννοια, ὅτι εἶναι ἄλλο τόσο δυνατό νὰ ἔρθῃ ἀπὸ τὸ σπίτι σου αὔριο, ὅσο εἶναι δυνατό νὰ μὴν ἀνατείλῃ ὁ ἥλιος αὔριο ἢ ὅσο εἶναι δυνατό τὰ φαινόμενα νὰ μὴν ἔχουν αἰτίες! Ἐνῶ ἡ στρατηγικὴ τοῦ σκεπτικισμοῦ τοῦ Χιούμ ἐπιχειρεῖ νὰ μᾶς αἰφνιδιάσῃ ὑπαινισσόμενη ὅτι οὐσιαστικὰ οἱ δύο δεύτερες ἔννοιες «δυνατότητας» σὲ τίποτα δὲν διαφέρουν ἀπὸ τὴν πρώτη καὶ ἄρα βρίσκονται τόσο κοντὰ στὴν πραγματοποίηση ὅσο καὶ αὕτη.

Μὲ ἀνάλογο πνεῦμα εἶχε μιλήσει καὶ ὁ Ἀριστοτέλης σχετικὰ μὲ τὴ δυνατότητα τῶν προτάσεων μελλοντικῆς ἀναφορᾶς. Μὲ τὸ σκεπτικὸ ὅτι αὐτὲς μποροῦν ἄλλο τόσο νὰ ἐπαληθευθοῦν ὅσο καὶ νὰ διαψευσθοῦν, διατεινόταν ὅτι αὐτὲς δὲν μποροῦν νὰ πάρουν ὀρισμένη τιμὴ ἀλήθειας κατὰ τὴν στιγμή τῆς ἐκφορᾶς τους, γιὰτὶ αὐτὸ θὰ τὶς καθιστοῦσε ἀναγκαῖες, ἂν ἀπλᾶ ἀληθεῖς, ἢ ἀδύνατες, ἂν ἀπλᾶ ψευδεῖς, ἐνῶ θὰ ἔπρεπε νὰ εἶναι οἱ ἴδιες ἀπλᾶ δυνατές. Ἔτσι ἀνέστειλε τὴν ἰσχὺ τοῦ Νόμου τοῦ Ἀποκλεισμοῦ τοῦ Τρίτου γιὰ προτάσεις μὲ μελλοντικὴ ἀναφορὰ καταλήγοντας καὶ ἐκεῖνος στὸ συμπέρασμα ὅτι ὁποιασδήποτε τέτοιας πρότασης τὸ ἀντίθετο εἶναι ἐπίσης δυνατό.

Συμμαχώντας μὲ τὸν Λάμπινις καταλήγω στὸ ἀντίθετο συμπέρασμα, δηλαδή ὅτι ἀπὸ δύο ἀντίθετα ἐνδεχόμενα μόνον τὸ ἓνα εἶναι πραγματικὰ δυνατό. Φανερά, ὁ ἰσχυρισμὸς τοῦ Ἀριστοτέλη, ὅτι εἶναι καὶ τὰ δύο ἐξ ἴσου δυνατά, ἄρα ὁ Νόμος τοῦ Ἀποκλεισμοῦ τοῦ Τρίτου δὲν ἰσχύει στὴν περίπτωσή τους, ἐκλαμβάνει τὸ ζητούμενο ὡς δεδομένο, ἀφοῦ τὰ δύο ἀντίθετα ἐνδεχόμενα θὰ εἶναι ἐξ ἴσου δυνατά, μόνον ἂν ἔχει ἤδη ἀνασταλεῖ ὁ Νόμος τοῦ Ἀποκλεισμοῦ τοῦ Τρίτου καί, ἀντίστροφα, μόνον ἂν αὐτὰ εἶναι ἤδη ἐξ ἴσου δυνατά, θὰ πρέπει νὰ ἀνασταλεῖ ὁ Νόμος τοῦ Ἀποκλεισμοῦ τοῦ Τρίτου. Ἀναστολὴ αὐτοῦ τοῦ Νόμου γιὰ προτάσεις μελλοντικῆς ἀναφορᾶς, ἀφ' ἐνός, καὶ ἴση δυνατότητα ἀμφοτέρων, ἀφ' ἑτέρου, δὲν εἶναι παρὰ συνώνυμες ἐκφράσεις ἐπὶ τοῦ προκειμένου, οἱ ὁποῖες στηρίζονται ἀμοιβαῖα μόνον μέσω ἐνὸς ἐμφανοῦς φαύλου κύκλου.

Ὅταν αὐτὸ τὸ ἐμπόδιο παραμεριστεῖ, τότε εὐκόλα κανεὶς διακρίνει ὅτι ἀπὸ δύο ἀντίθετα ἐνδεχόμενα μόνον τὸ ἓνα εἶναι πραγματικὰ δυνατό, διότι ἀσφαλῶς δὲν μποροῦν νὰ εἶναι ἐξ ἴσου δυνατά καὶ τὰ δύο. Δικαίωμα νὰ χρησιμοποιοῦμε τὸν ὅρο «ἐξ ἴσου» ἔχουμε κανονικὰ μόνον ὅταν τὰ πράγ-



CONSTANTINE ANTONOPOULOS

ματα, για τὰ ὅποια ἀποφαινόμαστε ὅτι διαθέτουν κάτι ἐξ ἴσου, μποροῦν κατ' ἀρχὴν νὰ συγκριθοῦν. Ἀλλὰ πράγματα τὰ ὅποια μποροῦν νὰ συγκριθοῦν, εἶναι πάντοτε πράγματα τὰ ὅποια μποροῦν νὰ πραγματοποιηθοῦν ταυτόχρονα. Κάτι δηλαδή τὸ ὁποῖο ἀποκλείεται ἐξ ὁρισμοῦ στὴν περίπτωση ἀντιθέτων, καὶ ἄρα ἀσυμβίβαστων, ἐνδεχομένων.

Κωνσταντῖνος ΑΝΤΩΝΟΠΟΥΛΟΣ

