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The Apostrophe of Difference:  
The Supplement of the Copula in Western Metaphysics

Abstract: The apostrophe is 1) a diacritical mark denoting the elision of a letter or letters in the surface form of words; or 2) a rhetorical trope describing the turning away of a writer or speaker toward an absent audience, often the gods or the dead. In English, the apostrophe marks the deletion of a vowel in statements employing the copular verb, 'is,' and/or the negative particle, 'not,' which predicate the existence or non-existence of beings in phrases like 'What's' or 'What isn't (x).' The appearance of the apostrophe in predications of existence or non-existence suggests that apostrophization accompanies the waning or attrition of the strong existential sense of the verb, 'to be, to exist,' in Western Indo-European languages. This essay traces the etymology of the copular verb to the Proto-Indo-European verb-stem, \*es- or \*as- (\*h[1]es-) (Sanskrit *asti*, Greek εστι, German *ist*, English 'is,' etc.), and follows its appearance in metaphysical statements from Parmenides' εστι γαρ ειναι and Aristotle's το τι εν ειναι to Heidegger's *Es ist das Sein*, to consider whether the critique of these statements as simply meaningless is accurate, or whether it is a symptom of the turning away from the strong existential sense of B/being in Western philosophy.

i

I will speak, therefore, of a word. Of the simplest of words, and the most significant. I will speak of the word, 'is'---that is, the 3<sup>rd</sup>-person present singular indicative of the Western Indo-European verb, 'to be, to exist': Sanskrit *asti*, Greek εστι, German *ist*, English 'is.'<sup>1</sup> Which, like the Greek words, ειναι, ον, οντα, in Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, or the German words, *Sein*, *Seiende*, *Seienden*, in Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time*, or the English words, 'Being,' 'being,' 'beings'---that is, the substantive nominalized derivatives of the 3<sup>rd</sup>-person present singular indicative of the Western Indo-European verb, 'to be, to exist'---carries a proliferating surplus of significations which are crucial to the simplest sentences. And to the most sophisticated philosophical statements.<sup>2</sup> But which can be eliminated altogether from what are

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<sup>1</sup> Strong evidence that the Western European languages were derived from a Proto-Indo-European ab-original is provided by the conjugations of the copular verb, 'to be, to exist,' in the vernacular languages, viz.: Skt. *asmi, asi, asti, smas, stha, santi*; Gk. ειμι ει (εσσι) εστι εσμεν εστε εισσι; Lat. *sum es est sumus estis sunt*; Gn. *bin bist/sind ist sind seid sind*; Eng. *am are is are are are*. These surface verb-inflections are derived from the PIE verb-stem \*es- or \*as- (\*h[1]es-) (\*h[1]es-mi, \*h[1]es-i, \*h[1]es-ti, \*h[1]s-mos, \*h[1]s-te, \*h[1]s-enti), as supplemented by \*b[h]uH, 'to become, to grow,' the source of Gn. *bin, bist*, and Eng. *be, been*, and \*h[2]wes, 'to exist, to live,' the source of Gn. *wesen* and Eng. *was*.

<sup>2</sup> Philosophical usage of the Western Indo-European verb, 'to be, to exist,' was called into question by 'The Frege-Russell Ambiguity Thesis,' which distinguishes four different senses of verb, 'is': the 'is' of existence, of identity, of predication, and of class membership or subsumption. See Russell, *The Principles of Mathematics*, Sec. 64, n. 2,

called ‘nominal sentences’---that is, predicative sentences in which the copular verb (Skt. *asti*, Gk. *εστι*, Gn. *ist*, Eng. ‘is,’ etc.) between subject and predicate is absent---without destroying the ‘sense’ or ‘meaning’ of the de-copulated sentence or diluting the strong existential sense of ‘What *is*...’ (namely: B/being). Or which, in other cases, can be replaced by a simple diacritical mark---*the apostrophe*---that denotes what is absent or missing in the surface sentence---that is, the strong existential verb, ‘to be, to exist.’ I will speak, therefore, of the simple word ‘is.’ Which, in two brief letters, carries the whole burden of the ‘meaning’ or ‘sense’ of B/being in the Western metaphysical languages. But which scarcely exists, and is often not spoken or written except as the meaningless sibilant: ‘s.

ii

What *is* ‘is,’ then? in simple sentences like: ‘What’s ... ?’ ‘That’s ... !’ or ‘It’s ...,’ in which the subject and predicate are empty signifiers or zero morphemes and the copular verb is abbreviated or elided?<sup>3</sup> Is it the same ‘is’ which appears in statements like: ‘God is Being,’ ‘Being is,’ or ‘Non-being is not’? In which the existence or non-existence of a being or existent is predicated, and, sometimes, negated, by the strong existential sense of the copular verb, without further predications or truth-claims?<sup>4</sup> It could be argued, for example, by Rudolf Carnap in “The Elimination of Metaphysics Through Logical Analysis of Language,” that statements of this type (e.g., ‘God is Being’ or ‘Being is’) are simply meaningless: 1) because the copular verb cannot be used without a predicate, 2) because the word, ‘Being,’ is not a real predicate, and 3) because the copular verb, ‘to be, to exist,’ is insufficient, of itself, to establish the existence of a subject or object. For Carnap, Rene Descartes’ notorious statement, “I think, therefore I am” (*Cogito, ergo sum*), is meaningless on the same grounds, because “this sentence violates the [ ... ] logical rule that existence can be predicated only in conjunction with a predicate, not in conjunction with

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64. This essay argues that the existential sense of the verb is primary, since it establishes ‘the brute fact’ of the existence of a being or existent, and that the copular, predicative, and subsumptive senses of the verb are derivative of the strong existential statement. It should also be noted that the term, ‘predicative,’ as employed here, has two senses, as employed 1) to predicate the existence or non-existence of a being or existent; or 2) to predicate qualities or characteristics of a being or existent.

<sup>3</sup> These statements describe the experience of apprehending beings or existents and making an apophantic statement about them. Walking down the street, for example, I perceive a brown shape, and I say: ‘What’s that?’ I perceive the brown shape as a dog, and I say ‘That’s a dog!’ And I add: ‘It’s a brown dog...’ and so on. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger argues that “[w]hen entities within-the-world [*innerweltliches Seienden*] are discovered along with the Being of *Dasein* [*dem Sein des Dasein*] [ ... ] that which is understood, taken strictly, is not the meaning [*Sinn*] but the entity [*das Seiende*], or alternatively Being” [*das Sein*]. “In every understanding of the world, existence [*Existenz*] is understood with it”; and this hermeneutical pre-understanding is the basis of an assertion about the existence or non-existence of beings or existents. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, Sec. 32-33, 192-93/151, 194/152, 196-97/154-55

<sup>4</sup> In the Western onto-theo-logical tradition, ‘Being’ and ‘God’ are frequently taken as coterminous expressions, based upon Aristotle’s description of ‘God’ as ‘the supreme being’ (*Metaphysics*, Bk. XII, 1072b, 1074a), and resulting in the Scholastic theology in which ‘God is Being itself’ (*Deus est ipsum esse*; St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I.q.11.a.4.3). Aquinas (*Summa Theologica*, I.q.2.a.1.3) and Immanuel Kant (*Critique of Pure Reason*, A592/B620-A602/B630), however, argue that the Western Indo-European verb for ‘to be, to exist,’ is not a real predicate, and cannot be applied to predicate the existence of a specific deity or a specific being. See Llano, “The Different Meanings of ‘Being,’” 36. But in “Categories of Thought and Language,” Benveniste observes that “[w]ithout being a predicate itself, ‘being’ is the condition of all predicates” (61); and in *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, Heidegger argues that ‘B/being’ is not a real, but a metaphysical predicate which designates what is ‘beyond being(s)’: that is, ‘Being itself.’ See Caputo, *Heidegger and Aquinas*, 64-67.

a name (subject, proper name).”<sup>5</sup> Further, in statements of the type, ‘God is Being’ or ‘Being is,’ Carnap argues, “the word ‘God’ [or ‘Being’?] refers to something beyond experience”; as a transcendental subject, a proper noun or a proper name, it is ‘metaphysical’ or ‘theological,’ and hence also meaningless by analytic criteria.<sup>6</sup> As are all ‘metaphysical’ or ‘theological’ statements, under the basic rule that “a sentence can be used only to assert an empirical proposition”---that is, a proposition about the existence or non-existence of beings or existents which is subject to empirical verification---but not a proposition about the existence or non-existence of ‘God’ or ‘Being.’ “If something were to lie, in principle,” Carnap argues, “beyond possible experience, it could neither be said nor thought nor asked.”<sup>7</sup> It would exist, therefore, in the sphere of what Ludwig Wittgenstein, in the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, calls the “inexpressible” or “unspeakable” (*Unausprechliches*), and hence would fall under the Wittgensteinian prohibition: “Whereof we cannot speak, thereof we must keep silent.”<sup>8</sup>

iii

But in Heidegger’s texts, statements of the type, ‘Being is,’ or ‘It gives Being’ (*Das Sein ist* or *Es gibt das Sein*), are privileged statements, precisely because they assert, by the strong existential sense of the German verbs, ‘to be’ or ‘to give’ (*sein, geben*), the simple fact of *the existence of existence itself*, without the necessity of a specific subject or further predications. In these strong existential statements, what Charles Kahn calls the “predicative” and “veridical” senses of the Western Indo-European verb, ‘to be, to exist,’ (PIE \*es- or \*as- (\*h[1]es-), Skt. *asti*, Gk. εστι, Gn. *Ist*, Eng. ‘is,’ etc.) are absent or suppressed,<sup>9</sup> and the strong existential sense is asserted in a proposition that establishes a self-reflexive hermeneutic circle between the 3<sup>rd</sup>-person present singular indicative of the Western Indo-European verb (Gk. εστι, Gn. *Ist*, Eng. ‘is’) and its substantive infinitival or participial derivatives denoting ‘the existence of existence’ (Gk. ειναι, Gn. *Sein*, Eng. ‘Being’), which complement or supplement each other to complete the self-confirming statement: ‘Being is’ or ‘Existence exists’ (Gk. εστι γαρ ειναι, Gn. *Es ist das Sein*). In Western metaphysics, this simple self-reflexive coupling of the substantive nominalized subject and the strong existential verb results in such cryptic propositions as Parmenides’ aphorism, εστι γαρ ειναι (‘Being wholly exists’), or Heidegger’s statements, *Das Sein ist* or *Es gibt das Sein* (‘Being is’ or ‘It gives Being’). Which, as Heidegger admits, in “The Grammar and Etymology of the Word ‘Being,’” may be among the most profound statements of Western metaphysics. Or among the emptiest.<sup>10</sup> Depending, that is, upon the strong existential sense of the 3<sup>rd</sup>-person present indicative of the copular verb, ‘to be, to exist’ in the Western Indo-European languages. Which asserts the basic truth(s) of Western metaphysics: that ‘There is something and not rather nothing.’ That ‘Existence exists and non-existence does not.’ That

<sup>5</sup> Carnap, “The Elimination of Metaphysics Through Logical Analysis,” 74.

<sup>6</sup> Carnap, “The Elimination of Metaphysics,” 66.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

<sup>8</sup> Wittgenstein *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, Sec. 6.522, 7, 157.

<sup>9</sup> Kahn, “The Greek Verb ‘To Be,’” 252-53. Reprinted in *Essays in Being*, 24-25. Kahn argues that the distinction between the strong existential and predicative senses of the copular verb, ‘is’ (Gk. ειναι, εστι) is largely irrelevant to Classic Greek usage, and that what he calls ‘the veridical sense’---that is, the use of the Greek verb to assert ‘What is the case, what is true’---is primary. Cf. also “On the Terminology for Copula and Existence,” *Essays in Being*, 41-61. But in retrospect. Kahn also argues that the copular usage is primary, and the veridical use is derived from or fused with the copular. See “Retrospect on the Verb ‘To Be’ and the Concept of Being,” 3.

<sup>10</sup> Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, 42-3, *Einfuehrung in die Metaphysik*, 30-31.

‘Being is and Non-Being is not.’ Which is why Heidegger argues that the basic fact of *Dasein*’s existence is not the metaphysical description, ‘What (it) is’ (its *Was-Sein*); but the existential ascription, ‘That (it) is’ (its *Das-Sein*), that asserts what Robert Nozick calls “the brute fact” of (a) B/beings existence, and preexists any predications or truth-claims that might be made of it.<sup>11</sup> But as Heidegger further argues in “The Statement of Identity,” there is really no simple self-reflexive copula, no perfect expression of identity or equivalence (A=A), which is not cleft by the fracture or fissure of non-identity and difference that obtrudes even between one letter and another (between A and A’, say),<sup>12</sup> as it also opens a chasm or abyss between ‘Being’ (*das Sein*) and ‘being(s)’ (*das Seiende, die Seienden*), to establish the second brute fact of *Dasein*’s or *das-Sein*’s existence: namely, the existence of what Heidegger calls ‘the ontological difference the difference between Being and being(s)’ (*die Unterschied des Seins zum Seienden*). And so if these simple sentences are self-confirming statements or self-reflexive tautologies, they are also what Nozick calls “self-subsuming statements,”<sup>13</sup> which, like G.W.F. Hegel’s speculative proposition, only establish their self-identity by subsuming their self-difference within themselves, and only predicate their ‘sense’ or ‘meaning’ at the constant risk of nonsense and absurdity.<sup>14</sup> As becomes obvious when they are compared with statements like: ‘The tree trees,’ or: ‘The rock rocks!’ (But what about: ‘The rain rains?’ Which can also be said: ‘It’s raining.’)<sup>15</sup> Which are also self-confirming statements. Even arguably true statements. But which are probably meaningless and absurd statements, nonetheless. Or, to put it differently: They are strong existential statements which, in asserting the equivalence or identity between ‘Being’/‘being’/‘beings’ as substantive nominative terms, and ‘to be, to exist,’ as an (in)transitive verb, also dis-close or dis-conceal the fissure or rift of non-identity and difference between ‘Being’ as a metaphysical entity, and ‘beings’ as existent persons, places, or things, which exists even within the perfectly seamless and unbroken self-identity and self-presence of ‘Being itself’ (*das Sein selbst*) or ‘Being as such’ (*das Sein als solches*). Because, as Heidegger observes in “Kant’s Theses About Being”: ‘If Being (*das Sein*) is *not!* the Being of beings (*das Sein des Seienden*), still, Being (*das Sein*) is *nothing but!* the Being of beings (*das Sein des Seienden*).’<sup>16</sup> But this observation does not change ‘the brute fact’ of *Dasein*’s existence as (a) Being-in-the world’ (*In-der-Welt sein*): that ‘Being is’ (*Das Sein ist*). Or, that ‘There is namely Being.’ (*Ist namlich das Sein*).

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<sup>11</sup> Nozick, “Why Is There Something Rather Than Nothing?” 117. The question, “*Pourquoi il y a plutôt quelque chose que rien?*” was first posed by Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, who pinpointed the basic problem behind all ontological arguments about the existence of ‘God’ or ‘Being’---that is, the problem of the predication of the existence of existence itself. See “*Principes de la nature et de la grace*,” 727. Cf. Heidegger, “What is Metaphysics?” 96, and “Metaphysics as History of Being,” 49-54. See also Heidegger, “The Fundamental Question of Metaphysics,” in *Introduction to Metaphysics*, 22-35; and Caputo, *The Mystical Element in Heidegger’s Thought*, 40. The question, ‘Why is there something and not rather nothing?’ is perhaps unanswerable or can only be answered: ‘Just because there is!’ Or, better: ‘Because unless there is (a) something or (a) nothing that exists, it would be impossible to pose this question!’

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Heidegger, “The Principle of Identity,” 23-41; 24-5; “*Der Satz der Identität*,” 33-50.

<sup>13</sup> Nozick, “Why Is There Something Rather Than Nothing?” 119-121.

<sup>14</sup> Hegel, *Phenomenology*, 38/59.

<sup>15</sup> Based upon these statements, it might be argued that statements can be formed from the nominalization of verbs and not from the verbalization of nouns. But that observation would not settle the question “whether the primordial form of the word is the noun (substantive) or the verb” raised by Heidegger in “The Grammar and Etymology of the Word ‘Being,’ although dismissed as “a pseudo-question.” *Introduction to Metaphysics*, 59, 60.

<sup>16</sup> Heidegger, “Kant’s Theses about Being,” 362 (translation altered, emphasis added); “*Kants Theses Ueber Das Sein*,” 479.

The statement, ‘Being is’ (Parmenides’ εστι γαρ ειναι, Heidegger’s *Das Sein ist*), then, belongs to a strictly restricted category of statements which could be considered self-evident, because the subject of the sentence (Gk. ειναι. Gn. *Sein*, Eng. ‘Being’) is the substantive nominalized infinitival or participial derivative of the 3<sup>rd</sup>-person present indicative of the Western Indo-European verb, ‘to be, to exist’ (Gk. εστι, Gn. *ist*, Eng. ‘is’), while the predicate is the 3<sup>rd</sup>-person present indicative verb itself. Which semantic equivalence between cognate terms, established through syntactic transformation, therefore also establishes agreement between subject and predicate without further predications or truth-claims. As Heidegger observed in his last recorded public lecture, “The Zähringen Seminar,” Parmenides’ aphorism, εστι γαρ ειναι, ‘Being wholly exists,’ or, ‘To be really is,’ “doesn’t name the same thing twice” (as does, say, ‘Being is Being’) and therefore become subject to the charge of self-circularity, superfluity, or redundancy. Instead, “[i]t says the Same only once; and indeed [it says] the Same itself,” because the subject (Gk. ειναι) and the verb (Gk. εστι) both designate or signify the *action* or *event*, the *verb-ing* of ‘being’ or ‘existing,’ so that, in speaking of Being, ‘the Same’ is said differently by the cognate variants of the Western Indo-European verb, ‘to be. to exist.’<sup>17</sup> It could still be argued that in this simple sentence, the copular function of the 3<sup>rd</sup>-person present indicative verb is simply a self-reflexive doubling of the substantive nominalized subject, and only confirms this statement as a self-referential circular proposition---that is, a tautology. Which is to say: A superfluity. A redundancy. A sentence without ‘sense’ or ‘meaning.’ A repetition of empty words. Signifying nothing. And, after all: We wouldn’t say that self-confirming statements, like ‘The world worlds’ or ‘The thing things,’ are profound truths, would we? Although they appear as self-evident statements in Heidegger’s metaphysical texts.<sup>18</sup> ---But aren’t tautologies also logically true propositions? Whose self-referential structure and self-confirming logic make them indisputable? Didn’t Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus* prove that “the propositions of logic are all tautologies”?<sup>19</sup> And as Heidegger observes in “Kant’s Theses About Being,” if these strong existential statements (Parmenides’ εστι γαρ ειναι, Heidegger’s *Es ist das Sein*) can be considered tautologies; they are “tautologic in the highest sense, which [signifies], not nothing, but everything.”<sup>20</sup> And in his remarks to students after “The Zähringen Seminar,” Heidegger is reported to have said that “the thinking which is called for” in the most rigorous philosophical thinking “I call tautological thinking. It is the originary sense of phenomenology.” Describing his phenomenological method, Heidegger continued: “This phenomenology is a phenomenology of the invisible or the unapparent (*Unscheinbare*).”<sup>21</sup> Which denotes or signifies what is otherwise *in-expressible* and *un-speakable*, *un-representable* and *im-presentable* in Western metaphysical languages. Except, precisely, by these self-confirming existential statements. These self-referential tautologies. Which, by saying nothing, say everything.

<sup>17</sup> Heidegger, “Seminar in Zähringen,” 79, 95 (translation altered); *Vier Seminare*, 399.

<sup>18</sup> “*Die Welt weltet.*” Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” 23; “*Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes,*” 30. “*Das Ding dingt.*” Heidegger, “The Thing,” 172; “*Das Ding,*” 175.

<sup>19</sup> Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, 6.1, 125.

<sup>20</sup> Heidegger, “Kant’s Theses about Being,” 362 (translation altered); “*Kants Theses Ueber Das Sein,*” 479.

<sup>21</sup> Heidegger, “Seminar in Zähringen,” 80 (translation altered); *Vier Seminare*, 399.

It could also be argued that in these strong existential statements, the Western European cognates of the Proto-Indo European verb-stem, \**es-* or \**as-* (\**h[1]es-*), exercise their full semantic force by placing the strong existential sense of the verb, ‘to be, to exist,’ as a morpheme, above its merely syntactic function as a copula, and affirming the existence of (a) something or (a) nothing which simply *must* exist if existential statements are to have ‘meaning’ and ‘sense’ at all. Because, as Heidegger’s *Being and Time* argues: ‘There is no statement about Being or beings that does not presuppose the existence of Being.’<sup>22</sup> But as Jacques Derrida points out in “The Supplement of the Copula,” citing Émile Benveniste, in these simple tautological statements, there is also always already a splitting of the semantic and the syntactic, the grammatical and the lexical functions, which reduces the copular verb to a mere syntactic marker and negates its grammatical meaning as an (in)transitive verb signifying the *action* or *event*, the *verb-ing* of being or existing. And in certain languages, like Hungarian and Russian, the copular verb can be omitted altogether (or, in Russian, signified simply by a pause, a silence: as: . . . ) in predicative sentences, as if it were *nothing but* an empty syntactic marker or a mere lexical convenience.<sup>23</sup> As, for example, in the Russian sentence: “*Ya —amerikanskaya studentka*,” the copular verb is simply absent, replaced by an em-dash; while, in American English sentences, like ‘What’s . . . ?’ ‘That’s . . . !’ or ‘It’s . . . ,’ which might be considered to have a purely deictic or indicative function, a diacritical mark---the apostrophe---indicates the absent presence of the strong existential sense of the copular verb, which has otherwise declined or atrophied in the surface sentence. Except for the vestigial remnant of the sibilant consonant: ‘s . . . Yet these de-copulated sentences, in which the copula is omitted or deleted and the verb, ‘to be, to exist,’ is completely absent, can, Benveniste points out in his discussion of “The Nominal Sentence,” carry what he calls an “assertive” quality that makes them essentially equivalent to strong existential statements, as affirmations---or, sometimes, negations---of the eternal truth of existence: that ‘Being is,’ that ‘Existence exists.’ As, for example, in these questions and answers from Pindar’s *Pythian Odes*: *τι δε τις; τι δε ου τις; σχιας οναρ ανθρωπος*: “What is he? What is he not? Man is the dream of a shadow.” (Or, literally: “What but he? What but not he? Shadow dream man.”)<sup>24</sup> Or in Aristotle’s enigmatic question from the *Metaphysics*: *τι το ον*: “What is being?” (Literally: “What the being?”)<sup>25</sup> In these cryptic sentences, no slight shadow of the verb, ‘to be, to exist’ appears. And yet their assertive or anaphoristic quality as existential questions is clear to the reader or listener. “We must restore its full force and its authentic function to the [Western Indo-European] verb, ‘to be,’” Benveniste argues, “in order to measure the distance between a nominal assertion and an assertion with ‘to be,’” when, in the nominal sentence, the copular verb is wholly absent or missing, and yet is supplied by the speaker and the listener, the writer and the

<sup>22</sup> This is a brief paraphrase of Heidegger’s argument in *Being and Time*, Sec. 43, 246-256; *Sein und Zeit*, 202-212. In *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, Heidegger’s also argues against Kant’s refutation of the ontological proof for the existence of an external world in *The Critique of Pure Reason* (A592/B620-A602/B630). See also Heidegger, “The Comprehension of Being and the *Dasein* in Man,” 233-238.

<sup>23</sup> Derrida, “The Supplement of the Copula,” 202-03. “The nominal sentence exists not only in Indo-European, in Semitic, in Finno-Ugric, and in Bantu, but also in the most diverse languages: Sumerian, Egyptian, Caucasian, Altaic, Dravidian, Indonesian, Siberian, Amerindian, etc.” Benveniste, “The Nominal Sentence,” 131-32, also cited in Derrida, op. cit., 202. But the question is whether the (absent) copular verb plays the same semantic role or syntactic function in these diverse languages and whether the copular verb still carries the strong existential sense of ‘to be, to exist.’

<sup>24</sup> Benveniste, “The Nominal Sentence,” 140.

<sup>25</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Bk. VII, 1028c. But for Aristotle, the question, ‘What is being qua being?’ (*τι το ον*) translates into the question: ‘What is substance?’ (*τις η ουσια*). Aristotle thus inaugurates the substantialization or hypostatization of Being/being characteristic of Western metaphysics.

reader, as if it were still somehow mysteriously present, and still carried an assertive force equal to or greater than the strong existential verb itself. “[H]ow does it happen,” Benveniste asks, “that the verb of existence has this privilege of being present in an utterance in which it does not appear?”<sup>26</sup> Or, more properly, in which it appears only in its absence, as a complement or supplement to the superficial sentence, which is presupposed by the writer or speaker, and which is supplied by the speaker or listener, but which has disappeared completely from the surface sentence?

v

In “The Nominal Sentence,” Benveniste further argues that the strong existential sense and the copular function of the verb, ‘to be, to exist,’ are substantially distinct, because, in many languages, the nominal sentence can appear complete without the copular verb, and without the vestigial presence of the strong existential verb, ‘to be, to exist.’ In the absence of the copular verb, it might be argued that the strong existential sense of the Western Indo-European verb, ‘to be, to exist,’ is also simply absent from the statement or proposition, which neither affirms nor denies the existence of the beings or things it signifies or designates. If, in fact, it signifies or designates anything at all. Except, perhaps, the existence of existence itself. And so it might be asked: Does this gradual atrophying or disappearance of the strong existential sense of the Western Indo-European verb, ‘to be, to exist,’ in the contemporary vernacular languages---especially English---symptomize what Heidegger calls ‘the forgetting of being’ (*die Seinsvergessenheit*) in Western metaphysical languages? Does it signify or designate a waning or attrition of being? Something absent or missing in contemporary existence? Or does it, as Heidegger elsewhere argues, contrarily or not, instead stand out as the *trace* or *mark* whereby the ontological difference between Being and beings is inscribed in Western metaphysical languages?<sup>27</sup> Should the critical linguist or the etymological scholar give in to “the temptation,” evident in Benveniste’s essays and in Heidegger’s metaphysics, and described by Derrida in “The Supplement of the Copula,” “to consider the growing predominance of the formal [syntactic] function of the copula,” and the eventual disappearance of the strong existential verb itself, “as a process of *falling*: an abstraction, degradation, or emptying of the semantic plenitude of the lexeme, ‘to be,’ [ ... ] even if one considers it to be [a] structurally necessary,” and, therefore, a virtually inevitable process?<sup>28</sup> Should the contemporary metaphysician follow Heidegger’s “The Grammar and Etymology of the Word ‘Being’” in arguing that the conjugation or declension of verbs in Western European languages like German or Greek, from their aboriginal stems in the 3<sup>rd</sup>-person present indicative conjugation (\*PIE \*-es or \*-as, Gk. εστι, Gn. ist, Eng. ‘is,’ etc.) to their substantive, infinitive, and participial cognates (e.g., in Greek, from εστι to ειναι, εον, εσσια/ουσια, to ον, οντα, etc.; in German, from ist to sein, to Sein, Seiende, Seienden, seiend, etc.), and the correlative waning or attrition of the strong existential sense of the verb, ‘to be, to exist,’ is itself a symptom or sign of their decline and fall from the pristine self- presence and primordial plenitude of a Proto-Indo-European original (the \*PIE \*-as or \*-es

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<sup>26</sup> Benveniste, “The Nominal Sentence,” 131-132.

<sup>27</sup> Heidegger, “The Anaximander Fragment,” 51; “Anaximander’s Saying,” 275; “*Der Spruch des Anaximanders*,” 365.

<sup>28</sup> Derrida, “Supplement of the Copula,” 203. On the ‘degeneration’ of the existential sense of B/being in the Western metaphysical languages, see also Heidegger, “The Fundamental Question of Metaphysics” in *Introduction to Metaphysics*, 54.

[\*h[1]es-])?<sup>29</sup> A primitive, ab-original verb-stem that carried a plethora of meaning(s), from which the strong existential sense of the Western Indo-European verb, ‘to be, to exist,’ is derived, but which is now missing from the contemporary language? Or can the 3<sup>rd</sup>-person present indicative of the copular verb, whether in presence or absence, still serve to designate or refer to what is otherwise in-expressible and un-speakable, un-representable or im-presentable, within the Western metaphysical language(s)? And thus to signify what, in Heidegger’s terms, remains unthought (*ungedachte*) within the text of Western metaphysics? What appears only by disappearing? What is present only in absence? What exists only by not existing? What ‘is’ only ‘is’ *not*? That is: the ontological difference between Being and beings?

vi

But in the Western Indo-European languages, the substantive, nominalized cognates of the Proto-Indo-European verb stem, PIE \*es- or \*as- (\*h[1]es-) (Skt. *sat, sati, asivah, asusi, bhavitum*, etc.; Gk. εσσα/ουσα, εον, εοντα, ειναι; Gn. *das Seiende, die Seienden, das Sein; sein*; Eng. ‘Being,’ ‘being,’ ‘beings,’ ‘to be,’ etc.), would appear to have been contemporary with the Western Indo-European verb(s), ‘to be, to exist’ themselves. And it would also appear that the Western Indo-European verbs (Skt. *asti*, Gk. εστι, Lat. *est*, Gn. *ist*, Eng. ‘is,’ etc.), even in their earliest forms, had already given rise to quasi-infinitives, or, otherwise, abstract, substantive nouns (Skt. *sat* and *nasat*, Gk. ειναι and με ειναι, Lat. *esse* and *non esse*, Gn. *Sein* and *Nicht-Sein*, Eng. ‘Being’ and ‘Non-Being,’ etc.), through which ‘being’ and ‘non-being,’ ‘existence’ and ‘non-existence,’ could be predicated in simple sentences in which the substantive noun and the strong existential verb are declensions or conjugations of each other. ---But which came first? The noun or the verb? Is the Proto-Indo-European verb-stem \*es- or \*as- (\*h[1]es-) somehow the primal word? The master-word? The *Ur-Wort*? From which the Western metaphysical ‘thinking of Being’ is derived? Or is that privileged signifier, that transcendental signified, as a cursory reading of Heidegger’s texts might suggest, actually the metaphysical or theological term, the substantive, abstract noun, ‘Being’ itself? (Skt. *sat*, Gk. ειναι, Lat. *esse*, Gn. *Sein*, etc.) ---The answer to these scarcely rhetorical or leading questions, of course, depends upon whether the PIE verb, \*es- or \*as- (\*h[1]es-), is considered the primitive, ab-original root-word, the primordial verb-stem, preexisting the abstract, substantive nouns derived from it, which is probably the consensus of contemporary PIE linguists.<sup>30</sup> Or whether the substantive nouns and their nominal variants (the privatives, for example) may not actually be equi-primordial with the PIE language itself. As, for example, in the phrases: *nasad asin no sad asit* (*Rig Veda*, Book 10,

<sup>29</sup> Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, 56-79. See also Fried, “What’s in a Word?,” 129. In linguistic terms, verbs ‘conjugate’ while nouns ‘decline,’ which also perhaps suggests that the transformation of a ‘strong,’ ‘active’ verb into a substantive noun is a process of decline.

<sup>30</sup> In the Western Indo-European languages, there is a divergence between the 3<sup>rd</sup>-person present singular indicative of the verb-stem (PIE “-es or \*-as: Skt. *asti*, Gk. εστι, Gn. *ist*, Eng. ‘is,’ etc.) and the participial (Skt. *sat*, Gk. εσσα/ουσα, Gn. *seined(e)*, Eng. ‘being,’ etc.) and infinitival forms (Skt. *bhavitum*, Gk. ειναι, Gn. *sein*, Eng. ‘to be,’ etc.). Contemporary linguists argue that PIE verbs didn’t have true infinitives, but only ‘quasi-infinitives’ derived from extinct nominative case-forms, which functioned as substantive nouns. Others, like Benjamin Fortson (personal communication), argue that, in certain cases, like that of the PIE root, \*dhyer- (‘to harm by trickery or deception’), the PIE verb did have a true infinitive, which may or may not have been transmitted to the daughter language. Whether, in Parmenides’ aphorism, εστι γαρ ειναι, the Greek infinitive, ειναι, serves as a nominalized verb, which retains traces of its origins, or functions as a substantive noun, disconnected from its verbal roots, is Heidegger’s question.

Hymn #129, *Nasadiya*, or, Creation Hymn); εἶναι γὰρ ἐστὶ, οὐκ ἐστὶ με εἶναι (Parmenides, *The Way of Truth*); “*Es gibt Sein. Sein kann nicht sein*” (Heidegger, “Kant’s Theses About Being”). All of which can be roughly translated by the simple phrase, ‘Being is, non-being is not,’ or by variants thereof. Except that, as Heidegger’s phrasing subtly points out, there is still a chasm or gap of ontological (in)difference between the substantive noun-form of the infinitive verb and the 3<sup>rd</sup>-person singular verb from which it is ostensibly derived. In these simple sentences, the substantive noun-form of the Western Indo-European verb, ‘to be. to exist,’ displaces the verb itself, and becomes *substantialized* and *hypostasized* as a metaphysical substance or a metaphysical presence set apart from the *happening* or *event*, the *verb-ing*, of B/being, while the strong existential verb, which signifies or refers to the *process* or *action* of being or existing, becomes of secondary importance to the metaphysical existence of Being and Non-Being. At the same time, it could also be observed that the abstract, substantive noun (for example, the Greek verb/noun, εἶναι) or, perhaps, its cognate variants (the Greek participles, [ε]ὼν [ε]ὄντα, ἐσσία/ουσία, etc.), still preserve within themselves a *trace* or *mark* of their verbal origins as an *action* or *event*---the *verb-ing* of [the] ‘giving’ or ‘having’ [of] B/being---which is not completely elided or suppressed by its transformation into a substantive noun or participial adjective: that is, into (a) being. In “The Anaximander Fragment,” for example, Heidegger interprets a fragmentary sentence from the Pre-Socratic Greek philosopher to describe the Early Greek thinking of ‘the B/being of being(s)’ (Anaximander’s τὸ ὄν or τοῖς οὐσι, Parmenides’ τὸ εἶν or τὰ εἶντα, Aristotle’s τὸ ὄν or τὰ ὄντα, etc.) as a continuous process of ‘coming-to-presence’ (*An-wesen*) and ‘passing-away-from-presence’ (*Ab-wesen*) which has not yet been substantialized and hypostasized as the eternal presence or eternal present of beings as objects or things seen in *re-present-ation*, as in subsequent Western metaphysics.<sup>31</sup> But to support this somewhat strained, esoteric interpretation of Anaximander’s fragmentary sentence, Heidegger must also argue, in an extended etymological and grammatical digression, that Anaximander’s τὸ ὄν and τοῖς οὐσι, like Parmenides’ τὸ εἶν and τὰ εἶντα, are really *not* equivalent to, or simple dialectal variants of, Aristotle’s τὸ ὄν and τὰ ὄντα, since the earlier words (εἶντα, εἶν) are etymologically derived from the 3<sup>rd</sup>-person present indicative Greek verb, ἐστὶ; and “[t]he epsilon in εἶν and εἶντα is the epsilon in the root ἐσ- of ἐστὶν, *est, esse, and ist,*”<sup>32</sup> which indicates its absent presence by the single vestigial letter: ‘ε’. By contrast, Heidegger argues, “ὄν and ὄντα appear as rootless participial endings,” which are only subsequently substantivized and nominalized as subjects or nouns to denote ‘beings’ (Gn. *Seiende[n]*) or ‘being-ness’ (Gn. *Seiendheit*) in the abstract, predicative, or categorical sense. “Thus ὄν says ‘being’ [*seiend*] in the [verbal] sense of ‘to be’ a being [*ein Seiendes*], at the same time [as] it names ‘a being’ [*ein Seienden*] which ‘is’ [*das ist*] [ . . . ]. In the duality of the participial significance of ὄν, the distinction between ‘to be’ [*seiend*] and ‘a being’ [*Seienden*] lies concealed. What is here set forth,” Heidegger concludes, “is in fact the riddle of Being (*die Ratsel des Seins*)”: that is, the mystery of ‘Being itself’ (*das Sein selbst*) or ‘Being as such’ (*das Sein als solches*).<sup>33</sup> Anaximander’s ἐστὶ, like Parmenides’ ἐστὶ, Heidegger argues, “does not mean the ‘is’ which is the copula of a proposition”---for example, the ‘is’ of an Aristotelian syllogism: ‘Socrates is a man. All men are mortal. Therefore Socrates is mortal’---in which the

<sup>31</sup> Heidegger, “The Anaximander Fragment,” 30-31; “Anaximander’s Saying,” 257-258; “*Der Spruch des Anaximanders*,” 364. Translation slightly altered.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*, 32/259; 344.

<sup>33</sup> *Op. cit.*, 33/259; 344.

copular verb is employed simply to predicate characteristics or attributes of a being or existent. Instead, “[i]t names εὐν, the presencing of what is present” (*das Anwesend des Anwesenden*), in a strong existential statement that intimately speaks to the whole Pre-Socratic Greek thinking of Being. In a strong existential statement like Parmenides’ εἶναι γὰρ ἐστὶ, Heidegger argues, “[t]he ἐστὶν corresponds to the pure claim of Being,”<sup>34</sup> as a reference to the *event* or *happening* of being or existing, which is characteristic of the Early Greek thinking of Being before the waning or decline of the Pre-Socratic feeling for the strong existential sense of Being resulted in the conjugation or declension of the Greek verb, ἐστὶν, into a substantive noun or a verbal participle (Doric Greek ἐσσῖα, Classic Greek: οὐσῖα; Archaic Greek εὐν, Classic Greek ον, οντα etc.), which transforms ‘the presencing of what is present’ (*das Anwesend des Anwesenden*), into a metaphysical substance (οὐσῖα) or a metaphysical presence (παρ-οὐσῖα), abstracted from the existential-ontological experience of ‘Being-in-the-world’ (*In-der-Welt-sein*). This substantialization or hypostatization of the Early Greek thinking of Being then eventuates in the formation of the feminine participial form of the Greek verb, εἶναι, ἐστὶ, as it appears in Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*---that is, as οὐσῖα, which is commonly translated ‘substance’ or ‘essence,’ although Heidegger, in a deliberate counter-move, translates it as ‘presence’ (*Anwesen*), by comparison with the Classic Greek word, παρ-οὐσῖα (defined as ‘a being present, presence; arrival, advent’).<sup>35</sup> In *The Anaximander Fragment*, then, Heidegger discerns, behind the superficial transformations of the 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular present indicative of the Greek verb, ‘to be, to exist’ (Gk. ἐστὶ), and its substantive, nominalized, infinitival or participial forms, (Gk. εἶναι, [ε]ὐν, οὐσῖα, etc.), a profound deep-structural change in the thinking of B/being in Western metaphysics: from the Early Greek thinking of the Pre-Socratics, Anaximander and Parmenides, in which B/being still appeared in its continuous ‘coming-to-presence’ (*An-wesen*) and ‘passing-away-from presence’ (*Ab-wesen*), as a ‘presencing-of-presence’ or ‘presencing-of-(the)-present’ (*das Anwesend des Anwesenden*), to the explicitly metaphysical thinking of Plato and Aristotle, in which B/being is seen as something eternally present in *re-present-ation*---that is, as a something constantly present in its eternal present/ce, either as a Platonic idea (εἰδῶς), or as a specific *temporal hypostasis* or *entelechy* of a metaphysical substance in the Aristotelian form (μορφή)---which participates, by the Platonic *methexis* or Aristotelian *mimesis*, in ‘the supreme cosmic Being’ (Aristotle’s θεῖον). In Western metaphysics after Plato and Aristotle, Heidegger concludes, “the essence of presencing [*das Wesen des Anwesen*] and, with it, the difference between presencing [*des Anwesens*] and what is present [*zum Anwesenden*] is forgotten. *The forgetting of Being is the forgetting of the difference between Being and beings.*”<sup>36</sup> And so, with this deep structural change in the Early Greek thinking of B/being, there also occurs that forgetting or oblivion of the ontological difference between Being and being(s) that is

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<sup>34</sup> Op. cit., 39/265; 351.

<sup>35</sup> The Scholastic translation of Aristotle’s Greek οὐσῖα as Latin *substantia* created problems for Western metaphysics, not simply by promoting the substantialization or hypostatization of being or existence as a substance or a subject (υποκειμενον) which serves as a metaphysical ground for the predication of worldly existence, but also by lifting predication(s) of existence out of the temporal world and into a metaphysical realm, like the Platonic world of forms or the Aristotelian now-time. To avoid this problem, Heidegger translates οὐσῖα as ‘being’ or ‘presence.’ But Derrida argues that translating οὐσῖα as ‘presence’ only substantializes or hypostasizes ‘metaphysical presence,’ which then becomes the primary metaphysical concept to be deconstructed. Cf. “*Ousia and Gramme*,” 31, 33-34.

<sup>36</sup> Heidegger, “The Anaximander Fragment,” 50; “Anaximander’s Saying,” 275; “*Der Spruch des Anaximander*,” 364. Translation altered. See Derrida, “*Différance*,” 23-24; “*Ousia and Gramme*,” 64-67.

characteristic of Western metaphysics.<sup>37</sup> And ‘Being itself’ or ‘Being as such’ withdraws into dis-concealment (*die Un-Verborgenheit*) and disappears from the Western metaphysical languages. Or almost disappears. Except for a single cryptic letter: the initial epsilon (ε) in Parmenides’ το εον.

vii

But what, exactly, is ‘the ontological difference between Being and being(s)’? The phrase suggests something cryptic and mysterious in the metaphysical text, although its superficial meaning is clear. In Heidegger’s texts, ‘the ontological difference’ is the technical term for ‘the difference between Being and beings’ (*die Unterschied des Seins zum Seienden*): the difference, that is, between existents or essents (stones, trees, birds, beasts, human beings, etc.) in the plural (ontic) sense of ‘beings’ (*die Seienden*), and what Aristotle calls ‘being *qua* being’ (ον η ον), or what Heidegger, differing from Aristotle, calls ‘Being as such’ (*das Sein als solches*) or ‘Being itself’ (*das Sein selbst*), in its ontological singularity. For Heidegger, Western metaphysics is essentially the thinking of ‘the being of beings’ (*das Seiende die Seienden*)---whether Anaximander’s τοις ουσι, Parmenides’ τα εοντα, or Aristotle’s τα οντα---which takes ‘the being-ness of being(s)’ (*die Seiendheit des Seienden*)---that is, the quality or character of being (a) being---to be a metaphysical substance in itself, and therefore also mistakes the totality of ‘beings as a whole’ (*die Seienden im Ganzen*) to be equivalent or identical to ‘Being as such’ (*das Sein als solches*) or ‘Being itself’ (*das Sein selbst*).<sup>38</sup> In thinking ‘the Being of beings’ (*das Sein des Seienden*) as ‘the being of beings’ (*das Seiende des Seienden*) or ‘the being-ness of being(s)’ (*die Seiendheit des Seienden*), Heidegger argues, Western metaphysics forgets or obscures the ontological difference between ‘the being of beings’ or ‘the being-ness of beings’ as a singular or plural subject denoting the totality of ‘being(s)’ and/or the quality or character of ‘being-ness,’ and ‘Being’ as a singular subject, which supervenes upon or transcends ‘being-ness’ and ‘being(s).’ Western metaphysics thereby commits a philosophical version of ‘mistaking the trees for the forest,’ by mis-taking ‘the being of beings’ (*das Seiende des Seienden*) or ‘the being-ness of being(s)’ (*die Seiendheit des Seienden*) for ‘Being itself’ (*das Sein selbst*) or ‘Being as such’ (*das Sein als solches*). Similarly, Western metaphysics also forgets or obscures the critical etymological distinction between the cognate derivatives of the Proto-Indo European root, \*es- or \*as- (\*h[1]es-), in the Western Indo-European metaphysical languages, which are transformed into substantive nouns or abstract participles designating a substantialized and essentialized ‘Being’ (Gk. το ειναι or το [ε]ον; Gn. *das Sein*, Eng. ‘Being,’ etc.), and the Western Indo-European verb, ‘to be, to exist’ itself (Gk. εστι, Gn. *ist*, Eng. ‘is,’ etc.), which as a(n) (in)transitive verb, still carries an active sense of the *event* or *happening*, the

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<sup>37</sup> For a brief exposition of Heidegger’s thinking of ‘the forgetting of Being’ in Western metaphysics, see Watts, ‘The Ontological ‘Error’ of Western Philosophy,’ 13-17.

<sup>38</sup> It could be argued that Heidegger’s ‘Being’ is simply a categorical term for the open set of ‘being(s).’ which cannot be a member of its own set (‘the Being of beings’) without becoming simply a ‘being,’ but which also cannot *not* be a member of its own set without ceasing to exist as ‘(a) B/being.’ By this argument, Heidegger’s thinking falls prey to Russell’s Paradox; and ‘Being’ becomes an empty set composed either by the exclusion of all members of the set of ‘beings,’ or by the intersection of two mutually exclusive sets, ‘Being’ and ‘beings.’ Or else the term, ‘Being,’ can be reduced to the theoretically infinite but still closed set of ‘being(s),’ in which case it is superfluous or redundant: ‘Being’ is simply the closed set of ‘being(s).’ But if the strong existential statement, ‘Being is,’ or, ‘Existence exists,’ is a proposition about ‘the existence of existence,’ then the analytic argument doesn’t reach the basic questions: What do words like ‘Being’ or ‘God’ really designate or refer to? And does ‘it’ really exist or not?

verb-ing of ‘being-in-the-world’ (*In-der-Welt-sein*), and therefore preserves the primordial apprehension of ‘Being itself’ or ‘Being as such.’ In Heidegger’s texts, this ‘forgetting of the difference between Being and being(s)’ (*die Vergessenheit des Unterschieds des Seins zum Seienden*), like ‘the oblivion of Being’ (*die Seins-vergessenheit*) itself, is crucially interlinked with the atrophying or disappearance of the strong existential sense of the Western Indo-European verb, ‘to be, to exist,’ and with its declination or conjugation into infinitival or participial forms which denote ‘the being-ness of being(s),’ like the Greek το ον or τα οντα. Or, at a further remove, into words denoting the ‘substance’ or ‘essence’ of ‘being-ness,’ like the Greek ουσια (‘substance’) or παρ-ουσια (‘presence’).<sup>39</sup> But despite Heidegger’s erudite analysis of the etymological derivation of the diverse meanings and senses of the verb, ‘to be, to exist,’ in Western Indo-European languages, and despite his elaborate descriptions of ‘the coming-to-presence’ and ‘passing-away-from-presence’ of ‘Being’ or ‘being(s)’ in Early Greek thought, the crucially important question(s): ‘What, exactly, is the Being of being(s)?’ ‘What is Being itself?’ ‘What is Being as such?’ and: ‘What is the ontological difference between Being and being(s)?’ still remain un-answered. Because Heidegger’s description of ‘the Being of beings’ (*das Sein des Seienden*) as a continuous ‘coming-to-presence’ (*An-wesen*) and ‘passing-away-from-presence’ (*Ab-wesen*), which conceals or eclipses ‘Being itself’ (*das Sein selbst*) or ‘Being as such’ (*das Sein als solches*) before it can be dis-concealed, which is forgotten before it can be remembered, and which is erased before it can be inscribed as a trace or mark within the Western metaphysical text, not only leaves unanswered the critical question: ‘What is Being itself?’ But it also fails to explain exactly why, how, and when, ‘B/being’ comes-to-presence and passes-away-from-presence in ‘being-ness’ or in ‘being(s)’ without becoming itself a ‘being.’ Instead, Heidegger’s thinking of ‘the Being of being(s)’ (*das Sein des Seienden*), his thinking of ‘the being-ness of being(s)’ (*das Seiende des Seienden*), and his thinking of ‘Being itself’ (*das Sein selbst*) or ‘Being as such’ (*das Sein als solches*), finally devolve into a schizophrenic double-bind and epistemological/ontological impasse, which asserts, simultaneously, that ‘Being’ [*das Sein*] ‘is’ *not!* ‘the Being of being(s)’ (*das Sein des Seienden*), because, then, ‘Being’ [*das Sein*] would be simply ‘a being’ (*ein Seienden*). But still, ‘Being’ [*das Sein*] ‘is’ *nothing but!* ‘the Being of being(s)’ (*des Sein zum Seienden*), because ‘Being’ [*das Sein*] can only be *de-scribed* and *re-present-ed*, in Western metaphysical languages, as ‘the being’ (*das Seiende*) or ‘the being(s)’ (*die Seienden*) which it ‘is’ *not!* And so Heidegger’s thinking of B/being, which begins as an elaborate declension and conjugation of the substantive nominalized or infinitival forms of the 3<sup>rd</sup>-person indicative verb for ‘to be, to exist’ in the Greek and German languages, finally becomes a species of *negative onto-theo-logy*, which approaches Christian theology and Greek ontology in strictly negative, deconstructive terms, but still cannot escape the circumscribed closure of the Western metaphysics of ‘substance’ and ‘presence’ it attempts to deconstruct. Except, perhaps, by asserting, that within Western metaphysics, ‘Being itself’ or ‘Being as such’ can only be *de-scribed* or *re-present-ed* as a trace or mark inscribed in the metaphysical text, which somehow gestures or points outside Western metaphysics itself. But which remains, finally, unintelligible and illegible to the critical thinker, except as a mysterious something at once dis-concealed and concealed, forgotten and remembered, inscribed and erased in the metaphysical text.<sup>40</sup> Or, in other words, as what Heidegger calls *die Un-Verborgenheit*.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>39</sup> See note 39 supra.

<sup>40</sup> Heidegger, “The Anaximander Fragment,” 51-52. Cf. Derrida, “*Différance*,” 25.

<sup>41</sup> In Early Greek thinking, Heidegger argues, truth-claims were predicated upon the ‘dis-closed-ness’ or ‘dis-concealment’ of being(s) or existents to *Dasein*. Hence Heidegger’s definition of the Greek word, αληθεια, as the

Which translates the Greek α-ληθεια as the *dis-closure* or *dis-concealment* of what's always already concealed, and as the *re-membrance* of what's always already forgotten in Western metaphysics: that is, once again, the ontological difference between Being and beings.

viii

But can the ontological difference really be said to actually *exist*? In the strong existential sense of the Western Indo-European verb, 'to be, to exist'? Or is it simply an effect of the Western metaphysical languages, which create the confused impression that mere semantic or syntactic distinctions, between, say, singular and plural nouns (*das Sein/die Seienden*, 'Being'/'beings,' etc.) or between nouns and verbs (*Sein/sein*, 'Being'/'to be,' etc.), actually exist in the metaphysical world, when they are simply distinctions or conventions within Western metaphysical language itself, which substantializes and hypostasizes 'the Being of beings' as a substantial thing or an existent being? In "The Anaximander Fragment," Heidegger evades this question by arguing that all such semantic or syntactic distinctions---between the noun (εἶναι) and verb (ἐστί) in Parmenides' εἶναι γὰρ εἶναι---are really false distinctions created by Western metaphysical language, while the Pre-Socratic Greek language refused these false distinctions by creating or inventing words (nominalized verbs or verbal nouns), like Parmenides' εἶναι, which cannot be strictly distinguished as either nouns or verbs, but which, of themselves, preserve the strong existential sense of the Western Indo-European verb, 'to be, to exist.' In "The Supplement of the Copula," however, Derrida recapitulates the frequent contention, also advanced in Benveniste's "The Linguistic Functions of 'To Be' and 'To Have,'" that the Western thinking of B/beings is simply the result of a conflation or confusion between the strong existential sense of the Western Indo-European verb, 'to be, to exist,' and its purely copular function as an empty syntactic marker denoting the equivalence between a subject and its predicates.<sup>42</sup> In "The Linguistic Function," Benveniste argues, against his own argument in "The Nominal Sentence," that these two applications of the Western Indo-European verb must be kept distinct, because, in the nominal sentence, the structure of predication does not necessarily imply the absent presence of the strong existential verb, 'to be, to exist,' even when it apparently asserts the being or existence of what is predicated, whose existence cannot be established simply by the predication of the 3<sup>rd</sup>-person singular verb in diverse languages.<sup>43</sup> In arguing with and against Benveniste, Derrida observes "the contradiction between Benveniste's two texts, or, at least, between the affirmation that the verb 'to be' does not belong to every language" and therefore is not implied by the copular or nominal sentence, "and the affirmation that the equivalence of verb phrases 'to be' is a universal phenomenon" and therefore is affirmed by the nominal sentence, even when the copular verb, 'is,' is elided or deleted from the surface sentence. "Thus it happens that the lexical absence is 'supplemented'," Derrida argues, "only by absence period, the grammatical function of 'to be' then being fulfilled by the blank of spacing, by a somehow erased punctuation, by a *pause*: an oral interruption, that is, an arrest of the voice ... that no graphic sign, in the usual sense of the word, no written plenitude could come to

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un-forgetting (α-ληθεια) of the forgetting of Being (*Seinsvergessenheit*) and as the dis-closure or dis-concealment (*Un-verborgenheit*) of what has been hidden or concealed (*verbirgt*): namely Being (*das Sein*). See Heidegger, "The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking," in *On Time and Being*, 71; *Zur Sache des Denkens*, 75, 76-77; and Inwood, *A Heidegger Dictionary*, 13.

<sup>42</sup> Benveniste, "The Linguistic Functions of 'To Be' and 'To Have,'" 163-179.

<sup>43</sup> See notes 7 and 27 supra.

mark.”<sup>44</sup> In deconstructing Benveniste’s argument in “The Linguistic Function,” Derrida is actually arguing that both the strong existential sense and the merely copular usage of the Western Indo-European verb, ‘to be, to exist.’ disguise or obscure the fact that there is no ‘meaning’ or ‘sense’ that can be attached to the Western Indo-European verb to correspond to the *event* or *happening* of being or existing, as construed by Benveniste or Heidegger. Nor is there a metaphysical presence or a metaphysical substance that could be denoted or signified by the Western Indo-European words for B/being, as construed within Western metaphysics. In Derrida’s reading, both “science” (philology or linguistics) and “philosophy” (metaphysics), in their different ways, succumb to “the authority of the ‘is’ whose possibility is to be examined” by the deconstructive critique of (the) Western metaphysical language(s),<sup>45</sup> as they also succumb to the mystique of Being which is created by the substantialization and hypostatization of the verb, ‘to be, to exist,’ in the Western metaphysical languages. They mistake the semantic differences between simple graphemes, morphemes, and lexemes, and the syntactic differences between nouns, verbs, and participles, which are built into the Western metaphysical languages, for distinctions in the fabric of existence itself. As if, as Heidegger implausibly claims, “the fate of the West hangs” upon the translation of single letters, like the epsilon (ε) of Parmenides’ εον, εοντα.<sup>46</sup>

ix

But what difference does it make? it might rightly be asked, whether we call ‘What *is* ...’ the Greek ειναι, [ε]ον, [ε]οντα, the German *Sein*, *Seiende*, *Seienden*, the English ‘Being,’ ‘being,’ or ‘beings,’ or some other equally meaningless metaphysical term? In English, as in Greek or German, the Western metaphysical terms for the various degrees or states of B/being are virtual homonyms, scarcely distinguished by a capital letter or a diacritical mark to signify what Heidegger calls ‘the ontological difference between Being and beings,’ and which, he says, is the forgotten truth behind Western metaphysics. ---But does what is forgotten or erased make a difference, by itself, if what is forgotten or erased is only a single letter? Or a simple diacritical mark? ---What difference does it make how we spell the words, ‘Being,’ ‘being,’ or ‘beings’? Does a simple slip of the tongue or a skip of the pen really change everything? ---Does the simple substitution or deletion of a letter (an ‘a’ for an ‘e,’ for example, or the deletion of an epsilon: ‘ε’) really change the deep meaning of the Greek, German, or English word? Or does its ‘sense’ or ‘meaning’ survive these superficial changes? Which conjugate the surface variants of a verbal root (Gk. εμι, εσσι, εστι; Gn. *bin*, *bist*, *ist*) according to the infinitely subtle distinctions of aspect, tense, person, or time frame. Or which change a verb into a noun by abstracting its infinitive form (Gk. ειναι; Gn. *sein*) from its verbal sense in the 3<sup>rd</sup>-person present indicative (Gk. εστι; Gn. *ist*), transforming it into a substantive infinitive (Gk. ειναι; Gn. *Sein*), or into a participle (Gk. εσσια/ουσια, (ε)ον; Gm. *seiend*, *Seiende*) and finally freezing it into a substance, an object, or a thing, without changing ‘the brute fact’ of the existence or non-existence of the being or thing. In “The Anaximander Fragment,” Heidegger argues “in an exaggerated way, which nevertheless bears on the truth, that the fate of the West depends upon the translation of the [Greek] word εον” as it appears in Parmenides---that is, upon the elision or

<sup>44</sup> Derrida, “The Supplement of the Copula,” 200, 201.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, 202.

<sup>46</sup> Heidegger, “The Anaximander Fragment,” 33/260.

deletion of the initial epsilon (ε), which marks the derivation of (ε)ον from the Greek verbs, εστι, ειναι, etc., and upon the subsequent transformation of Parmenides' (ε)ον into the Western metaphysical words for 'being-ness' and 'beings': Aristotle's το ον, τα οντα, and ουσια. But isn't Heidegger being excessively literal-minded here, in attaching so much significance to a single letter? As if that single letter were the key to Being itself! ---Maybe that's what Derrida means when he begins his deconstruction of Heidegger's "The Anaximander Fragment" with the straightforward, pithy sentence: "I will speak, therefore, of a letter."<sup>47</sup> Of the letter 'a,' that is, in *différance*, which substitutes for the letter 'e' to mark the difference between Heidegger's destruction of classical ontology and Derrida's de(con)struction of Western metaphysics. Which is also, necessarily, a critique and deconstruction of Heidegger's metaphysical texts. And so this transformation of the superficial graphic marks or differential traces of a single key-word in Derrida's text marks the difference between Heidegger's thinking of the ontological difference between Being and being(s), and Derrida's thinking of *différance* per se. Because for Derrida, there is no privileged signifier or transcendental signified, no primordial hieroglyph or primal word, like Heidegger's eponymous 'Being,' which can serve as the center and the circumference of the whole cosmos of Western metaphysics.<sup>48</sup> And yet, at the same time, gesture or point beyond itself to what lies behind or beyond the text of Western metaphysics, as the half-effaced mark or the half-erased trace of a primordial presence that finally dis-closes or ex-poses itself only by the forgotten memories and vestigial marks of its withdrawal and absence.<sup>49</sup> 'What (there) is,' in Derrida's world, is never and nowhere 'Being,' 'being,' or 'beings.' 'What (there) is,' in Derrida's world, is simply a constant proliferation of diacritical marks and differential signifiers without center or circumference, without beginning or end, without a final stop to the perpetual slide of signification(s). A ceaseless dif-fraction and ef-fraction of words and letters, of diacritical marks and syntactic markers set against themselves, which establish the sub-textual backdrop of differential signification against which the 'meaning' and 'sense' of the Western metaphysical language(s) emerge. An endless 'differencing of difference(s)' or 'differencing of differend/ts' which does not finally eventuate in the disclosure of the ontological difference itself. Or of difference itself in its pristine self-presence and purity, which might compare with the primordial presence of 'Being itself.'<sup>50</sup> There is no primordial master-word or aboriginal ur-word which can designate or signify what exceeds the circumscribed closure of the Western metaphysical languages. Except, perhaps, the *archi*-word, the *arche*-trace, *différance*, "which is neither a word nor a concept,"<sup>51</sup> and which, like all words, finally signifies nothing. Not even

<sup>47</sup> Derrida, "*Différance*," 3.

<sup>48</sup> In "The Anaximander Fragment", Heidegger argues that "to name the essential nature of Being, language would have to find a single word, the unique word" (52). "What we know," Derrida responds, "is that there has never been [ ... ] a unique word, a master-name. This is why the thought of the letter a in *différance* is not the primary prescription [ ... ] of an [ ... ] as yet unheard-of nomination." "*Différance*," 27.

<sup>49</sup> "What Heidegger wants to mark is this: [that] the difference between Being and beings [ ... ] has disappeared without leaving a trace. [ ... ] If we maintain that *différance* (is) (itself) other than absence and presence [ ... ] then [ ... ] we would have to speak of a disappearance of the trace of the trace." Derrida, "*Différance*," 23-24. "But [ ... ] this erasure of the trace [ ... ] must have been traced in the metaphysical text. Presence, then [ ... ] is the trace of a trace [ ... ]. Only on this condition can the text of metaphysics [ ... ] signal in the direction of [its] transgression." Derrida, "*Ousia and Gramme*," 66.

<sup>50</sup> "In [ ... ] the system of language, there are only differences. [ ... ] But [ ... ] these differences play [ ... ]. What is written as *différance*, then, will be the playing movement that 'produces' [ ... ] these differences [ ... ]. [W]e will designate as *différance* the movement according to which language [ ... ] is constituted 'historically' as a weave of differences." Derrida, "*Différance*," 10-12.

<sup>51</sup> Derrida, "*Différance*," 3, 7.

*différance* itself.

x

After Heidegger, then, Derrida argues that Heidegger's 'thinking of Being' in "The Anaximander Fragment" succumbs to the Classic Greek mystique of Being which it purportedly attempts to deconstruct, and that therefore Heidegger's thinking is still inscribed within the Western metaphysics of 'substance' and 'presence' which prescribes the circumscribed horizon of Christian-Greek onto-theo-logy.<sup>52</sup> Heidegger's text, Derrida argues, is characterized by a nostalgia for 'presence' and 'essence' which is simply a mystified version of the myth of Early Greek origins promulgated by Heidegger's reading of the Pre-Socratic philosophers, Anaximander or Parmenides. Because if, as Derrida argues, there never really was a super-abundance or plenitude of B/being in its pristine self-presence and its ab-original purity, such as is described by Heidegger's reading of Early Greek thinking. And if what Western metaphysics and Scholastic theology call 'Being' has never really existed except in 'being(s),' then, obviously, what Heidegger calls 'the ontological difference between Being and being(s)' could never have inscribed itself as a trace or mark in "The Anaximander Fragment." Because that ontological difference between Being and being(s) would never have existed, in the first case! "If Being," Derrida writes, "has never meant anything except beings, then perhaps difference is older than being itself. There may be a difference still more unthought than the difference between Being and beings." Although what that difference might be, beyond *différance* itself, Derrida doesn't say. "Beyond Being and beings," Derrida continues, "this difference, ceaselessly differing from and deferring (itself), would trace (itself) (by itself)."<sup>53</sup> Although exactly where or how it would trace itself, when there is nothing, nowhere, anywhere, upon which to trace itself, Derrida, again, doesn't say. *Différance*, Derrida says, differences itself. And defers itself. Without the metaphysical agency of either 'Being' or 'God,' without either 'Being' or 'being(s),' to supplement or complement it. Without insisting upon either its existence or its non-existence, its being or its non-being. And, therefore, without either affirming or denying the existence or non-existence of the ontological difference between them. Which might have been designated by the simple transposition of letters or the displacement of words, but which finally does not require even an apostrophe to serve as a trace or mark of the difference between difference and *différance*. Not even the slightest trace of the apostrophe of difference.

xi

So what if there never was an ontological difference between Being and being(s) which might have inscribed itself in the scriptural texts of Western metaphysics? Because what Heidegger calls 'ontological difference' has simply never existed? Except, perhaps, as *différance* itself? Which can never appear, whether as a substance or a presence, whether as a being or a thing, and cannot even dis-appear, as a mysterious absence or a metaphysical agency that dis-conceals itself or dis-closes itself only in its non-existence or non-being. Because *différance* could only differ or defer its in-difference from itself, not having a pristine self-presence or an ab-original purity of Being or being(s) from which to differ or defer. If that were the case, Derrida argues, then that *différance*, not being (a) Being or (a) being, not being (a) something or (a) nothing, and not even

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<sup>52</sup> Cp. Derrida, "Ousia and Gramme," 65.

<sup>53</sup> Derrida, "Ousia and Gramme," 67.

being a concept or a word, whether a noun or a verb, could not be said to exist even in its non-existence or its non-being, in the accepted sense(s) of the verb, ‘to be, to exist,’ in the Western Indo-European metaphysical languages. And if Heidegger’s ‘Being’ were not a metaphysical substance or a metaphysical essence, a metaphysical presence or a presencing of the present, and therefore also could not be said to exist, in the strong existential sense of the verb ‘to be, to exist,’ in the Western Indo-European languages, then, self-evidently, it could not leave a trace or mark in the scriptural text(s) of Western metaphysics. But if the ontological difference between Being and being(s) were to be inscribed in a superficial text, Derrida argues, it could only appear as *the erasure of a trace---the trace of a trace---* which never really existed except as *différance*, in the first place.<sup>54</sup> Not only does ‘Being’ not have the status of a real predicate, which could serve as the subject/object of a predicative sentence (e.g., ‘God is Being’). Not only can ‘Being’ not function as a proper noun or a proper name (‘God,’ ‘Being,’ etc.) which could serve as the subject of an existential statement (e.g., ‘Being is,’ or ‘God exists’). But ‘Being’ also can’t serve as a simple assertion of ‘the brute fact’ of the existence or non-existence of beings or things. Because ‘being’ or ‘existing’---that is, the *verb-ing* or *be-ing* of existent being(s)---only exists in the existence of beings themselves. Or, rather, Derrida suggests, in the difference or *différance* of beings from themselves. Which is what Heidegger would call a merely ontic difference. ---‘What (there) *is*,’ in Derrida’s world, is neither ‘Being’ nor ‘being(s),’ nor an ontological difference between Being and being(s). Which, in the absence of ‘Being’ or ‘being(s),’ is nothing but the differencing of difference, and can’t be said to exist as a something or a nothing, as a substance or a presence, as a subject or a predicate, that, differing, differs from and defers itself. ‘What (there) *is*,’ in Derrida’s world, is only the Nietzschean play of force(s) and its primordial violence,<sup>55</sup> which, dif-fracting and ef-fracting upon itself, creates the *spatialization* and the *temporalization* from which (a) something or (a) nothing like Being or being(s) can incessantly emerge.<sup>56</sup> Without, by the simple occurrence of that *event* or *happening*, that *verb-ing* of difference or *différance*, providing a substantial ground that might support a metaphysical presence or a metaphysical subject whose existence could be asserted by a strong existential statement, like ‘Being is’ or ‘God exists.’ What exists, in Derrida’s world, is simply the play of differences and the differing/deferring of differences, which inscribe themselves in the Western metaphysical languages as the general economic system of diacritical markers and syntactic signs described by Ferdinand de Saussure as a system of differences “*without positive terms.*”<sup>57</sup> And this play of difference(s) provides the significant context within which statements or assertions emerge as predications or propositions about existence or non-existence, and phrases or words become meaningful or sensible statements, without itself appearing as (a) something or (a) nothing of which existence or non-existence could be predicated. ---And could we then say

<sup>54</sup> Cf. “*Différance*,” 25. Cf. n. 49.

<sup>55</sup> For Nietzsche, Derrida argues, “[f]orce [ ... ] is only a play of differences [ ... ]. There would be no force in general without the difference between forces [ ... ] Thus, *différance* is the name we might give to the ‘active,’ moving discord of different forces, and of differences of forces, that Nietzsche sets up against the entire system of metaphysical grammar.” Derrida, “*Différance*,” 17.

<sup>56</sup> “*Différance* as temporization, *différance* as spatialization. How are they to be joined? [ ... ] An interval must separate the present from what it is not [ ... ] but this interval that constitutes it as present must [ ... ] divide the present in and of itself, thereby also dividing [ ... ] everything that is thought on the basis of the present [ ... ]. In constituting itself [ ... ], this interval is what might be called *spacing*, the becoming-space of time or the becoming-time of space (*temporization*). And it is this constitution of the present, as an ‘originary’ [ ... ] synthesis of marks, or traces [ ... ] that I propose to call [ ... ] *différance*. Which (is) (simultaneously) spacing (and) temporization.” Derrida, “*Différance*,” 9, 10, 12, 13.

<sup>57</sup> Derrida, “*Différance*,” 11. Citing Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, 117-118, 120.

that the apostrophe itself exists, in either of its two senses, as a semantic term or a syntactic mark? ---Obviously not! it must be replied. Except, perhaps, as *the apostrophe of difference* itself. Which, in Derrida's terms, says, simply: 'Difference differs from itself,' or, '*différance* defers itself.' Without making further assertions of truth or fact. Without predicating (a) something or (a) nothing that exists or doesn't exist. And without allowing itself to become substantialized or hypostatized as a word or concept, a proper name or proper noun, like 'God' or 'Being.' Because, as Derrida admits, *différance* is always at risk of becoming a metaphysical name, which signifies or denotes everything and nothing.<sup>58</sup> Metaphysical propositions are simply empty words and meaningless phrases, which designate or refer to only 'the brute fact' of existence itself, and which, like cosmic force(s) or primordial violence(s), can only be inscribed as a play of traces, of *archi-traces* and *arche-marks*, in an *arche-text- tonic system* or *arche-text-ual structure*, which might describe the cosmic backdrop of the existence of existence, in its abysmal emptiness. But which still signifies nothing, denotes nothing, refers to nothing. Except, perhaps, the empty space of an effaced mark or the blank space of an erased trace. The smear or blur of a crossed-out word or an obliterated letter on a crumpled manuscript. The black mark of a mis-spelled word on a repeatedly-erased palimpsest. Which might mark the absent presence or the forgotten memory of (a) something or (a) nothing which once existed or didn't exist as (a) being or (a) non-being. But which is still unintelligible and illegible to the contemporary reader. Who cannot read what doesn't denote or signify anything. Except, maybe, *différance* itself.

xii

But what, exactly, 'is' *the apostrophe of difference*? Superficially, the apostrophe is a diacritical mark which serves, in certain Western Indo-European languages, to designate or indicate a crucial phonological or typographic element which is absent or missing from the surface sentence, but which is supplied by the writer or speaker, the reader or listener, as if it were still somehow metaphysically present.<sup>59</sup> Frequently, what's deleted is the copular verb or its immediate antecedents, as in the French or English phrases, '*C'est la vie!*,' or, 'That's life!,' or simply vowels in the copular verb, which are elided without quite disappearing from the spoken or written sentence, as in the English interrogative phrase, "What's ...?" In addition to its appearance in conjunction with the copular verb, the apostrophe also marks the deletion of a vowel in the negative particle, 'not,' in phrases which predicate the non-existence of beings or existents, like 'What isn't...'. But the apostrophe also appears in phrases employing the supplemental verb, 'to have, to possess,' in phrases like "I've..., 'you've..., 'we've..., ' in which case, the semantic sense of the apostrophe also shifts, as Benveniste suggests, from the Western Indo-European verb, 'to be, to exist,' to the possessive verb 'to have, to possess' although its syntactic function is, of course, different from its semantic usage.<sup>60</sup> In English, the

<sup>58</sup> "For us, *différance* remains a metaphysical name [ ... ]. And this is particularly the case when these names state the determination of *différance* as [ ... [ the difference of Being and beings." Derrida, "*Différance*," 26.

<sup>59</sup> There are two distinct senses of the English word, *apostrophe*, derived from the Greek terms, *apostrophos* and *apostrophe*. Syntactically speaking, the *apostrophe* is a diacritical mark which denotes the elision or omission of a certain letter or letters in the spoken or written form of a word. Semantically, *apostrophe* is a rhetorical trope that denotes the turning way of the writer or speaker from the explicit audience to another, often absent, audience, like the gods or the dead. In Greek drama, a *strophe* was a verse-stanza spoken or sung while the chorus was walking or dancing in one direction, followed by an *anti-strophe* recited while walking or dancing in the opposite direction, making the turn itself an *apo-strophe*.

<sup>60</sup> Benveniste, "The Linguistic Functions of 'To Be' and 'To Have,'" 163-179.

apostrophe is also employed to denote the ‘having’ or ‘possession of’ a being or existent, as in the sentence, ‘That’s somebody’s book!’ in which the apostrophe-‘s’ denotes the Old English genitive case-ending, *-es*, which was abandoned in the Middle English languages, but whose vestigial presence, is, once again, signified by the apostrophe. More generally, the apostrophe is a syntactic marker that functions in the general economy of diacritical marks and differential signs, which, without having ‘meaning’ or ‘sense’ themselves, nonetheless serve as the unspoken backdrop or the unwritten background against which the ‘meaning’ and ‘sense’ of statements and propositions can emerge, to enable the speaker or writer to make assertions about being or non-being. The apostrophe of difference thus designates ‘the brute fact’ of ‘the existence of existence itself,’ which would otherwise be signified by the strong existential sense of the PIE verb, ‘to be, to exist,’ but which is absent or missing from the surface sentence. In this sense, the apostrophe of difference resembles what Heidegger calls ‘the ontological difference between Being and being(s),’ as a diacritical element or differential syntagm in the grammar and vocabulary of Western metaphysics, which, while being nothing in itself, not existing in itself, still establishes the metaphysical context against which the ‘meaning’ and ‘sense’ of B/being can emerge from the cosmic backdrop of nothingness and non-being. But the apostrophe of difference also differs from both Heidegger’s ontological difference and Derrida’s *différance* in that it resists not only the *substantialization* and *hypostatization* of metaphysical concepts, like ‘God’ or ‘Being,’ or of beings or existents, as the ‘substances’ and ‘essences’ of Western metaphysics; but it also resists the equal but opposite tendency, evident in Derrida’s deconstructive thought and in the anti-metaphysical strain of Anglo-American analytic philosophy, toward the *de-substantialization* or *de-materialization* of what were previously thought as cosmic personages or metaphysical substances. Which, by simply inverting or negating the previous Western metaphysical concepts, remains circumscribed within Western metaphysics. But while the apostrophe of difference is neither a Being, a being, nor beings, and is neither difference nor *différance* as such, what the apostrophe of difference designates or refers to undoubtedly exists, in the strong existential sense of the Western Indo-European verb, ‘to be, to exist,’ since without ‘the brute fact’ of the existence of existence itself, all metaphysical concepts and all existent entities would simply cease to exist. Ontological difference would have nothing to differ *from*. Difference could not differ from or *différance* defer *itself*. And the whole cosmic backdrop of being and non-being would simply dissolve into the quantum foam of contemporary astrophysics and collapse back into emptiness and void-ness again. But even in a perfectly empty space-and-time-less cosmos, devoid of both substances and essences, and of differences and *différences*, it could still be said: ‘Being is,’ or, ‘Existence exists.’ Except, of course, for the fact that there would be no Being or beings to say it! And no beings or existents to be it! Except, of course, for non-beings in their abysmal non-existence. And except for the non-being of non-existence itself. Of which it could still be said: ‘Non-being is,’ ‘Non-existence exists.’ ---But would it leave a trace or mark inscribed in the nothingness of its non-being? What would it trace itself *on*? And what *with*? Or for whom? Who or what would write it? Who or what would read it? If not the anti-God of Western metaphysics. The God (who) ‘*is!*’ and ‘*is not!*’ difference or *différance* itself.

And, finally, it still must be asked: What is the apostrophe in itself? The etymological definition below, compiled from diverse sources, is certainly suggestive. But definitely not definitive.

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Decidedly not decisive. Especially not in the version reproduced here:

*Apostrophe*: From PIE \**ap-* ‘off, away’ + PIE \**strebh-* ‘to wind, to twist, to turn.’ Hence Gr *απο-* ‘from, away from,’ etc. + Gr *στροφή*, ‘a twisting, a turning.’ Hence the Greek word *αποστροφή*, defined as: 1) a turning away, averting; 2) an escape from; 3) an elision or deletion. See also Gr *strophos*, ‘a cord, a band,’ from Gr *strephein*, ‘to turn, to twist, to plait.’ Also from Gr *strephein* comes Gr *strophe*, ‘a turning,’ from the movement of the Greek chorus in walking or dancing from one side of the orchestra to another, hence the first stanza of a choral ode, LL *strophe*, whence E ‘strophe.’ Hence *apostrophe*<sup>1</sup>: in rhetoric or drama, a figure of speech (in English, a ‘trope,’ from Gr *tropos*, ‘a turn,’ and Gr *trepein*, ‘to turn, to change’) denoting a feigned turning-away from one’s audience to address someone else (often absent or dead), LL *apostropha*, EF-F and E ‘apostrophe’; and hence *apostrophe*<sup>2</sup>: 1) the ‘turning-away’ (elision or omission) of one or more letters in a word (*Obs.*), or 2) the diacritical mark (‘) indicating this elision or omission, likewise from Gr *apostrephein*, ‘to turn away,’ LL *apostrophus* (var *apostrophos*), whence EF-F and Eng *apostrophe*.<sup>61</sup>

And so on. This brief definition is at least sufficient to indicate the convolutions of the several thousand year-long etymology of the current French and English word, ‘apostrophe.’ But what can be made of this knotty etymology? Of the twisting and turnings (*strophes*, *tropes*) of prefixes (*apo-*) and suffixes (*-phein*, *-phus*, *-phos* etc.) around the basic root words (\**strebh-*, *strephein*, *strophos*, *strophe*, etc.) from which the contemporary French and English word, ‘apostrophe,’ emerges? This multilingual, polyglot etymology, compounded of Proto-Indo-European, Greek, Latin, French, and English words, is scarcely distinguishable from the complicated etymological processes of the Western European languages themselves, as they have evolved over the past five or six thousand years of Western Indo-European world history. Beginning from simple verbs (PIE \**strebh-*: ‘to turn’; Greek *strephein*: ‘to twist, to plait’) and their cognate substantive nouns (Greek *strophos*: ‘a cord’; *strophe*: ‘a twisting, turning,’ etc.), the Western European languages have created increasingly complex verbs and increasingly abstract nouns which twist and turn away from what they signify or refer to. Which, of course, is simply ‘the brute fact’ of the existence of existence itself. The etymological processes of the Western European languages then become an increasingly complex word-play, a play of differences, a play of signifiers, which finally refers to nothing but itself. And which cannot, finally, designate what is inexpressible or un-speakable, im-present-able and un-represent-able within the contemporary vernacular languages. Especially not those increasingly abstract nouns, ‘God’ and ‘Being,’ which have long since ceased to exist in the strong existential sense of the Western Indo-European verb, ‘to be, to exist.’ And so, in the contemporary philosophical jargon spoken by Heidegger and Derrida, Western metaphysical language becomes an *apostrophe of difference*: that is, a metaphysical language addressed to (a) something or (a) nothing which is absent or missing from the superficial discourse itself. A crypto-metaphysical language addressed to no-one and nothing but itself, which only feigns or pretends to speak to and of ‘God’ and ‘Being,’ when God and Being have turned away and withdrawn into silence and absence. When God and Being no longer speak back. Western metaphysical language becomes an apostrophe of difference, in which the only God or Being left is (in)difference itself. And (in)difference to itself. Because God has fallen silent and Being has ceased to exist. And the Western metaphysical languages, in

<sup>61</sup> See “Apostrophe,” in the OED, Vol. 1, 558-559; and “Strap,” in Partridge, *Origins*, 673.

which God and Being once apostrophized Western humanity in the words of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, to ask: 'What is being *qua* being?' (τις ον η ον?). And to answer, in the words of Aquinas' *Summa Theologica*: 'God is Being itself' (*Deus ist ipsum esse*). ---That Western metaphysical language now can only say: 'God is dead.' 'Being is not.' 'Only difference *is*.' 'Only *différance* exists.' And those Western metaphysical languages can only signify their (in)difference to anything but difference and *différance*. Which, by themselves, signify nothing. Except the absence of Being and beings and the withdrawal or death of God. But still, perhaps, there is hope, that amidst these twisting and turnings, these elisions and deletions, these absences and gaps in the contemporary Western Indo-European languages, signified only by an insignificant diacritical mark or a meaningless differential sign, there is still something left of what once spoke and wrote in the cryptic words and fragmentary texts of an earlier age. A half-erased trace. A half-effaced mark. A scrambled word or an obliterated letter. Written by no-thing and no-one upon nothingness. Which, after 'The Death of God' and 'The Withdrawal of Being,' still hazards the simple words: 'God exists' or 'Being is.'

xiv

And still the question persists: What is this trace or mark inscribed within the text of Western metaphysics? Which, Derrida and Heidegger agree, somehow gestures or points outside its significant context, while remaining circumscribed within the scriptural closure of Western metaphysics as onto-theo-logy? Is it simply the smudge or blur left behind by the erasure of a single letter within the metaphysical text? Which, while (in)significant, in and of itself, within a cryptic palimpsest already multiply overwritten and rendered almost un(intel)legible and (il)legible by the elisions and erasures of its scriptural history, still signifies or designates (a) something or (a) nothing otherwise un-script-able or un-read-able within the Western metaphysical languages? ---Or is it, instead, simply the absence left behind by the differencing of difference itself? Which, while signifying nothing other than this differencing of differences, nonetheless discloses the differential space within which the diacritical marks and syntactic traces of a cryptically (il)legible syntax might become scriptable and legible again to the semi-(il)literate reader? Is it the scar or wound left behind by some primordial violence or invisible cosmic force, which, while erupting ab-originally within a cosmic emptiness completely devoid of presences or of beings, dif-fracting and ef-fracting upon itself in a chaotic concatenation of asymmetrical symmetry-breaking and catastrophic non-equilibrium, nonetheless creates the fifth dimension of spatialization/temporalization within which a something different can come into existence within the perfectly symmetrical, completely static, antediluvian cosmos? Is it the half-erased track or the half-effaced trace of (a) something or (a) nothing still absent or missing here, now, within the contemporary god-less world? A something or a nothing which might have once been called 'Being' or 'God'? But which is now known only as what has simply passed away, ceased to exist or stopped being, without leaving the slightest trace of its absent presence traced upon cosmic space. And if it were to return, someday, to this contemporary, god-less world, 'it' could still not be known under those old, anachronistic names, the Western metaphysical names: 'God' and 'Being.' 'It' would still present itself as a *happening* or an *event*, a *verb-ing* of B/being, without substantive cognates, without metaphysical predicates: as (a) something or (a) nothing in-expressible and un-speakable, un-representable and im-presentable within the Western metaphysical language(s). As (a) some-thing or (a) no-thing still unknown and forever unknowable to contemporary humanity. In the fathomless abyss of emptiness and meaningless

left behind by the departure or absence of Being and of God.

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