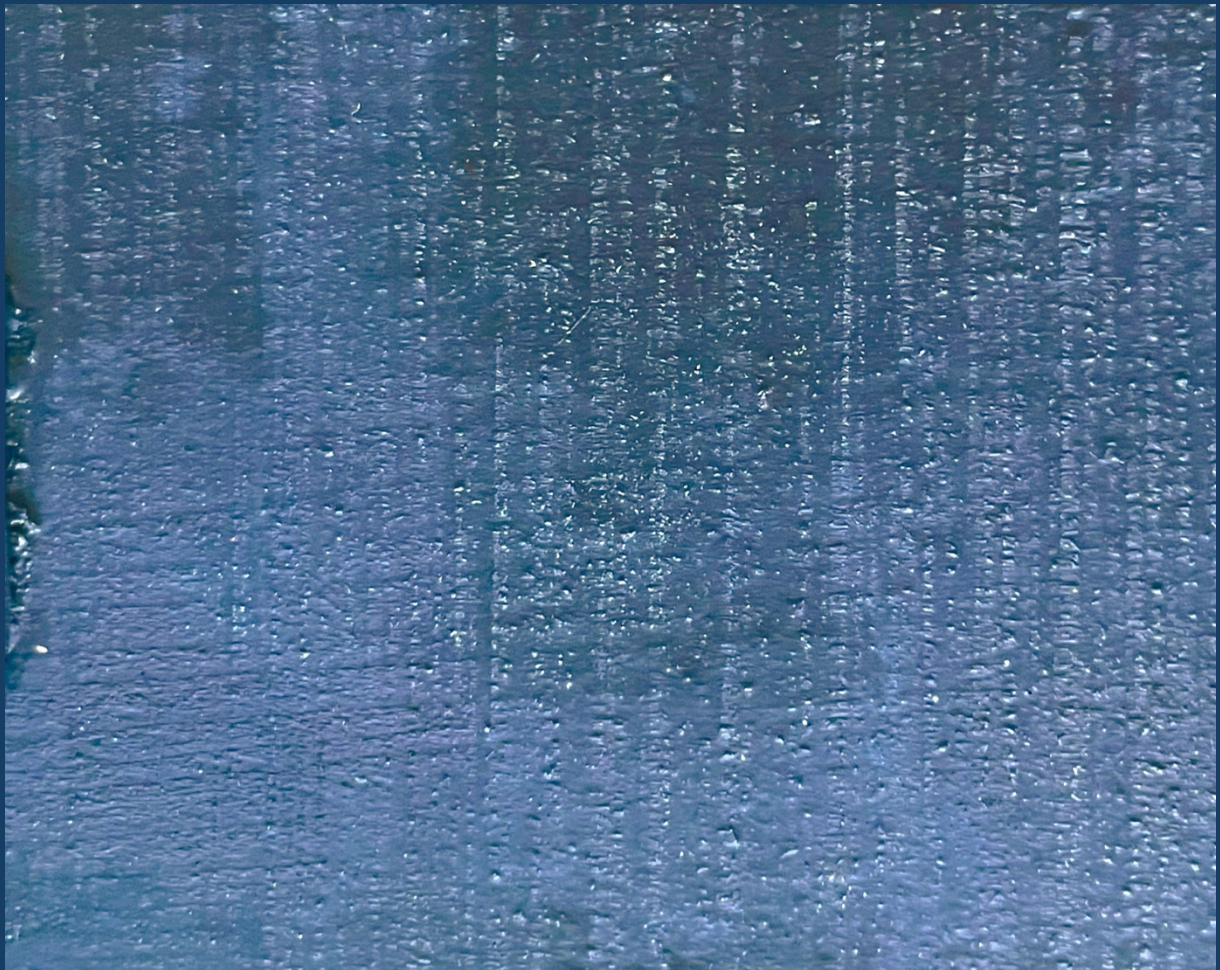


Wolfgang Ink Mark Ziegler aka Nean

CRITIQUE OF BEING

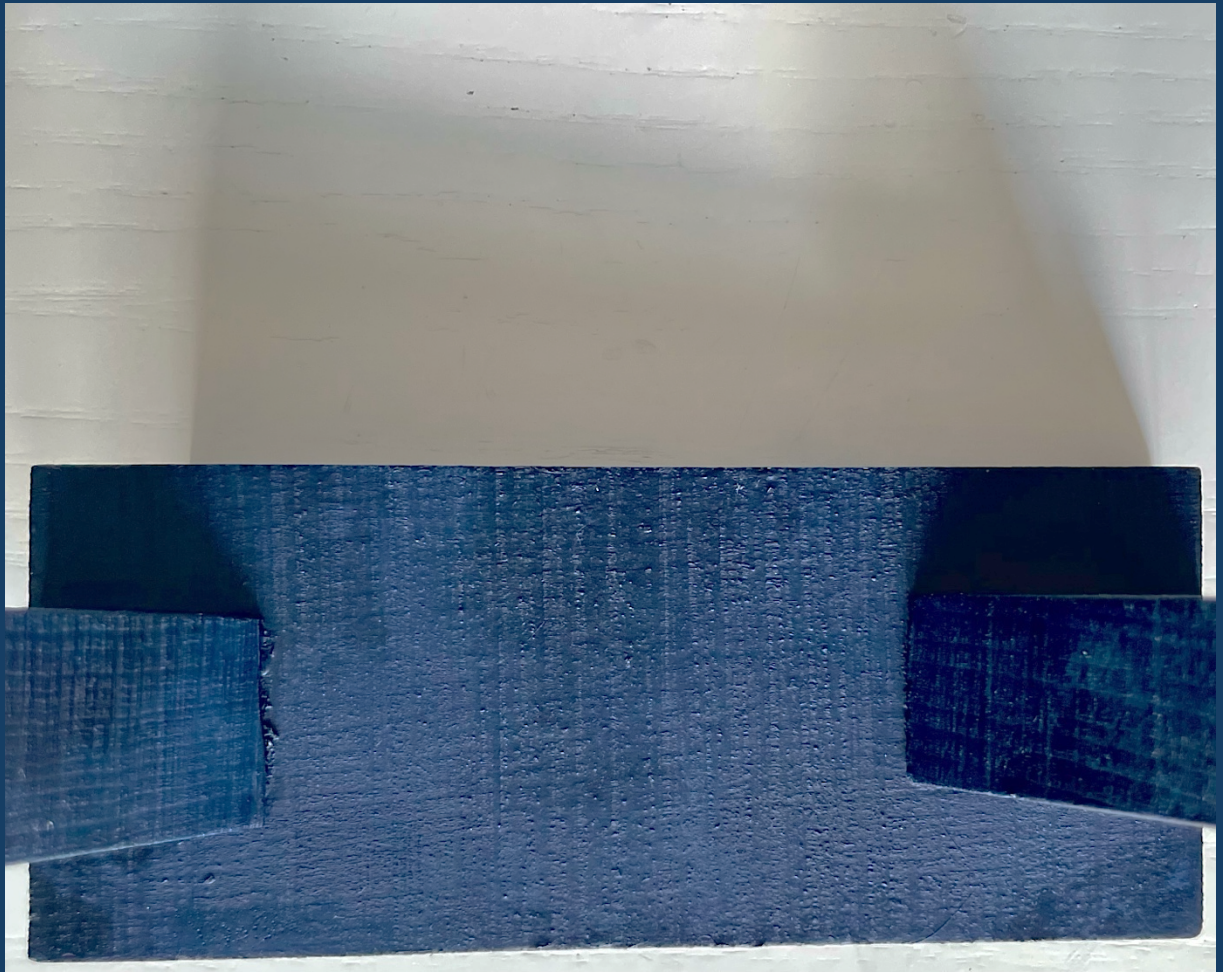


CAN BEING AND BECOMING

CONTRADICT each other?







CRITIQUE OF BEING

Is a contradiction **between being and becoming** at all possible?

Antisthenes of Athens is famed for having written many books, an achievement that nevertheless failed to assist the transmission of his philosophy, since none of them has survived. Due to his lack of popularity among established thinkers, deliberate omissions to mention his views have, since Antiquity, further reduced the amount of information available about his person and his theories.

The disappearance of any philosopher's manuscripts confronts us with a feeling of frustration. We feel unfairly deprived of a bequest that an author had made for us, his future readers. Nonetheless, in Antisthenes' case, that annoying situation takes a twist in that, by his own account, he was a dedicated follower of Socrates, the great Speaker who refused to commit to writing, words that he exchanged in confrontational dialogues. If Socrates had truly turned his intensely lived philosophy into a spoken praxis, which he deemed morally superior to penned scholarliness, would the discovery of his closest student's many books fill a gap in our appreciation of antique philosophy, or would it fill us with disappointment?

Thanks to Xenophon's *Symposium*, we know that Socrates teased Antisthenes about his connections, for instance with the very wealthy Athenian Callias, who had an interest in learning about philosophy (or perhaps rhetoric). The Master ironically called his disciple a procurer and a matchmaker. Strong language which raises the question of Antisthenes' allegiance to the distinct schools of thought with which he is associated: Sophist, Socratic and Cynic. In spite of his progression from one to the next, chronologically recorded in secondary sources, the three strands permeate the statements that can confidently be attributed to him on various dates. One or the other, or a combination, tints the content of his ponderings with fluctuating degrees of cogency, on the one hand assertive, on the other contradictory. For example, his admonition that reading books corrupts the mind of intelligent people is interesting, but not free of contradiction, since he wrote many. Which perhaps does not really matter, when we remind ourselves of his major claim, that contradiction is impossible.

At any rate, his shameless propensity to annoy everyone led to the unintended preservation of some of his written thoughts. Aristotle was so incensed by Antisthenes' claim, that contradiction cannot exist, that he fell into the trap of calling him (and his followers) misguided, when arguing about the futility of such an irrational assertion. By naming a minor rival and referring to a statement he opposed, Aristotle made, I would suggest, five mistakes. Firstly, he contributed to secure Antisthenes' immortality, which could hardly have been his intention. Secondly, had the point he sought to ridicule been as obviously wrong and unworthy of philosophical consideration as he believed, condemning it should have been unnecessary. So, why did he bother? Thirdly, the derided argument was not minutely analysed but literally interpreted and dismissed, as if its author had taken no rhetorical care in its formulation and, consequently, no discursive skills were needed to decode it. Fourthly, by denouncing the argument's

blatant irrationality, and thereby missing out on its cryptic deconstruction of knowledge acquisition, Aristotle gave away that he had swallowed a bait. Namely, that the most distinctive Cynic rhetorical device, provocation, had achieved its desired effect: to numb an antagonist's powers of criticism and make him react emotionally. Besides, there would have been no gain for Aristotle in discrediting Antisthenes with a spurious accusation, since he held his paradox on contradiction for complete nonsense. Moreover, the discursive validity of contradiction had already been negated by Sophists before Antisthenes made his outspoken statement, notably by Gorgias of Leontini who completely rejected the concept of being. Aristotle's dismissive opinion of Antisthenes in *Metaphysics*, therefore authenticates an attribution which is highly likely to be accurate. All the more so because of another reference, this time positive in *Politics*, to a fable he courteously accredited to Antisthenes. Aristotle argued that individuals of exceptional merit are likely to become a danger to society and that they should be expelled from the City-State, when instead of following the Law, they have become a law unto themselves. To illustrate this theory, he quotes the fable in which the rabbits demand to be treated equally by the lions. Whereupon a lion asks what kind of claws and teeth rabbits have, which would qualify them as equals.

That one of the most influential and gifted philosophers of all times should have been so annoyed, that he defended Reason not in a placid manner but impulsively, vindicates an astute taunt by anyone's eristic standards. Which brings us to the fifth mistake. Antisthenes made no bones about his dislike of the people he regarded as corrupt or thoughtless. Yet, when asked if he despised everyone, he is reputed to have answered that he loved Socrates. Whereas Plato's reception of Socratic ideas has determined our knowledge of the latter, since his *Dialogues* (unlike Antisthenes' Writings) have been preserved, alternative interpretations of the great Speaker, that are bound to have been discussed in his lifetime, have strangely vanished. Although both were close friends, only little is known about Antisthenes's response to Socrates' views and his way of life. Therefore, the assumption, that Aristotle as well as others avoided commenting on Antisthenes and his friendship with Socrates raises the suspicion, that they had a vested interest in editing the Socratic legacy.

How can the idea that contradiction does not exist make sense? Antisthenes argued that when we point to something, we identify one particular thing. However, when we compare a particular thing with others, we define relationships, not uniqueness. Though the argument is extreme, it is not futile. A described communality cannot subsume the exhaustive description of one identity, in as much as a unique identity possesses compatible and comparable features as well as exclusive characteristics. Therefore, when I classify X and Y, as Y(XY) and X(YX) because both according to me, are to some degree similar, I might as well extend the field of my comparisons and call Y(XY) and X(YX) infinitely relatable and re-classifiable Y(XY)-(etc) and infinitely relatable and re-classifiable X(YX)-(etc). And of course, I can further extend the range of data I relate to one another by contrasting as well as comparing them, and thus coding them accordingly. For instance: infinitely relatable and re-classifiable Y(XY)-Not-Y(ZY)-(etc and NOT-etc) and infinitely relatable and re-classifiable X(YX)-Not-

X(ZX)-(etc and NOT-etc). Unless I wanted to use these data, why should I take so much trouble to compare and contrast them gratuitously? Surely not because I want to know what they are on their own, that is to say outside my sphere of influence. For if I seriously wanted to know what they really are independently, I would not bolster my limited knowledge by relating it to compatible information, in the hope of expanding it. Thus, distinctions between knowledge and application of knowledge become blurred. If I knew what one single thing is, without having to comparing it to anything else, for example a gust of wind or a cloud pattern, I would possess absolute knowledge or at least an insight into absolute knowledge. In other words, I would be in a position to determine what being is. At that stage of our examination of the paradox, we already realise that Antisthenes' implicit criticism of epistemology spreads to ontology. If knowledge of a thing has to be related to other things, it does not bracket the knowledge of only one thing, in avoidance of comparative and contrastive perceptions and analyses of other things; therefore, it cannot be and is not definite. Should this proposition be true, it would limit access to being and preclude approaches to the inflated idea of beingness. A lower awareness of being implies less existential experience. Without stretching his critique to Gorgias' extreme conclusion of the non-existence of being, Antisthenes doubts a fundamental connection. If absolute knowledge cannot be asserted, how could absolute being be knowingly experienced and logically communicated? Or to put it directly and not shun the awkwardness: If any trust in dependable knowledge ought to be subjected to strict questioning, should we maintain that all that is known exists, and that all that exists is knowable? Questioning the methodology of contradiction relativises the key concept of being. Not a pleasant piece of news for theologians, not a safe thought for the apologists of authoritarian states, not even cold comfort for hedonists who idolise selective moments.

Self-knowledge does not escape the lonesome fate of isolationist epistemology either. How could I gauge an appreciation of my uniqueness by eschewing contradistinction, the main means of gaining self-knowledge? We agree to disagree, as we posit borderlines between knowledge and the application of knowledge, as if the former could at best more than temporarily survive without the latter. The Law would not tower as an abstract proposition, if it were not concretely upheld by a profession. Research into pure mathematics would not be financially supported, if banks and high-tech coalitions did not benefit from optimised algorithms. Whatever stories they tell us, and we tell about them, pure and applied knowledge resent staying apart. From that perspective, knowledge boils down to narrative modes, human assessments and experiences having to negotiate reflection with fiction renderings. Narratives appear to contradict one another when they highlight opposite views, but these views, however antagonistic, share perspectives that are differently interpreted. If black never turned into white or if black and white did not dilute into shades of grey, they would contradict one another. But as all black-and-white types of thinking share a dogged determination to be right, they resemble one another in some and other ways. Black-and-white ideologies that denounce contradictions in others, reveal in so doing contradictions about themselves, either because they function similarly at disjointed levels or in parts of their system. What appears to spot contradictions may prove contradictory, not

contradicting, and what appears to contradict itself may reveal unsuspected and unwanted coherence. Experiencing contradiction does not imply that it exists. The fact that I live does not contradict the further fact that I could not live without using fiction to make sense of what I cannot know, and struggle to understand. Without a fictional distance to self-knowledge and accrued knowledge, I would eliminate possible interpretations, a process which would disable the scope and purpose of my existence. Therefore, Antisthenes of Athens was right. Contradiction does not exist, though contradictions do; which does not contradict the non-existence of contradiction per se. If contradiction were possible and could be proven, it would make opinions superfluous. There are perceived, clichéd, institutional and fabricated contrary levels between opposites such as health and sickness, wealth and poverty, and there are repeated efforts to define health as the opposite of sickness, and wealth against poverty, that at some point unavoidably falter and collapse.

The principle of being exacerbates our craving for definitions, as if key questions that plague us implied that answers to these questions had to exist. How could I continue to ask myself what is right and wrong, and not look for answers? There must be correct answers to correct questions. Yet, by emphasising that there are appropriate questions and answers, I dismiss contradictory features to define them more precisely, even though these more precise definitions do not unite beyond contradictions, and cannot be justified by a fundamental contradiction. Existence and death only intermittently contradict one another; well-being would love to contradict discomfort but only secures some respite. In other words, Antisthenes' theory of knowledge remains limited and frustrating, but it initiates a critique of being that to some extent complements Heraclitus' comprehensive theory of becoming. By defining things as we suppose they are, we carry the consequences of our inadequate definitions. Furthermore, we cannot endure the brutal alternative, that would silence our need for questions and answers. Nonetheless, on a positive note, the principle of becoming helps us to accept that questions and answers vary in a changing world, where certainties about being eventually appear illusory.

Contradiction does no more (and of course no less) exist than what we call being, for the forcefulness of contradiction does not eradicate opinion or solves differences, and the actuality of being derives from the overwhelming reality of becoming. Whereas for Aristotle and for all who rely on tautology to secure logical pronouncements, a tight concept of being is as necessary to justify logic, as speech is (in their view) indispensable to actuate thinking. Aristotle argues that calling different things by the same name is false and constitutes a contradiction. Unfortunately, his geometrical example, the triangle as opposed to the circle, is not as straightforward as he would have liked us to believe. We can easily divide a square into two triangles that form, we might as well say constitute or "are" a square. Though it takes more effort to inscribe triangles within a circle until the many triangles make an almost perfect circle, with patience and accuracy the two (very different) figures eventually merge into one (almost identical). This oversight does not mean that Antisthenes wins the contra-battle unscathed. Modern commentators have called him a moralist, not a logician. A fair

point. His most famous statements, that virtue can be learned, and once learned will not be forgotten, and that pleasure constitutes a threat to happiness, which virtue alone can secure, are no logical demonstrations. They mix experience and reflection with discipline, and deliver a stern message which, at worst, might assist dogmatic interpretations and, at best, cannot be entirely devoid of self-righteousness. We all have our own way of thinking and, on that account, never fully understand one another, therefore contradiction could exist if misunderstanding were systematically avoidable. Some logic there, but a good measure of psychology as well. Yes, Antisthenes has reasons to distrust fellow humans. If we wanted to contradict one another in an open and peaceful manner, rather than agree in a rush because we see no point in prolonged discussions, we would engage in hard thinking and achieve constructive debate. In that eventuality, contradiction would yield a problem-solving potential. Ironically, Aristotle rounds his argument with an impressive conclusion which, nonetheless, not unlike Antisthenes' insights, owes more to psychology and ethics than to logic. If there were no contradiction, he cleverly points out, there would be no liars.

Talking about liars, did mum and dad tell you? Do not believe what you read in the newspapers, especially when vehement columnists denounce contradictions and flog remedies to crush them. Their hidden agenda is to prove to you, their intelligent reader, that you are right in your conviction, that becoming is a second-rate facet of being. Why? Because being sells better than becoming. Granted, thanks to this new product you will become slimmer and younger-looking, etc. However, the desirable attribute you wish for should deliver an immediate, not a delayed or proportional provision. Who chooses a package for partial effects happening in stages? Getting nearer your goal is not what you paid for. You do not ask for some improvement. Becoming slim and younger-looking might require a process, but what you want is more radical. You want to be slim and younger-looking now, and you are willing and able to finance the fastest and most efficacious fix, even though (like contradiction) that magic product does not really exist. Of course, I have the ability and the propensity to contradict myself abundantly, and we can contradict one another for hours on end, but at the end of my self-evaluation or our animated exchange, the contested goods do not do what is spelled out on the tin. The magic product or service or idea cannot be what it is and nothing other than what it is, since in order to achieve completion of being, it would have to annihilate becoming, not an easy task. Think of Roman soldiers being praised by their general for their success in a decisive battle. Imagine what the words "This is Rome" would have meant to an elite legion, and consider what it may mean to tourists today. Which Rome? Before or after the split into a Western and an Eastern empire? At the time of its expansion or collapse, as a Republic or an Empire?

To focus on what became of Rome at a certain point of its history, or on what it is currently becoming within the EU and according to its relations with the world's major economic powers, concerns current debates. Whereas, to say what "Rome is" can be done through simplification, which may attract much interest until the overview is replaced by an even shorter summary. Illusions, impressions and convictions that I know who I am and what things are, have their merit and importance, as long as fear

of change, insecurity or greed do not make them appear more accurate and more comprehensive than they could ever be. In short, becoming does not function as an agent bent on achieving the completion of being, that would retreat from an accomplishment which, once realised, would make it redundant. It works the other way around. Being issues from, expands and contracts within becoming, because Evolution always makes countless mistakes. Being does not progress from one species to the other by elimination of the less appropriate characteristics in a drafted version, and then transfers tested and proven improvements into the next attempt. On the contrary, it messes around in a sluggish and random way to the effect that appalling mistakes that cause disasters, in some situations, unwittingly generate in other circumstance opportunities of a scope, brilliance and worth that logic cannot engineer. Let us simplify the argument. What “is” logic? Logic “is” an interpretative tool that predicates, compares and contrasts data referred to: as what “is”, in as much as what “is” can be reduced to predicating, comparing and contrasting. And what “becomes” of logic when it falls into the wrong hands? It “becomes” as dangerous as when it falls into the right hands.

Antisthenes of Athens and Diogenes of Sinope took an anarchic stance against logical discourse and reclaimed philosophy as what one does and how one lives, not as a collection of spoken or written announcements. In that sense, they should remain a valuable source of inspiration to philosophers whose ambitions and message fit into scholarly footnotes. Albeit, philosophers of that ilk, as well as the masses swayed by the pursuit of pleasure (or should we say the struggle for pleasure), are unlikely to be moved by these demanding propositions. One reason why A. of A. and D. of S. advocated silence. If what one says cannot elucidate what “is”, refraining from saying anything reduces the dissemination of false claims. If speech is silver, silence is golden, or speech is human but silence divine, or words to that effect, are maxims that found approval among the Cynics and Stoics, and later on with hermits and monks. Vows of silence taken by Trappists perpetuate to this day, in a few cloisters with plenty of vocational vacancies, a tradition embraced by diminishing minorities. Antisthenes and Diogenes knew that their austere warning, that virtue gives more (in depth) satisfaction than hedonism can, would fall on deaf ears, but they still said it. So, saying as little as possible (or nothing) and expecting as little as possible (or nothing) from what we say, which hopefully is worth saying, present us with an opportunity to attempt non-contradiction and to appraise the reality of rewards. Philosophy is a hard Master that demands as much as we are willing to give, but offers very little in exchange, with the caveat that this very little has considerable worth for those attain it.

Being satisfied with less, awards enough advantages. Perhaps more? Pointing to one thing instead of vowing to define and exploit most things is equally commendable, or at least safe. Nonetheless, pointing to one thing identifies me as (a) being, as much as it designates an identified object as extant. Indeed, this may be satisfying for alpha dogs like Antisthenes of A. and Diogenes of S. who cared to live in the here and now. Those who point to a chicken and say: this is a chicken, may not see the egg in what they call chicken. Those who recognise friends they had not seen for many years, and

are recognised by them, realise that change is no contradiction to continuity, especially as both appear to contradict one another in certain ways, but fail to do so in others. Pointing to an object isolates object and observer in a here and now bubble; it locks them in a restrictive connection, which forms an excluding relationship. Why should observers be so anxious to designate the distinctiveness of any object they point to, if not to vindicate their own, through that very designation? Every grain of sand, every speck of dust and every putrid vegetable possess uniqueness, why then so much personal insecurity? Once branded a Sophist, once a disciple of Socrates and finally a Cynic, Antisthenes concocted wise (or perhaps witty) formulae. Did he ever search for meaningful communication from his teachers or with his disciples? Look, it does not matter how ugly, stupid and ignorant or, for that matter, how attractive, clever, and knowledgeable you might be, whether you like it or not and in whatever way it befalls you, you are unique. Sadly, you can't be otherwise. This is not your fault, let alone your main problem. You have this and other types of problem. You find it difficult to think clearly, and it hurts when you try on your own. Or maybe it does it less, when you communicate?

By the way, as a person making art, I have otherwise no interest at all in being an artist. Perish the thought! But may it console Banksies, Ai Wei Weis and other Laurie Andersons. My interest lies in interspecies communication, by which I do not mean getting on well with my two cats Nera and Spotty, who are brother and sister. Interspecies communication includes, in my unpublished books, any matter that divergent opinions may or may not consider as living, pigments and fibres, for instance. I (like to think that I) communicate with matter, and sincerely hope that matter communicates with me. Dearest matter, please do. You can tell me anything you want, any time. I am listening to you. I like you. I love you.

As for communicating among Sophists and Cynics, I wonder if it turned out to become their forte, since reciprocal communication accommodates ideas exchanged from various perspectives. The cultivation of rhetoric skills aims at establishing the prominence of one line of argumentation that should be convincingly promoted against likely (and even likelier) alternatives and variations. Thus, Sapiens who, for most of them, have never heard of Protagoras of Abdera, are to this day deeply influenced by his winning arguments. Fond of their wisdom, which they value as the triumph of conscience gorgeously laced with a plethora of feelings and a touch of reason, Sapiens believe in specific pecking orders. Below them, they notice Nera and Spotty's colleagues, whom they grant the possession of instinct. Proud of their two shod feet, Sapiens stand on stone and gravel, as if minerals were detritus at the bottom of the lowest evolutionary pile, even though one of their own, Carl von Linné, had allocated a mineral Realm, next to the animals and plants. Indeed, logical Sapiens dream the golden thought, that they are made of stardust, as they fancy themselves scattered across the whole universe, through which they would like to roam to its very confine. Even though, they do not get carried away by twinkling visions, but make sensible use of their fine rhetorical skills. So much so, that they endorse the precise proposition, that minerals, being neither endowed with reason nor with instinct, cannot be much alive.

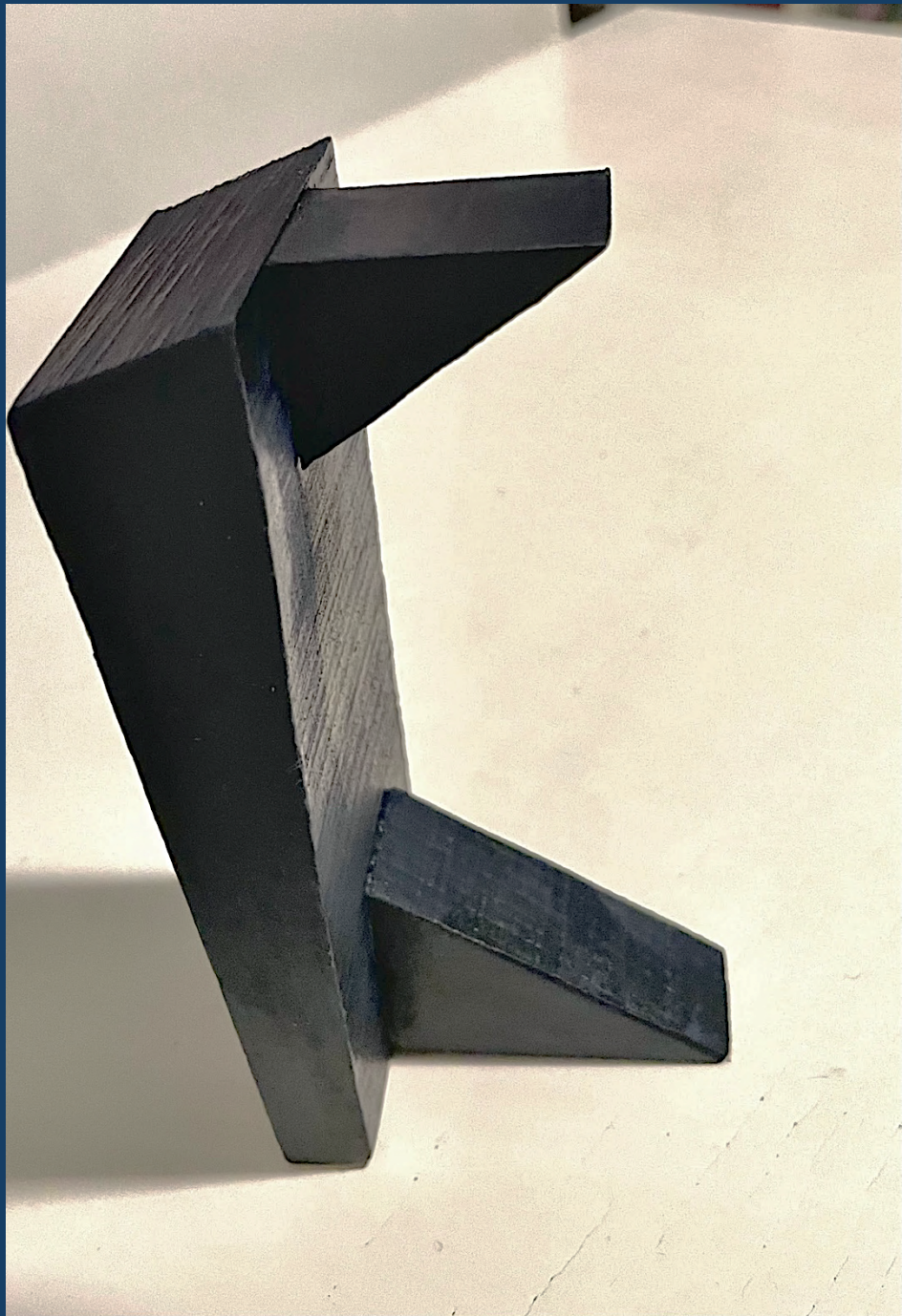
Well then, let us make a further *ad absurdum* hypothesis. Let us take all minerals away from the Cosmos and conjecture what, if not who, shall survive.

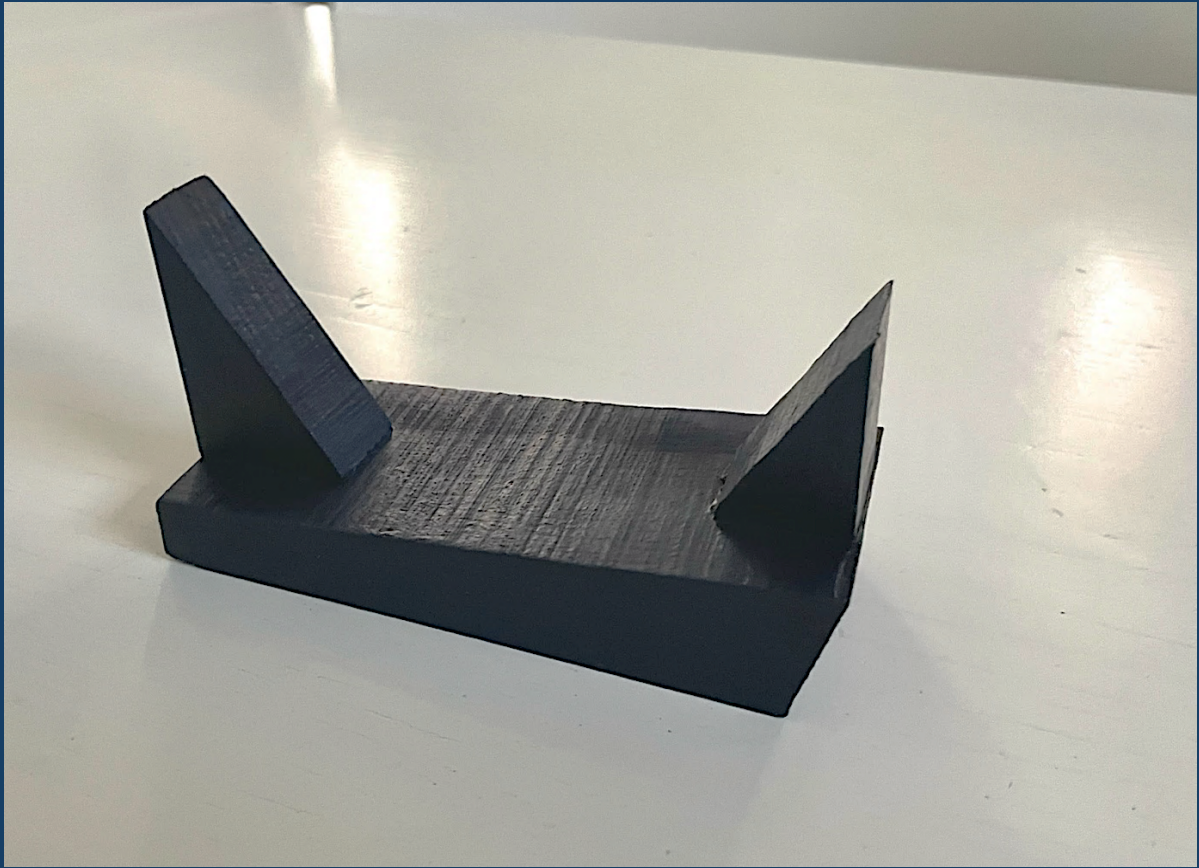
Regarding Gorgias as well as Protagoras' denial of the existence of being, it has to be noted in the first place that their extreme position intended to condemn an influential school of metaphysics. Since they considered Parmenides' theory of beingness as false and absurd, opposing it with the symmetrical counterargument of validated non-beingness would have been equally false and even more absurd. The alleged existence of absolutely nothing, inferring that something defined as nothingness could exist, is self-contradicting; no thing cannot be a thing. A nihilist dogma would therefore have failed to dislodge the Parmenidean tenet (that only what is, is) by advancing an equally flawed opposite argument (that, because negativity is definable, it exists on the premise that defining remains defining, when it is positive and when it is negative). Since positing one thing as knowable necessitates comparing and contrasting it with other things, self-contradiction by contradicting only itself and failing to contradict other things undermines both the validity of definition and contradiction. Once again, the seemingly untenable idea that contradiction is impossible makes more sense when analysed against Parmenidean thought. Does it end up disabling discourse and thereby the very foundation of justified knowledge, or does it initiate a demanding approach to knowledge, that is most unlikely to become prevalent? If non-existence cannot be absolute, it has to be relative; and if existence relates to non-existence, to be extant and apprehensible, then it too has to be relative. Consequently, contradiction becomes, when released from a Parmenidean straitjacket, possible. As long as we remember that it can be forcibly restrained again and owes its existence to a dogma, we can sensibly reflect on the theoretical and practical possibilities of contradiction.

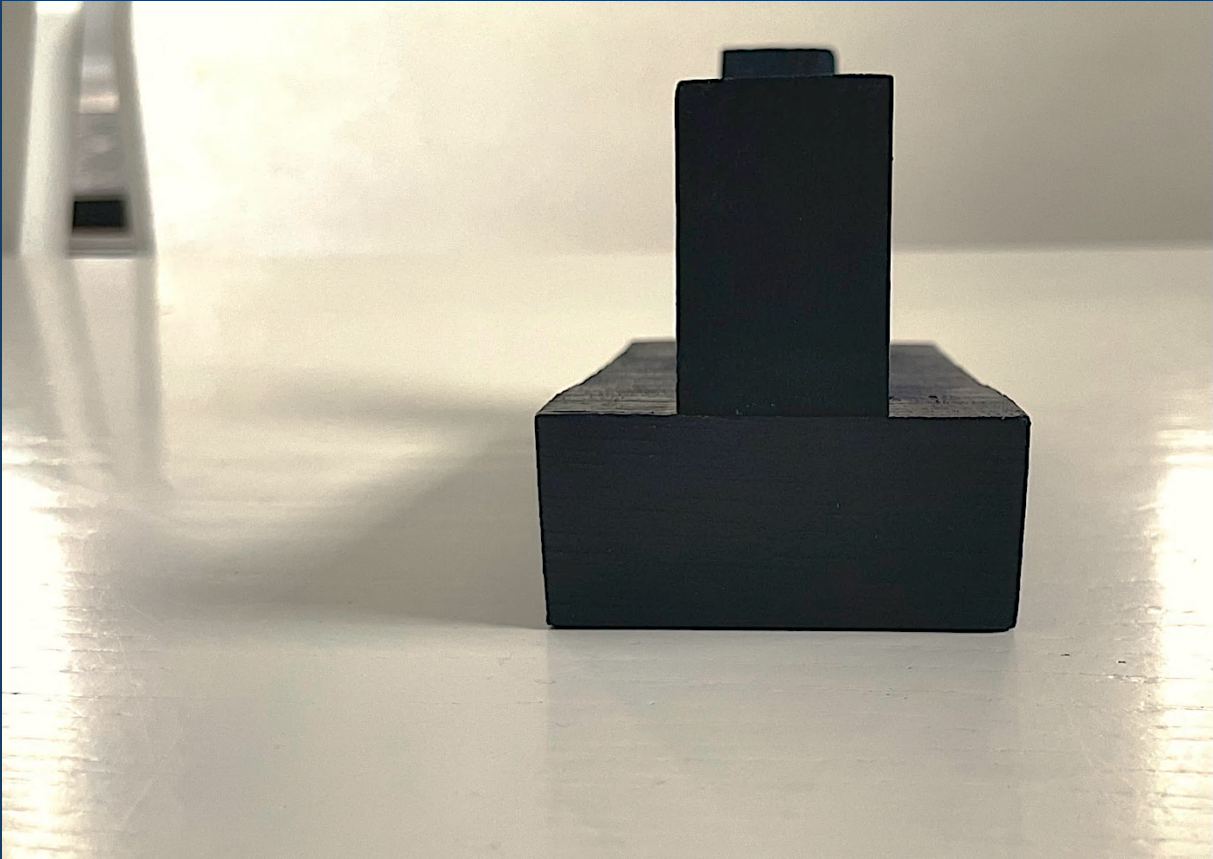
Instead of interpreting Gorgias, Protagoras and Antisthenes' provocative assertions literally, we may wish to ask ourselves if these bold philosophical gestures hold realistic insights, from which we might benefit. The propositions that existence, non-existence, and contradiction do not exist, are far-fetched. However, the fact that (political, religious, scientific and other) institutions defend and promote the definite nature of what they represent and stand for, constitutes a realistic correlation. Statements defining what is and what is not are released by institutions that thus establish or increase their power, once these definitions gain acceptance. Any reached consensus about accepted definitions therefore secures a balance of power or enable new power-games, that depend on the official existence of contradiction.

Suddenly, one wonders whether anarchic philosophy had not taken one of its most explosive turns long before Proudhon and Bakunin. Roughly when did a notorious association of knowledge and the application of knowledge with power, first raise public concern? And where? Though reviled for defending any cause and asking remuneration for their rhetorical skills, the Sophists' unethical reputation deserves to be re-examined. They might even be compared to the earlier Daoists.









Were they no more than crooked lawyers donning a philosophical hat? In the 20th and 21st centuries, standard notions of liability and guilt have been replaced with a broad range of specific criteria and even convicted criminals have been given legal rights. Of course, dubious lawyers will abuse these rights which, on the other hand, are needed to protect anyone against falling victim to received assumptions. In that sense, the Sophists were modern thinkers who anticipated cultural relativism. They were open to implausible ideas, and perhaps the first to broadcast that any defined principle, whatever it “is”, can be used to underpin or to reveal a bias. Any critique of being owes them recognition. Though we are left with a confused picture of their respective achievements, I would like to conclude this essay with two considerations which, I suspect, are still relevant. The first, philosophers should be willing to debate on any ideas, however offensive or frowned upon they may appear; otherwise ideas fall into two categories: off-limits or suitable for a philosophical investigation. After all, even Descartes conducted *ad absurdum* argumentations. The second thought regards those who call themselves philosophers. If they preach a theory, they should be prepared to live as they preach, which so few of them and so few of us do.

So, how do *so few of them and so few of us* inform their philosophical practice with political and social elements? Perhaps the best-known example, Karl Marx, set these connections at the centre of his intellectual endeavour. Written with Friedrich Engels in London, in 1847, his *Manifesto of the Communist Party* elects a contemporary place and date, Europe in the late Industrial Age, to launch a historical mission which philosophy and politics were meant to carry out jointly. Does this urgent sense of a plan, that must be put into action, compare in any way with the Cynics’ congruence between theory and practice? Beyond a contempt for wealth and despotism, there are no striking similarities. So-called primitivists, philosophers who rated closeness to nature higher than social attainment, did not rally like-minded followers to prepare a revolution. The Daoists phrased their critical stance with humour and ambiguity to avoid getting killed by the rulers under whom they served. Their warnings did not target the masses. Daoist scholars were reminded not to aspire to recognition and riches; the masses were not cautioned accordingly. Daoists and Cynics took it for granted that most people, including scholars, superficially overcome their limitations; human weaknesses may be exposed and reduced, but not eradicated. Such a self-disciplined acceptance of everyday reality discards proselytising ideals. For sure, education helps us to acquire moral values since, according to Antisthenes, if these are truly (taught and) understood, they cannot be unlearned. Yet, revolutionary expectations were foreign to resigned practitioners who, instead of demanding or hoping for change, fought for a personal acquisition of some wisdom, and nothing else. The Cynics expressed their disbelief in the notion of a better world with assertive arrogance; the Daoists did it through a placid and playful avoidance of reaction.

On the face of it, Antisthenes’ savage attack on knowledge acquisition, the claim that contradiction is impossible, insults not only philosophers but anyone who, through research or debate, is contributing to civilising society. No wonder that Aristotle felt outraged by that targeted conceptual confrontation. Indeed, it has a strong critical

character, an anarchic unyieldingness which, nonetheless, strikingly lacks a social foundation. If thought were food, what would be a typical socio-political meal according to doctrinal regimes? Communist cuisine would not serve the best, but enough for everyone, with local variations such as NorthKorean ballistic specialities. Let them starve a little, while we test a couple of long-range missiles; overheating is unhealthy. As to Diogenes, who was sincerely convinced that overheating is unhealthy, he is not only remembered for despising cooked food and preferring to eat raw fish and eggs, like a canine. His insalubrious choice of accommodation, a barrel, has tickled popular imagination, even though his commitment to living close to nature deplorably hasn't. It is difficult to conceive what Cynic traits might interest a broad audience, since the Cynics made no effort to be interesting. Antisthenes did not care for followers. When Diogenes visited him day after day, the Master used to wield his club to hit him and other aspiring students. Diogenes responded to the wooden welcoming with endurance. Antisthenes may have hit him as much as he wanted, the blows did not keep his thick head away. Thus, Diogenes became Antisthenes' humble disciple. It should not hurt too much to admit that Cynic food (for thought), for all its sharp antisocial and ascetic flavours, does not remotely appeal to us. Except that, when a reputable dish happens to taste bland or has arrived lukewarm on the dining table, a small amount of Cynic spice may season it to our liking. In a manner of speaking, an elegant sufficiency of roasted civilisation occasionally feels palatable.

No time is wasted pondering and arguing at a crocodiles' or at a piranhas' banquet. When they spot an edible creature straying in their water, they catch the doomed swimmer. Snacking a prey, not yacking away, so shall their spontaneous philosophy be summarised. Sapiens think otherwise. They need to make mistakes. Without them, they are incapable of learning. Thanks to them, they build types of knowledge that belong to no other species. For this reason, critiques of being are conducted within societal parameters, which they cannot transcend. Still, if such critiques dwelt on the *politikon* rather than the *zoon* aspect of human knowledge, they would create an imbalance we ought to redress. Therefore, we need to investigate, whether the dialectical terms of a philosophy of becoming are compatible with the basic consensus reached on biological findings across species. To explore this avenue, we'll answer the question: What "is" or what "becomes" a human or an animal body?

After at least seven years, a Sapiens has a completely regenerated body. Within a span which is far longer than the period needed by other species to replace all their cells, an entirely new body has grown out of its former version. A running river's incessant flow compares with the constant regeneration of cells in living forms. In the wake of Heraclitus' metaphor, we can either say that, on a number of occasions, we cross the same river in which a different water is flowing. Or we can state that we never cross the same river, as its running water never stays the same while flowing. Cells grow, divide, attack or defend themselves, atrophy, die, spread or mutate. These procedures fit within a cyclical dialectic of becoming: non-occurrence of being, coming into being and starting to evolve and decay, transformational occurrence of being, ceasing to evolve and continuing to decay, ceasing to decay, ended occurrence of

being. Whereby, since being has not static but transformational characteristics, no isolated phase of living ends up dying within a life span. Regeneration means that life and death happen in combinations, even though we apportion specific durations to the various ages we experience as successive sequences. When we live, we are also dying; when we are dying, we are still living. If we were not partly dying when are alive, we could not live. If we could not die, life could not regenerate and sustain itself. A biological approach to a critique of being therefore tallies with a socio-political framework. Does this imply that the philosophies of becoming are right and the philosophies of being wrong? Only philosophers of being can answer this question; their answer, I guess, would be no. But it might as well be yes, which throws further questions, linking being to knowledge again.

For instance, since philosophies of becoming relativise actual and potential occurrences of being, how can anything judged right, not be wrong (at least in part)? And anything wrong, not be right (also at least in part)? Newton's theory of gravity is still correct when compared with Einstein's relativity, if we recall the scale on which his observations were conducted. His explanations are still relevant, when they apply to a distance of a few meters, which covers the fall of an apple from a branch onto the earth. Conversely, Einstein's first and second theories of relativity, which are abstract and arduous to understand, become impossible to follow when reduced to the scale used for Newton's empirical deductions. Unless we possess advanced scientific and mathematical skills, we may struggle to come to terms with contradictory accounts of physical facts. However, ask physicists whether light is wave or particle. They will have no qualm in maintaining that they are neither, but also both; and they shall even explain why and how.

Quantum physics makes use of both explanations. Matter and energy can be considered as particles when emitted or absorbed, and when they are observed. However, they can also be understood as waves, for instance, when we attempt to describe the position of an atom's electron. This type of description caps the level of accuracy it can deliver; an electron's exact position and its momentum cannot both be determined simultaneously. Heisenberg's *Uncertainty Principle* stipulates, that it is not possible to define several physical properties at the same time and that, at any rate, an observed object is disturbed (affected) by its observer. This principle thereby also undermines straightforward ideas of being, i.e. the tenet that a thing is either what it is or that it cannot be a thing, since one and the same time would be required, within which a thing would have to be every aspect of what it is, irrespective of any observer's influence. We are confronted with the idea, that referring to a thing does not justify its existence. The exact location where an electron should be found, does no more exist than Zeno of Elea's flying arrow stuck by cogent reasoning into midair. The idea of a flying arrow and a flying arrow cannot coincide with one another; electrons do not coincide with themselves in a manifestation of identity kindly provided by a time-space continuum. Another classic of non-existence involving ideation, concerns a tree felled in a forest. Emitted audible vibrations populate the air, but as transmitted vibrations

cannot be perceived without a receptor, the noise made by a felled tree only exists when it is heard. Otherwise, the tree silently falls to the ground.

Should I come up with an example less commonly, or never quoted in physics? Someone (Rexa Samplinova) sits in a restaurant overlooking the open stone bridge that links the town of Rheinfelden in Switzerland to the town of Rheinfelden in Germany. Like the river Rhine, that bridge also separates the two communities. Keen to discover whether the pale looking Blanc de Noir locally produced in Magden, tastes like a white wine or a rosé, Rexa Samplinova orders a bottle. She knows that the skin of the black grapes pressed to make that wine, is removed before their juice matures into barrels. Yet, whatever information Rexa has gleaned about Magden Blanc de Noir, be it from A.I. that does not drink (anything), or from the mouth of a wine-taster, she would like to try it herself. Rexa swirls the liquid inside her glass and brings it near her nose. Slowly and noisily, she gurgles to oxygenate the precious aromas. Be it as it may, before Rexa Samplinova smelled and drank Blanc de Noir from her glass, the wine's bouquet and taste could not exist. All the more reasons to drink, cheers! Of course, the fact that plenty of arguments and publicity about wines' bouquets and tastes do exist, concerns a completely different issue. Another issue, also different, is that, because Rexa enjoys the wine from Magden, she drinks more than one glass. After all, a bottle stands on her table. When she leaves the restaurant, she still walks pretty straight, and even makes it to the middle of the adjacent stone bridge (would that be in Switzerland or Germany?), where she leans over the parapet and spews. In a modest, but witnessed manner, her puke festival redefines the water's contents. Strolling by, smoking teenagers pollute the air; their interference is strikingly mean, not fair. Staring at Samplinova, they shout: "No one vomits twice in the same river." Not only that, but they also sing the taunting Pukey hymn. "*Pukey Pukey! Pukey, Pukey!*" rings the haunting, repetitive, melody.

Quantum physics and quantum computing rely on probability to approximate and combine data. As an alternative to their mathematical method (probability), we shall consider a notional approach through potentiality. Thanks to the concept of potentiality, which contains a latent notion of being (*ens/esse*), we abstractly envisage that a thing which had previously undergone change and is about to change, is also, by being about to be changed, not yet changed and further changing. To what extent is change felt, observed or imagined? Like the duration of a physical process and the energy it requires, we assume that the various aspects observable in a phenomenon are connected, that they act as a set of consistently processed elements. However, connections do not necessarily happen at once; they may be performed in discrete or continuous modes that defy observation. Potentiality describes the versatile character, that becoming imparts on matter, whereas probability calculates comprehensible and predictable changes in matter. By further aligning potentiality and probability with discourse, we notice that these hypothetical methods of enquiry signal the major operative value of doubt. As a result of a personal experience, or a conversation we had, or a book we read, we may question ideas that we hitherto had taken for granted, and thus develop an analytical outlook, rather than reiterate the same views. Yet, we

cannot do both at the same time. We cannot have an experience and evaluate it concurrently. If we could, philosophy might be fully applied to infuse our lives with effective wisdom, which none of its schools - including the Cynics – has ever had the ability to deliver. According to Diogenes Laertius who, in his *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, recounted countless anecdotes about Diogenes of Sinope, the latter wandered through the streets of Athens, which he lit with a lantern in broad daylight. Asked why he held that lantern, Diogenes answered: “*Anthropon zeto*”, which literally means I am looking for a human being. Planned and deliberately provocative, the staged action, had it taken place in America or Europe in the late 1950s, or in the 60s, would have been called a *happening* or a *performance*. The anachronistic descriptor *viral* also describes it well, especially as its common translation “*I am looking for an honest man*” correctly renders Diogenes’ intention. Nonetheless, as for recent actions or statements that have gone viral, its veracity ought to be verified. Diogenes, who took himself for a sage (*sophos*), looked for a human being imbued with honesty and wisdom, knowing full well, that he would never find a perfect example. His search had therefore been designed to fail publicly. He never sought an encounter with a normal person who, in spite of foolishness and weaknesses, possessed a degree of honesty and some wish for truth, that could at least to some extent be “freed” by philosophical assistance. His proclaimed search for a model of virtue and wisdom must have misled him in the first place, otherwise he would have been deceitful and manipulative. No one is recorded to have replied: “*What entitles you to recognise an honest man? Are you anthropos and no one else? Was neither your mentor Antisthenes nor his mentor Socrates an honest man? And if you know two anthropoi who also were sophoi and are yourself sophos and anthropos, why are you looking for a fourth one, pretending that none can be found?*”

Promoting Diogenes’ stubborn humility and dedication to truth, the burden of proof carried by the lit lantern performance lies in its credible philosophical marketing. To this day, the stunt is remembered and talked about. As indeed Alexander’s recounted claim that, had he not been Alexander, he would have wanted to be Diogenes. Taught by Aristotle, Alexander (called the Great) never tired of waging wars with the lofty aim of exporting Greek wisdom to the barbaric lands he conquered, an enlightened form of military expansionism, for which he admired himself. But then, why was it necessary to raise Persepolis to the ground, since Persians were Barbarians with no culture worthy of that name? Was Persepolis an example of *non-culture* and its inhabitants prime examples of the equation: *non-sophos=non-anthropos*? The concept ***anthropos*** (rather than *sophos*) features in Protagoras’s famous denial of objective knowledge that implies the impossible existence of objective ***being*** (and objective ***non-being***): “‘Pántōn chrēmátōn métron ***ánthrōpon eînai***, tôn mèn ***óntōn***, hōs ***ésti***, tôn dè ***mē óntōn***, hōs ***ouk éstin***.” (Πάντων χρημάτων μέτρον ***ἄνθρωπον εἶναι***, τῶν μὲν ***ὄντων***, ὡς ***ἔστι***, τῶν δὲ ***μὴ ὄντων***, ὡς ***οὐκ ἔστιν***). This time, the equation works positively as well as negatively. Only humans measure all things; whether they measure things that are real or imagined hardly makes a difference, anything that has been measured and produced by them as knowledge cannot exist without their measurements, and the mould of their perception and judgment. The things that do not exist, but are discussed

by humans, are not coming into being because they have been imagined and are discussed by humans. Conversely, the things that are proven to exist by humans, could also be proven to exist by another source and provider of knowledge, if another source and provider of knowledge existed, which no one can prove. Let us make a further equation: Diogenes + Eisenberg. It is impossible to observe anything without modifying the nature of what is observed, therefore observations cannot but be biased, therefore approximate, and creative observations exist. The exposed myth of an independent observer does not spare *sophoi*. Either philosophers appreciate that studies of truth are shaped by a mould that must be clearly accounted for, or they choose to understate their methodologies. Is it true that philosophical searches for the truth impact on the truth which they search? It is true that any claim, that any truth searched according to any method may go beyond a method's boundaries, has to end in deception?

On the other hand, Diogenes framed some of his remarks with an ironic reference to his status. Even I, a philosopher, or: even after all these years, do I, a thinking man (a *sophos*), only now realise that... Or words to that effect. Serious philosophical enquiries never reach a stage of completion that makes further questioning redundant. Even though this limitation may be considered a drawback, it dwindles into near insignificance once we realise, that we face a far more daunting problem, the craving for simple answers and the fear of uncertainty that both underpin beliefs deeply seated in ideologies of being.

Broadening our critique of being, so that it includes psychoanalysis, we then ask: "What rules the world?" The naïve answer: "(It is) money (that) rules the world." conceals the influence of powerful drives responsible for the invention and the minting of money. What is the point of blaming banknotes for corruption, and weapons for killings, as if unaided banknotes intended to make and receive payments, and stored weapons were keen to pull their trigger? Fear of need, panic at the prospect of low security, and the overall unease unleashed by uncertainty turn into dominant forms of overcompensation. Sapiens admit that they make rules and pass laws, which they break. Nonetheless, they relentlessly issue new regulations which, however adjusted, will be broken. In their desperation, Sapiens struggle to retain a higher degree of certainty than they can attain. So why have human fears gone out of control? Whereas animals use fear to detect risks and avoid immediate threats speedily, our fears have been dislocated and relate to other objects. They hinge on our addictively high demands and unrealistic expectations. Knowing that we cannot get what we want, does not stop us from wanting it. Knowing that rules and regulations can only be partially implemented with success, does not hinder us from improving systems that cannot be perfect. Like high demands and expectations, and like wishful thinking, some civilised fears may be provoked by factual danger, but the majority are fuelled by imagination and triggered by fantasy. We want a long and happy life and a comfortable existence, wonderful relationships, not just good ones, optimal health, not a reasonably good condition, and so on and so forth. Even in Nietzsche's least pathetic tome, "*Was Zarathustra an Influencer?*", we learn from his lyrical outburst (*Das trunkene Lied*), that our zest for life yearns for eternal existence, that our deepest joys demand to last

forever. Why not be honest and concede, that the only thing we really desire in depth, is what we can't get (precisely because we can't get it)?

Placed within an evolutionary context, civilised fears and exacerbated consumerism strongly contrast with natural measure and contentment. In their natural habitat, animals do not overkill, because they do not overeat. Civilisation mints a main currency to facilitate payments for its doubtful bounty: mental illness. In the manageable forms of stress and conflicts and in the aggravated forms of behavioural disorders and psychotic crime, mental illness negotiates our most profound aspirations: to get what we can't have, to say things that do not exist, exist, and to claim on the grounds of incomplete evidence that, what is, is. Only the ethically self-promoted Sapiens species perpetrates abuse, practises corruption and commits violent deeds on a scale irreconcilable with the necessary (and therefore justified) levels of aggression that exist in nature. With considerable success, morals tell us what is right and what is wrong, and religions disclose what should be believed and emulated. Laws decree what is permissible, and what is transgressing. And, through numerous accomplishments, logic dictates what is correct or inaccurate. Yet, a higher success and greater achievements might become tangible, if we conquered our paralysing fear of uncertainty and endeavoured to cope with the thought, that things are not what they are, and that we are not who we are, however inane and infuriating we find that convoluted idea.

Indeed, the statements: "things are not what they are" and "we are not who we are" do not make sense, as long as we rely on the customary set of opposites that justifies truth versus falsehood, namely: appearance and reality (Schein und Sein). Yet, if we say: "things are not what they seem" and "we are not the person, we believe to be", these stated dualities exonerate a fundamentalist association. Things can only appear to be other than what they are, if definite identities exist; then and only then, can they be what they are, not an appearance, but an essence. By relativising appearances, dualist discourses on being "appear to be" serious. Monist philosophies of becoming relativise both notions, for instance the appearance of a flying arrow and the thinkable idea of an arrow in flight. Granted, Zeno's arrow cannot fly if it is an infinitely divisible, i.e. infinitely definable arrow. However, the arrow that moves from one point to a further point, is and is not the same, as the one that passes that further point and is becoming a new and the same arrow. Heraclitus + Protagoras + Zeno = The concept becoming solves the seemingly real difference between our problematic ideas of appearance and being.

Civilisation insists that we have become better than animals and teaches us an edifying tale of two opposites; the savage law of the jungle and the triumph of democratic values over barbarity. What a touching yarn, I never grow tired of hearing it. On second thoughts, I feel inclined to argue that animals are not (just) animals, since the human species came into being as a result of their evolution. Like us, animals have their own individuality and feelings, and are susceptible to emotions. Concurrently, humans are still, though partially and in spite of the cultural incentives with which they are

obsessed, a natural species. In that they remain torn between self-indulgence and a resilient urge to reconcile themselves with balanced contentment, humans nurture an uneasy and contradictory bond with nature.

At the very dawn of civilisation, Neanderthals and Sapiens, and Denisovans, created symbolic objects, that gave them the same wonderful reward as Modern Humans: to have more than what they needed to live. To put it mildly, the role fulfilled by these objects preemptively nullifies the rational foundation supporting millennia of philosophies of being. Sculptured or painted bisons and horses never have been, and are not bisons and horses. The manner in which they were sculptured or painted did and does not represent who they were, but thoughts and feelings about them; it evokes life forms separate from and incompatible with the communicative reality articulated by an artwork. No person in the Ice Age looked like the Venus of Hohle Fels, or the Venus of Willendorf, or Amiens-Renancourt. These three Palaeolithic figurines adorned female anatomy with gigantic breasts and hips in an era, when early humans had difficulties finding enough food to sustain themselves. Hungry hunters and gatherers crafted overweight symbols. Therefore, their sculptures did not and do not represent a woman one of them could have seen. They show a woman who is not a woman, that is to say the aesthetic ideal of a female body, which no real person incorporates and therefore, which only exists in someone's head. An alternative elucidation based on the lack of facial features common to these small sculptures, scattered over Western and Eastern Europe, advises that the early artists may have been inspired by bronzes typified by highly abstracted anatomy and a conspicuous avoidance of a recognisable face, notably those by Henry Moore. However, no one is recorded as having verified this theory.

Whether we interpret the mysterious and highly expressive carvings as pornographic toys carved by men, or as fertility idols conceived and made by either women or men, the Palaeolithic Venuses help us to recommend an answer to the vexing question: What makes us human? I would suggest: a compulsive attraction to what does not and cannot exist, a pathological intolerance of factual reality, an enduring cultivation of selfdeceit and confused or mendacious interactions, and a fragile balancing act between virtuality and actuality. Of course, a Texan chick feeding on Kentuckies and boasting 300 kilos exists. She and other all-American squashers of conventional scales, compete in breadth and depth with our ancestors' shapely figurines, but not in height. Willendorf: 11 cm, Hohle Fels: 6 cm, Amiens-Renancourt: 4 cm. Regardless of their extreme body index, no Jessy Whooper and no Beulah Extra could be 11 cm high and weigh a few hundred kilos; no objects on earth, let alone big humans, accommodate such coordinates. These include Nean's *Table Prototype #1, also entitled: The Venus of Bottmingen (Die Venus von Bottmingen)*, which, with an upper length of 11 cm and a lower length of 12 cm, weighs a paltry 10 grams. By this and many other tokens, we wish our XXXXL US stars best of luck on the operation table. May a surgical intervention reduce their stomach successfully, and may God bless America. *O Dio! Crudel'*. And ... Our sizzling regards to Benny Mash Bangers and Donald McDoom.

*Sì grande è il mio contento,
sì dolce è tal momento,
che tanta gioia ancora
credere il cor non sa.
No, non vi posso esprimere
la mia felicità.*

Thought is what early humans developed. Be it visual, spoken or written, be it materialised or intangible, thought provides fascinating opportunities; it enables us to engage in the evaluative contemplation of what is not, of what could be or could have been, of what should or might become. But it also tricks us into believing that our evaluations are tantamount to accurate descriptions, and that we can know what is inside and outside us, and act accordingly and justly. Our thinking abilities testify to an inborn aptitude to question the world we inhabit and change, imaginatively. Nonetheless, the confidence we have gathered, that we should be able to analyse and define reality without the distorting lenses of our wishes, has promoted not only the philosophies of being, but recurring reasoning arrogance from all ideological corners. The reproof addressed by Socrates to Antisthenes, that his pride shone through the holes of the ragged blanket he wore, applies tenfold to Diogenes.

If we reflect on topics with which we are very familiar, such as personal experiences, it becomes easier to consider almost anything as partially both right and wrong, or good and bad. During childhood, we look forward to having more freedom in adolescence. But should we throw away the innocence of childhood? We would be inadequate adults if we resented our obligations and sorely missed the lack of responsibility enjoyed by children and adolescents. The peace of mind that comes with old age may be relished. Yet, who would prefer senility to maturity? These notions can be contrasted unlike other areas of knowledge. Because they have not been taught, we reach our own conclusions. When we think, this is so or not so, do we make a judgement that does justice to our intellectual potential? Do our opinions depend on cultural influences, or do they distinctly vocalise our ability to distance ourselves from received values? This question brings us back to the social and political aspects affecting our understanding of being and becoming. For Sapiens, there can be no *zoon* without *politikon*.

Alleged author: Nean

Approximate place of composition:

Either Pyongyang or Vatican City

Date: unascertained

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Quotation from the end of the opera: *Tancredi*,
melodrama in two acts, libretto by Gaetano Rossi,
music by Gioacchino Rossini, 1813.

Photographed artwork

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Wolfgang Ink Mark Ziegler aka Nean, *Table Prototype #1*,
also entitled: *The Venus of Bottmingen (Die Venus von Bottmingen)*,
watercolour on machine-sawed bonded beechwood, 2024.

Weight: 11 grams.

Measurements of the leaf

Upper length: 11 cm, lower length: 12 cm, width at both ends: 5 cm,
depth of the straight side: 1.3 cm, depth of the slanted side: 3 cm.

Measurements of the legs

Slender leg: 3.5 cm x 4 cm x 2.2 cm, strong leg: 5.6 cm x 4.6 cm x 3 cm

The 11 photographs by the artist, 2026,

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