NEGATION AND BEING[*]

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NEGATION IS SOMETHING THAT WE DO. It is typically a judgment that we make, a judgment that something is not the case, and it usually—albeit by no means exclusively—takes the form of a statement. We make negative existential judgments ("There is no longer a Cold War," "Inflation doesn't exist in this economy") and negative predicate judgments ("Two is not greater than three," "The suspect's not ready to talk").[1]

Negations such as these are commonplace, in our lives and in our grammar, and they may well be a distinctive feature of human communication. Almost two decades ago Jon Barwise made the observation: "All human languages contain one or more mechanisms of a negative character; no animal communication does."[2] Even if this

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[1] By no means do these two sorts of negation exhaust the forms of negation. Some negations express genuine oppositions ("ammonia is not an acid"), others merely a difference ("an SUV is not a truck"), still others simply an absence ("the prices are not inflated"). Negations can express a contradiction, a contrariety, or a subcontrariety; see Aristotle, *De interpretatione*, 6.17a25–8.18a27. A negating term may be used to indicate the complement of a class rather than the opposite of some state of affairs. However, as the examples in this opening paragraph are meant to convey, my main concern in this paper is negation expressed in adverbs to deny that something exists, has a certain property, or is related to something else. I am grateful to Walter Hopp and Bryan Norwood for critical readings of earlier versions of this paper.

[2] Jon Barwise, "Review of Laurence Horn's *A Natural History of Negation*," *The Journal of Symbolic Logic* 56, no. 3 (September 1991): 1103. See, however, the research of Lou Hermann and others on dolphins; L. M. Herman and P. H. Forestell, "Reporting presence or absence of named objects by a language-trained dolphin," *Neuroscience and Biobehavioral Reviews* 9, no. 4 (Winter 1985): 667–91, and L. M. Herman and R. K. Uyeyama, "The Dolphins' Grammatical Competency: Comments on Kako (1999)," *Animal Learning and Behavior* 27, no. 1 (1999): 21. There is also the issue of whether great apes' ability to express displeasure amounts to a conception of

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last observation overreaches, there can be no doubt about the foundational role that negation traditionally plays in thinking and knowing. Consider how Wittgenstein, with the Sheffer stroke, introduced a negation operation to generate all truth functions.[3] Whether one analyzes knowledge claims as suitably justified or as reliable true beliefs, it hardly suffices to show that someone believes what is the case; for both epistemological theories, it must be shown that either the reasons an alleged knower has for his true belief or the behavior he exhibits rule out beliefs to the contrary.[4] Thus, negation appears to be a primitive element of our processes of thinking and knowing anything.

Not surprisingly, negation also plays a central role in scientific reasoning in the form of counterfactuals. Moreover, even if we reject the notion that an absence signaled by a negation could be a cause, we have to contend with the fact that standard analyses of causation are forced to have recourse to negation inasmuch as they suppose that a process or fact can only be a cause if it is not the same as its effect.[5] So construed, causation requires a real distinction that is the counterpart of a negation.

Nor has the fundamental role of negation been lost on metaphysicians. For Aquinas, access to the very subject matter of metaphysics is crucially dependent upon the distinctive negative judgment he labels *separatio*.[6] The subjectivity of a living substance,

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negation. I am grateful to Alice MacLachlan and Kristin Andrews for these references.

[3] Guy Stock, **"**Negation: Bradley and Wittgenstein," *Philosophy* 60, no. 234 (October 1985): 465–76.

[4] In other words, the analysis entails evidential or reliabilist criteria for attributing to the knower a belief in this state of affairs and not another. So, too, externalist talk of "getting connected to the facts in the right way," "having appropriate concepts," and "relevant conditions" presumably must have recourse to negation; see Fred Dretske, *Perception, Knowledge, and Belief: Selected Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 82, 86, 92 note 14.

[5] G. H. von Wright, *Explanation and Understanding* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1971), 93–4; Donald Davidson, *Actions and Events* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 13–14, 161; the issue of negation remains if causation is supplanted by strings of probabilistic conditions.

[6] *Sancti Thomae de Aquino Expositio super Librum Boethii de Trinitate*, ed. B. Decker (Leiden: Brill, 1955), 183–6; see John Wippel, "Metaphysics and *Separatio* According to Thomas Aquinas," *Review of*

Hegel tells us, is "sheer negativity" and his own metaphysics relies on what he calls "absolute negativity," that is, the absolute's "movement and activity of mediating itself with itself."[7] We hear echoes of this role of negativity in Whitehead's characterization of consciousness as "the feeling of negation" and "negative perception" as "the triumph of consciousness."[8]

Nonetheless, the status of negations presents well known problems. The very grammar of negation seems to point to its secondary status. Thus, negation typically takes the form of an adverb or adjective, requiring a copula or a predicate to modify, respectively. By contrast, the copula or predicate can fulfill its grammatical function without the negative modification. The grammatical structure of negation and what it modifies suggests that negation supposes the foregoing presence of what is negated, but the presence does not require negation.

Not surprisingly, given the hold of grammar on our thinking, negation, in the sense of a negative judgment, appears necessarily derivative, piggybacking on affirmations. In keeping with this apparently secondhand status, a negative judgment typically tells us a lot less than an affirmative judgment. Above all, if ontology is supposed to help us figure out what there is and what it means for anything to be, then negation appears to be spectacularly inept since negative judgments function to tell us what is not the case. In sum, negation seems to be a singularly inappropriate theme for elucidating what it means to be.

The purpose of the following paper is to contest this conclusion and to argue, to the contrary, that negation is fundamental to our understanding of what it means to be. I try to make this case by presenting reasons to think that the counterpart of negation, that is, something corresponding to a negative judgment is, at least in some cases, constitutive of the very makeup of the things and states of

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Metaphysics 31, no. 3 (March 1978): 431–70; see, too, Thomas Aquinas, *De potentia*, q. 7, a. 3 in *Opera omnia*, vol. 3, curante R. Busa (Stuttgart-Bad Canstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1980), 242: " . . . esse uniuscuiusque est ei proprium et distinctum ab esse cuiuslibet alterius rei."

[7] G. W. F. Hegel, *Wissenschaft der Logik*, Bd. 2 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970), 565.

[8] Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality* (New York: Free Press, 1969), 187; see, too, 284 and 319.

affairs about which the judgments are made. In more traditional terms, my aim in this paper is to argue for the ontological significance of negation. In pursuing this aim, by no means do I want to contest the study of negation as a purely formal operation, concerned with its syntactical properties within a given system, in abstraction from ontological commitments or implications. However, one reason, among others, for examining negation's ontological significance is precisely to raise the question of how one might go about determining grounds, if there be any, for the forms that negation may take as a logical operation. For this question, it seems, we have no other recourse than the realm from which logic as a formal operation abstracts, namely, the phenomena of concrete judgments and their contents.[9]

There are three parts to this attempt to make a case for negation's ontological significance. In part one, I review the issue of negation's ontological reach in terms of what might be dubbed the "Parmenidean quandary" regarding negation. In part two, I discuss two traditional ways of expunging the quandary by deriving negation from some ontologically positive dimension, thereby demonstrating the ontological superfluousness of negation. In part three, I argue that the analysis of some negative, perceptual judgments provides ample reason to countenance negative facts.

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[9] As Ledger Wood notes, a purely formal approach to negation, while legitimate in its own sphere, leaves unaddressed the issue of its ontological import. Hence, too, philosophy of logic, insofar as it examines possible grounds and warrants for logical operations, must have recourse to the realm from which logic abstracts. See Ledger Wood, "Paradox of Negative Judgment," *Philosophical Review* 42, no. 4 (July 1933): 412–23. For Reinach, a purely formal approach to logic generally, including the operation of negation, is, if not misguided, then at best derivative since he regards the principles governing relations among states of affairs as the subject matter of logic; Adolf Reinach, "Zur Theorie des negativen Urteils (1911)" in *Sämtliche Werke*, hrsg. Karl Schuhmann und Barry Smith, Bd. 1 (München: Philosophia, 1989), 138, n. 1; Adolf Reinach, "On the Theory of the Negative Judgment," trans. Barry Smith in *Parts and Moments: Studies in Logic and Formal Ontology*, ed. Barry Smith (Munich: Philosophia, 1982), 367, n. 40; hereafter cited as "Reinach" followed by the page numbers of the original and the translation; here: Reinach 138, n. 1 / 376, n. 40.

I

One ready way to broach the issue of negation's ontological significance is to consider its relation to affirmation. Is the relation one of asymmetry or symmetry? Does negation ultimately suppose affirmation, but not vice versa? On one level, it seems patent that a negative judgment supposes a corresponding affirmative judgment or even follows upon an affirmation, particularly if we take the latter to be erroneous. Over a century ago, Christoph Sigwart issued a particularly influential statement of this perspective on the matter:

> The object of a negation is always a *performed or attempted judgment* and the negating judgment can therefore not be regarded as a species of judgment equal in standing with, and as equally primordial as, the positive judgment.[10]

On another level, however, the issue is far from clear since, in some respects, negative judgments are on a par with affirmative judgments and, indeed, equally necessary for logical, epistemological, and ontological concerns.[11] Frege insists, for example, that the being of a thought (*das Sein eines Gedankens*) may be affirmed or denied and,

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[10] Christoph Sigwart, *Logik*, Bd. 1, fünfte, durchgesehene Auflage (Tübingen: Mohr, 1924), 155: "Object einer Verneinung ist immer ein *vollzogenes oder versuchtes Urteil*, und das verneinende Urteil kann also nicht als ein gleichberechtigte und gleich ursprüngliche Speces des Urteils betrachtet werden"; emphasis in original. This theme is echoed, with modifications, by Bradley and Bosanquet. In their view, a negative judgment occurs on a higher level than a positive one because in affirmation we refer an ideal content to reality while in negation we deny that some real X accepts this ideal content. See F. H. Bradley, *The Principles of Logic*, vol. 1 (London: Oxford University Press, 1922), 115; Bernard Bosanquet, *Logic or the Morphology of Knowledge* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1911), 280; and R. M. Gale, *Negation and Non-Being* (Oxford: Basic Blackwell, 1976), 43–4.

[11] The difference between an affirming (*bejahend*) judgment and an assertoric (*assertorisch*) judgment leads Kant to distinguish reality and negation, as categories of quality, from existence and nonexistence (*Dasein—Nichtsein*), as categories of modality. While he identifies negation as the second category of quality, following upon reality, Kant notably places existence and non-existence together as the second category of modality, intermediate between possibility and necessity; Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* in *Kant's gesammelte Schriften*, Bd. 3 (Berlin: Reimer, 1911), B95 and B106.

hence, must be distinguished from its being-true (*Wahrsein*).[12] Thus, for Frege it is not the affirmation but the thought that is denied. In the *Tractatus* (§5.5151), Wittgenstein categorically rejects an asymmetricalist position: "The positive *sentence* must presuppose the existence of the negative *sentence* and vice versa."[13]

There is a straightforward reason for thinking that negation is not merely a dispensable syntactic operator but a semantic term with ramifications for ontology.   We can appreciate this reason by considering the question: what makes a true negative judgment true? According to a *truthmaker principle*, for every true judgment there is something that makes that judgment true. If we adopt the truthmaker principle, then it is incumbent upon us to explain what makes a true, factual negative judgment true. Perhaps the most straightforward way of explaining what makes such a judgment true is appealing to a negative fact as its objective correlate.   Thus, the fact that it is not cloudy today is what makes the corresponding true negative judgment true.

There are, to be sure, problems with countenancing negative facts, and some of these problems are related to the asymmetricalist position on negation. In the first place, there is, at least prima facie (pardon the pun), the empirical problem: where are they? According to several students of the issue, negative facts are simply not to be found in our experience.   As Ledger Wood puts it with admirable clarity:

> In the assertion "Mr. A *is* in the room" we can at least discover Mr. A's *presence* in the room as a positive fact given in perceptual experience, but in "Mr. A *is not* in the room" the factual situation, Mr. A's *absence* from the room, is by no means a perceptual datum. The apparently irreconcilable conflict between the negative

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[12] Gottlob Frege, "Die Verneinung (1919)" in *Logische Untersuchungen*, ed. Günther Patzig (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986), 56 and following. Frege reasons that "the being of a thought" (*Gedanken-sein*) is distinct from its being-true (*Wahrsein*) since the thought is the content of a question, the answer to which can be affirmed or denied. Frege's distinction is analogous to Kant's differentiation of qualitative and modal forms of judgment; see the preceding footnote.

[13] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus logico-philosophicus* in *Werkausgabe*, Bd. 1 (Stuttgart: Suhrkamp, 1984), 60; hereafter *Werkausgabe*; emphasis in original.

judgment and the exclusively positive reality which is its object is the crux of the paradox of negative judgment.[14]

However, there is also a formal problem with countenancing negative facts. The formal problem might be stated in the form of the question: how can there be a negative fact? We readily appeal to negative facts or events to explain what makes true negative judgments true. Nonetheless, it is hardly clear how we should characterize them and whether we should accord them any sort of existential status. If we regard a positive state of affairs (designated by an affirmative judgment) as existing and equate its existing with its presence, then the corresponding negative state of affairs is one that we would have to say does not exist or, equivalently, is absent.[15] If we adopt this terminology, then we can hardly say that a negative state of affairs exists. If we presuppose the law of excluded middle here, a state of affairs is either positive or negative, which is to say that it is present or absent. If this is so, however, how should we characterize the negative fact if we say that it is a fact which makes a corresponding judgment true, and yet that it cannot be said to be present or to exist? In the *Tractatus*, using language that goes back to Lotze, Wittgenstein appears to skirt the issue, as he distinguishes the world, that is, "the totality of states of affairs that obtain" (*die Gesamtheit der bestehenden Sachverhalte*) from actuality (*Wirklichkeit*) which, he tells us, is "the obtaining and non-obtaining of states of affairs."[16]

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[14] Ledger Wood, "The Paradox of Negative Judgment," 412 ; emphasis in original. See, too, Henri Bergson, *L'évolution créatrice* (Paris: Les Presses universitaires de France, 1907), 173: "En résumé, pour un esprit qui suivrait purement et simplement le fil de l'expérience, il n'y aurait pas de vide, pas de néant, même relatif ou partiel, pas de négation possible."

[15] I take state of affairs to include facts and events. This use is not meant to deny the difference between a fact as a *factum*, a more or less settled state (condition, property, relation) of some entity, and an event as the process in which a state of affairs unfolds. As the examples cited at the beginning illustrate, we use negations in the description of both facts and events.

[16] Wittgenstein, *Tractatus* 2.04–2.06 in *Werkausgabe*, 14. For a related statement of the problem, see Eric Toms, *Being, Negation, and Logic* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1962), 72: "The paradox of non-existence is most simply stated by saying that, in so far as a negative existential proposition seems to be about the very object or objects denied existence, it presupposes their existence." See, too, Eric Toms, "The Problem of Negation," *Logique et Analyse* 15 (1972): 1–38; R. M. Gale, "Negative Statements," *American*

This quandary over the status of negative judgments echoes a dilemma classically stated by Parmenides: How can a negative judgment tell us anything about being? How can negation, signaling a nonbeing or what is not the case, be in any way indicative of what it means to be? We can escape this quandary, it would seem, only by revising either our conception of judgments or their objective correlates. The latter solution consists in "reconstructing reality to embrace negativity" by postulating negative states of affairs and perhaps even negative essences.[17] However, most authors regard the very idea of negative states of affairs as muddled and, in its place, propose other solutions to the meaning of negative judgments, solutions that remove any reason for attaching ontological significance to negation.

II

Whereas affirmative judgments typically designate some positive state of affairs, negative judgments can be regarded as denying that designation or affirming the opposite state of affairs. The solutions to the problem of negative facts typically consist in characterizing negative judgments in these ways, which amount to reinterpreting them as judgments about other judgments rather than facts or as affirmative judgments in disguise.[18] Philosophers who endorse these reinterpretations tend to regard negation as an operation of thinking or, more specifically, a denial taking place in thought and eliminable in favor of some other interpretation. On this view, what a negation says can be translated into a description that lacks negation. The

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Philosophical Quarterly 7, no. 3 (July 1970): 206–17 and "On What There Isn't," *Review of Metaphysics* 25, no. 3 (March 1972): 459–88.

[17] Wood, "The Paradox of Negative Judgment," 417.

[18] Most authors on both sides of this issue reject the Hobbesian solution of reinterpreting negative judgments (by obversion) as infinite judgments in the traditional sense, such that "A is not B" is equivalent to "A is not-B." Even apart from the questionableness of supposing an equivalence here, this strategy is little help since it simply repositions and retains negation; see Wood, "The Paradox of Negative Judgment," 418; Raphael Demos, "A Discussion of a Certain Type of Negative Proposition," *Mind* 26, no. 102 (April 1917), 190, hereafter "A Discussion"; Sigwart, *Logik*, 157; Reinach 138–9 / 370–1.

implication is that negation is not a necessary but merely a contingent feature of any account that we may give of how things are.   There are two prominent proposed solutions along these lines.[19]

(1) *The incompatibilist thesis:* Negations can be replaced by statements of incompatibilities. So-called negative facts are just facts about incompatibilities or differences characterizable without recourse to negation.

(2) *The subjectivist thesis:* A negative judgment is not simply equivalent, but is reducible, either to a judgment that some other judgment is false or to a misbelief.

Bosanquet gives a succinct statement of the first solution (1): "Negation *is* simply the *logical, conscious expression of difference.*"[20] In a similar vein, a half-century ago A. J. Ayer contended that negative expressions are expressions of "positive relations" of differences, opposites, or incompatibilities.[21] Such proposals feed off the following reasoning.   The judgment that A is not sitting is based upon the composite fact that A is standing and that sitting is the opposite of or incompatible with standing.   Similarly, for the two nonequivalent items x and y, the judgment that x is not less than y simply expresses an essential difference between x and y and, indeed, a difference that can be expressed by the positive judgment that y is greater than x.[22] Midway through his career, Russell offers a similar solution:

> When, as a result of a perception, I say "This is not blue," I may be interpreted as saying "This is a color differing from blue," where

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[19] A third solution proposes to explain the truth of negative judgments by appeal to the totality of facts, without recourse to negation; see D. Armstrong, *A World of States of Affairs* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) and *Truth and Truthmakers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). For a criticism of this ingenious solution, see Boris Kukso, "The Reality of Absences," *Australian Journal of Philosophy* 84, no. 1 (2006): 21–37.

[20] Bosanquet, *Logic or the Morphology of Knowledge*, 360; emphasis in original.   See, too, Plato, *Sophist* 257d; Demos, "A Discussion," 191; J. D. Mabbot, Gilbert Ryle, and H. H. Price, "Symposium on Negation," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplement IX* (1929), 89–90.

[21] A. J. Ayer, "Negation," *The Journal of Philosophy* 49, no. 26 (December 1952): 805.

[22] This sketch is admittedly patchy.   What stands in a relation of incompatibility may be describable apart from that relation (for example, standing and sitting, seeing red and seeing blue) or not (for example, moving and being at rest, being alive and being dead).

"differing" is the positive relation that might be called "dissimilarity," not abstract non-identity.[23]

However, as several critics have point out, this solution expresses only a partial truth.[24] While some statements containing a negative may be reexpressible, *salve veritate*, as statements of an incompatibility, it is not true for all negative judgments. Consider, for example, the following three statements (as expressions of judgments):

S1: "Heat is not cold"

S2: "The drink is not on the table"

S3: "Calculating is not inferring"

We can easily imagine standard scenarios in which the negation in each statement is distinguishable from the others. Thus, S1 typically expresses an opposition, as can be gathered from the convertibility of "heat" and "cold." S2 expresses the lack or absence of a property. (Of course, we may infer from S2, that is, from denying the drink this property, that it is different from a drink that is on the table, but that is an inference from a negation, not an affirmation of a difference.) S3 indicates a difference, not to be confused with an incompatibility or an absence. So it would seem that, while some negations are reexpressible as incompatibilities (for example, S1) and thereby arguably reducible to them, some are not.[25]

This conclusion is too quick, however. While only S1 indicates an outright opposition between subject and predicate, the expression for negation in each case indicates an incompatibility between the state of affairs designated by the respective judgment and an opposite state of affairs. Each of the judgments expressed by S1–S3 (opposition, absence, difference) excludes a state of affairs at odds with it

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[23] Bertrand Russell, *Human Knowledge: Its Scope and Limits* (NY: Simon and Schuster, 1948), 122; hereafter *Human Knowledge*.

[24] Wood, "The Paradox of Negative Judgment," 420; Gale, "On What There Isn't," 460–9; Laurence Horn, *A Natural History of Negation* (Stanford: CSLI, 2001), 50–5.

[25] A further issue for the incompatibilist is that of recasting negative judgments in positive terms. While "L is not male" can be reexpressed as "L is female and being female is incompatible with being male," identifying an appropriate reexpression is more forbidding in cases such as "L is not next door"; see T. E. Patton, "Kant on the Semantics of Negation," *Journal of Philosophy* 65, no. 7 (April 1968): 208.

(respectively, the identity of heat and cold, the drink having the property of being on the table, calculating as a form of inferring). In this important respect, then, it would seem that the expression of negation in each case designates and rests upon at least a factual or even an essential incompatibility.

With this clarification, however, the incompatabilist is by no means out of the woods. For it is still incumbent upon the incompatibilist to demonstrate the derivativeness of negation from incompatibility. Establishing the equivalence of negative judgments to judgments of incompatibility hardly suffices, since doing so falls short of showing that the latter are more basic. For such a demonstration to succeed, the operative concept of incompatibility cannot itself trade on negation. If I say "I do not see red" because I see blue and seeing blue is incompatible with seeing red, I have hardly eliminated a negation; for what else does incompatibility mean here but that I cannot see both red and blue simultaneously? Hence, it is hard to imagine how one would go about establishing the thesis that incompatibility is in fact more basic than negation.[26]

The incompatibilist faces a further problem, and it directly concerns the issue of negation's ontological significance, that is, the issue of countenancing negative states of affairs.[27] Let us suppose that a negative judgment can be reexpressed for certain purposes as an affirmative judgment. For example, we might re-express S2 above as

S2´: "The drink is on the counter and its being on the counter is incompatible with its being on the table."

The judgment S2´ is meaningful only if there is in some sense a state of affairs that does not obtain. For the factual incompatibility cited in S2´ is precisely a relation between a state of affairs that obtains and one that does not.

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[26] Laurence Horn, *A Natural History of Negation*, 50 and following; G. Buchdahl, "The Problem of Negation," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 22, no. 2 (1961): 166; Russell, *Human Knowledge*, 122–6. Aquinas appears to agree that negation is more basic than difference; see his *Expositio super Librum Boethii de Trinitate*, q. 4, a.1. I am grateful to Kevin White for bringing this text to my attention.

[27] Versions of this argument can be found in Toms, "The Problem of Negation," 7 and following and Kukso, "The Reality of Absences," 23 and following.

My quarrel here, it bears emphasizing, is not with the contention that negative judgments and judgments of incompatibilities may be equivalent (albeit not identical).   However, I see no reason not to take such equivalence (if there be such) as indicative precisely of negation's ontological significance.   What I am calling into question is the plausibility of deriving negation from incompatibilities, as though they are somehow more basic than negation.

The second solution (2) to the Parmenidean quandary consists in reducing negation to something epiphenomenal and dispensable. Ledger Wood was so convinced of this solution that (echoing Descartes and anticipating Ayer) he was prompted to write: "Even a finite mind, exercising sufficient caution, could state all truth of which it is capable in positive form, and the negative judgment would disappear from its discourse."[28]   There are two versions of this second solution, again traceable to Sigwart and adopted by authors from James and Bradley to the late Russell.[29]   One version combines the asymmetricalist position with the notion that negation is a matter of falsity. As James puts it,

> The truth is that our affirmations and negations do not stand on the same footing at all, and are anything but consubstantial.   An affirmation says something about an objective existence.   A negation says something *about an affirmation*,—namely, that it is false. There are no negative predicates or falsities in nature.[30]

Bradley gives a slightly different version of the same basic solution, contending that negation is something purely "subjective," that is, a matter of misbelief.   "For logical negation can not be so directly related to fact as is logical assertion. We might say that, as such and in

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[28] Wood, "The Paradox of Negation," 421; Sigwart, *Logik*, 156; Bergson, *L'évolution créatrice*, 170 and following.

[29] Both solutions take the expression of a negative judgment to be a dispensable, intersubjective or intrasubjective epiphenomenon, in principle redescribable in terms of an affirmative judgment about some other judgment, namely, that it is a false belief or simply false.

[30] William James, "On Some Hegelisms (1882)" in *Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy* (New York: Longmanns Green & Co., 1902), 290–1; emphasis in original. See Ronald B. Levinson, "Sigwart's *Logik* and William James," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 8, no. 4 (October, 1947): 475–83, especially 477.

its own strict character, it is simply 'subjective'; it does not hold good outside my thinking."[31]

On James's version of this solution, in making a negative judgment, we identify some other statement as false. On this view, the negative judgment "W is not in the White House" is identical to "It is false that W is in the White House." However, the assimilation of negation to falsity is a patent category mistake. While we employ the words "false" and "falsely" to modify nouns and verbs ("false step," "false teeth," "false promise," "speaking falsely," "representing falsely"), James uses "false" to modify an affirmation. This use is metalinguistic (unlike, at least prima facie, the other uses of "false"); that is to say, "false" is predicated of an affirmation. However, as Aristotle notes in *De Interpretatione*, "false" might also be predicated of a negation.[32] To equate negation with falsity in the way suggested amounts to confusing a truth function with an assessment of the truth of the use of that function.[33] Moreover, the putative equivalence of negation and falsity can help eliminate negation only if there is a negation-independent account of falsity. The mere equivalence would establish neither that negation is less basic than falsity nor that falsity is intelligible without recourse to negation. Those who would reduce negation to falsity are faced with a challenge similar to those who would reduce it to difference—they need to explain how we can make sense of falsity without invoking negation or negative states of affairs.

Though a champion of the notion of negative facts early in his career,[34] Bertrand Russell advanced a related version of this general solution to the Parmenidean quandary. His strategy for eliminating negation appeals, however, not to falsity but to misbelief. Perhaps ironically, that strategy echoes Bradley's position. Russell advances his solution somewhat circumspectly, making it clear that his aim is to explain how negative statements can be true and known without assuming that there are facts only expressible with a negation. His

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[31] Bradley, *The Principles of Logic*, 120.

[32] Aristotle, *De interpretatione*, 9.18a28-29.

[33] Austin and Quine also warn against confusing negation with falsity; John Austin, *Philosophical Papers*, 2nd ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), 128–9 and W. V. O. Quine, *Mathematical Logic* (New York: Harper & Row, 1951), 27–8

[34] Bertrand Russell, "The Philosophy of Logical Atomism (1918)" in *Logic and Knowledge* (London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1956), 213 and following.

theory consists in (a) taking belief and disbelief to be positive states of affairs, describable without use of negation, and (b) redescribing the law of contradiction in terms of a true disbelief.   Thus, in place of "'This is red' and 'This is not red' cannot both be true," Russell would have us substitute: "A disbelief in the sentence 'The belief that this is red and the disbelief that this red are both true' is always true."[35]

There are at least two patent problems with solutions of this sort. First, how does one give an account of disbelief without recourse to negation? Not surprisingly, perhaps, Russell offers no support for his claim that disbelief is "a state just as positive as belief."[36] One wonders how he would be able to characterize disbelief in contrast to belief and lack of belief, without use of negation. Second, why should one think that all negative judgments can be redescribed as statements of disbelief?   From my assertion "W is not in the White House," you might infer that I do not believe that W is president, but the assertion is not about my beliefs, that is, the stance I have toward the (probably metonymical) claim that W is not in the White House or the straightforward claim that W is not president. The two statements "W is not in the White House" and "I disbelieve (that is, I do not believe) that W is in the White House" simply cannot be equated *salva veritate* since one states a fact about W and the White House, while the other states a fact about my disbeliefs. This nonequivalence, moreover, is patent from the fact that one of the two statements can be true while the other is false.   Thus, just as it can be false that house prices are falling and true that someone believes they are, so it can be false that house prices are not falling and true that someone does not believe they are. In short, the conditions of the truths of "~p" and "I disbelieve that p" no more coincide than do the conditions of the truths of "p" and "I believe that p."[37]

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[35] Russell, *Human Knowledge*, 125.

[36] Ibid.

[37] It deserves noting that Russell's midcareer view of negation does not fall prey, without further ado, to this formulation of the objection.   His analysis would not be that (1) "W is not in the White House" is true if and only if S disbelieves the sentence "W is in the White House" but rather that (2) "W is not in the White House" is true if and only if the disbelief in the sentence "W is in the White House" is always false.   I am grateful to Walter Hopp for making this point.

In addition to their lack of success, these attempts to eliminate an ontological interpretation of negation betray a common bias. I am tempted to characterize it as a modern bias since, like many a modern version of primary and secondary qualities, it at once attributes too much and too little to subjectivity: too much because it attempts to identify all negativity with something subjective, and too little because it presumes that this subjectivity is somehow dispensable and removed from objective states of affairs. The problem with this bias is patent: judgments are not isolable subjective states but part and parcel of a fact or better, a process, namely, the dynamic interactions of subjects with objects and other subjects. While no less a state of affairs than the properties and relations of more or less substantial things, these dynamic interactions are of a superordinate variety since they variously constitute, disclose, and in some cases even yield themselves as well as the other states of affairs acknowledged in judgments.

III

At the outset of my remarks, I began with the claim that negation is something that we do, more specifically, that it is an act of judging. If negation is a form of judgment, then the first order of business is determining what a judgment is. In view of the comments made at the conclusion of the last section, we need an account of how judgments and states of affairs come to be constituted and related to one another as part of a person's dynamic, unfolding interaction with entities (other subjects and objects in its environs as well as itself). A "state of affairs" can refer to these unfolding interactions as well as to other events and facts such as relations among entities and/or their manners of being, including the possession of various properties.[38] This characterization casts a fairly wide net, though for the purposes of this paper it suffices to think of a state of affairs as what is affirmed in sentences such as "I see the bicyclist approaching," "That bicyclist is wearing a helmet," and "The acceleration of the bike is cause for alarm."

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[38] See note 15 above.

Judgments, too, come in many varieties. Yet, while we refer to many different phenomena as "judgments," two ways of speaking of judgment are particularly salient, namely, judgments in the form of *assertions* and judgments as *convictions* or *beliefs*. Adolf Reinach is to be credited with appreciating this difference and its import for the consideration of negative judgments. The account that follows builds upon but also modifies his invaluable analysis.

The sense of "judgment" synonymous with "assertion" (or, less clearly, "utterance") typically signifies a verbalization in the form of a declarative sentence in the indicative mood. Assertions are about states of affairs but always by way of the meanings of the words and word combinations of the language in play and, indeed, in free play since (a) we are ourselves a pivotal source of those combinations and (b) assertions can be meaningful in the absence of states of affairs designated by them. Accordingly, we can focus on assertions and their meanings, apart from states of affairs they may designate. For this reason, assertions can be the subject matter—the basis of the well formed formulas—of a strictly formal study. The fact that assertions can be meant in detachment from the states of affairs they designate also explains why assertions are frequently polemical, as Reinach puts it. A polemical assertion is aimed at a contradictory positive judgment as when, for example, a proponent of wholesale health care reform, rejecting proposals to the contrary, asserts: "Piecemeal reform is not an option." To be sure, assertions need not be polemical; they can also be simple negative assertions. However, under either description, assertions are ways of meaning a state of affairs. As such, they depend on both the given meanings of the words and word combinations in the assertion and what we mean by employing them. If we assert some state of affairs, that is, if we say that something is or is not the case, it is always via the medium of the meanings of words and acts of meaning.

The term "judgment" is by no means restricted to assertions. It is often a synonym for a family of expressions such as "belief," "conviction," "opinion," "estimate," "understanding," and even "determination"—none of which need be expressed in language. Moreover, also in contrast to assertions, there is an important sense in which (a) we are not the source of our convictions or beliefs and (b) most of our rudimentary convictions and beliefs are directly tethered

to the states of affairs that give rise to them and form their object (even when those beliefs outgrow the presence or absence of the corresponding states of affairs[39]). Judging, according to this family of terms, is a matter of taking something to be or not to be the case. Moreover, we make judgments in this sense because of the way things present themselves to us and/or withdraw or withhold themselves from us.[40] Judging of this sort ranges across theoretical, practical, and evaluative activities, and within each range there are degrees of belief, grades of determination, and so forth. We rightly speak of coming to believe or to be convinced of something, and it is accordingly useful to distinguish these processes in which the act of believing or being convinced takes place from the settled belief or conviction as a disposition that may be dormant or even forgotten.

In perhaps its most elementary form, judging in the former sense—that is, forming a judgment in the sense of coming to believe or be convinced that a state of affairs obtains—emerges from seeing that it obtains. Here it is helpful to distinguish the far less common

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[39] Beliefs about the distant past or other states of affairs of which we have no experience draw typically upon testimony that provides the tether for them.

[40] While judgment in both senses is something that we do, we are not as free in our convictions and beliefs as we are in what we assert. Our convictions and beliefs grow out of our dynamic interactions with our environments and what makes itself present to us and what absences itself from us through these interactions. A negative judgment in the sense of a conviction that something is not the case presupposes an apprehension of that state of affairs and not a positive judgment. By contrast, an assertion presupposes meaning a state of affairs but not necessarily apprehending it. While we typically become convinced of a state of affairs by apprehending it through a perception, assertions articulate the state of affairs through the medium of meaningful language. To paraphrase Reinach's apt formulation of the difference, "in the case of the conviction that arises with and from grasping a state of affairs, the state in question is presented, where in assertion it is merely meant." Reinach 126 / 355. Assertions are meaningful but, for that very reason, they are detachable from the grasp and presentation of the state of affairs meant by them. Reinach also distinguishes the apprehension as taking the fact in all at once or as a totality, whereas the assertion, by articulating the fact through words, constitutes it piecemeal. To put the difference between convictions and assertions baldly: If I see it, I believe it; if I mean it, I assert it. In the case of belief (here equated with conviction), I judge it to be so in the sense that I am more or less convinced of it; in the case of assertion, I make a judgment but in a sense distinguishable from believing or being convinced of it.

perception of a sensory component, for example, sighting a color in one's visual field ("seeing red"), from perception of a fact, for example, determining that something is colored ("seeing that the rose is red"). This expression "seeing that" ("apprehending, discerning, grasping," the German *auffassen*) is a function of two factors: (1) the presence and absence of/in a state of affairs and (2) our apprehension of that presencing and absencing in a sensory perception.

Allow me to give an example. Just about every day I drive down Commonwealth Avenue in Boston to a university parking lot along the avenue. The entrance to the parking lot is on my right, but there is a well marked bike lane between the rightmost auto lane of Commonwealth Avenue and the entrance to the parking lot. As I slow down to make the right turn into the parking lot, I check my side view mirror to look for the approach of a bicyclist within thirty yards or so of my car. If I see that (that is, discern, determine that) a bicyclist is approaching, I slow down until he has passed me; if I see that there is no bicyclist there, I go about making my turn. These determinations are judgments that I make and, indeed, typically without any assertion on my part. They suppose the bicyclist's absence and the apprehension or grasp of this negative state of affairs (fact or event) in a visual perception—all of which leads me to believe, to be convinced that no bicyclist is approaching.[41]

Note that this belief or conviction is not a negative conviction, a disbelief, directed at a positive judgment, but instead a positive conviction that a negative fact obtains. According to Reinach, this positive conviction presupposes the apprehension of another fact, for example, the way being clear, and the necessary connection of this fact with the negative fact, for example, the absence of a bicyclist. Reinach's own example is a judgment about an ideal rather than a real object, namely, that "two is not greater than three," a judgment based upon seeing that "three is greater than two."[42]

However, is not the judgment that there is no bicyclist approaching the result then of an inference from a judgment, embedded in a perceptual grasp of a positive state of affairs, namely,

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[41] What I apprehend and then come to judge/believe is not an object or an object's relation to something but a negative state of affairs. I have a positive belief that, on this stretch of road at this time, there is no bicyclist.

[42] Reinach 130-31/361.

that the coast is clear?[43] Perhaps, but note that, even if there be such
an inference, it is, nonetheless, an inference to a judgment that
designates a negative state of affairs, the absence of a bicyclist in the
path of my turn.   That is to say, the negative judgment, as the
conclusion of the inference, is not the denial of some other judgment.
Instead, the negative judgment is the affirmation of a negative fact. So
this inferentialist interpretation would leave negative states of affairs
intact.   Nor does the fact that the inference supposes a grasp of a
positive state of affairs in any way diminish the ontological status of
the negative fact.   This supposition merely underscores that
knowledge of negative facts is derived.[44]

There are, however, at least four reasons to be wary of giving an
inferentialist interpretation of these sorts of negative judgments. First,
it would have to be an unconscious inference; I am not aware of
inferring that there is no bicyclist approaching. Second, the notion
that the inference is from a judgment about a positive fact to one about
a negative fact is itself questionable since it is by no means obvious
that we can describe the coast's being clear—an unimpeded view of
the road behind me, a correspondingly uninterrupted visual field, and
so forth—without reference to absences and, thereby, without
invoking a negation. Third, this negative fact and the corresponding
use of the negative need not be the result of some frustrated
expectation. To be sure, negation is an activity that I perform, and
what I see is dependent upon my motivation for looking. However, I
am looking with the expectation that there will be someone or there
will not be and I look at my side view mirror to find out which fact,
positive or negative, obtains.[45] From this vantage point, the negative is

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[43] It is not clear to me whether Reinach is in fact giving an inferentialist
or (Husserlian categorial) intuitionist account in this respect. On the one
hand, he does not speak of an inference; on the other, he speaks of the
necessary connections among states of affairs and the inferences that they
ground as the subject matter of logic. It seems possible to interpret him
either way.

[44] James DuBois, *Judgment and Sachverhalt* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1995),
57.

[45] This observation runs counter to attempts to treat negation principally
as the frustration of an expectation or conjecture and is consistent with an
attitude of questioning that entertains and leaves open contrary possibilities;
see Husserl, *Analyse zur passiven Synthese*, ed. Margot Fleischer,
Husserliana, Bd. 11 (Hague: Nijhoff, 1966), 25–6; Reinach 99 / 319.

by no means subsidiary to the positive; to the contrary, here they are plainly symmetrical. The positive is supposed as an equal partner to the negative as possibilities prior to and as a condition for my seeing that one of the two facts holds.

Fourth, Reinach makes the apprehension of a positive state of affairs a condition for negative judgment, at least in part because he contends that negative states of affairs would never be presented to us "if we were to limit ourselves to reading off those states which are given to us by the world of real and ideal objects."[46] This view of the matter, at least for real things, that is, the things that we can experience—real subjects, objects, and their interactions—is shared, as noted earlier, by those who refuse to countenance negative facts because those facts are supposedly not to be found in experience. Reinach's contention (at least so formulated) is true but trivial since negative states of affairs are never presented to us—nor can they be if a state of affairs is positive insofar as it is present. If anything, it would be more appropriate, following Lotze and Wittgenstein, to say that negative states of affairs *obtain*.[47] More importantly, Reinach and others who share this assessment that negative facts are not as such experienced seem to overlook the fact that we also and, indeed, routinely form beliefs and convictions in the course of apprehending movements and changes in perception. It would appear that these naysayers of negative facts construe the experience of real things (including the complex of perceptions, apprehensions, and judgments that such experience entails) as a static affair.

Yet we see—we do not infer—movements and changes in states of affairs. In doing so, we see precisely that things do not remain at a standstill, that they are never quite what they were a moment ago or quite what they are about to be. To the extent that we see that something is moving, we see properties and relations, part/whole complexes making up corresponding states of affairs, many of which

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[46] Reinach 124 / 353.

[47] Note that a *Sach-verhalt* can be considered a relation (*Verhältnis*), in Bradley's terms, an internal relation between a thing and its property.   Since Lotze's time at least, the operative verb for relations is *bestehen*.   Thus, Lotze distinguishes four irreducible senses of actuality (*Wirklichkeit*): things are (*sein*), relations obtain (*bestehen*), events happen (*geschehen*), and true statements are valid (*gelten*); see Hermann Lotze, *Logik*, hrsg. Georg Misch (Leipzig: Meiner, 1912), 511.

are anything but constant. Even where one sensation is dominant in the experience, what we apprehend in perception can be a steady interplay of presences and absences. Thus, we see the changing color of paint as we add tint to it, we feel the sweat dripping from our forehead, we savor a wine's lingering aftertaste, and we hear the fading strings of a symphony's first movement. These facts of movement and change can only be adequately characterized by invoking negation, and in this sense negative facts underlie the judgments, the convictions and beliefs, that emerge from the perceptual apprehension of these movements.[48] The import of these considerations is patent: in seeing that something changes or moves, we see that negative facts obtain.

Of course, the motility of perception is by no means confined to what we perceive. To the contrary, we apprehend not only the approaching bicyclist, the departing clouds, but also—kinesthetically and proprioceptively—the movements and ever changing positions of our own bodies as well as their changing relations to those objects of perception. So, too, we perceive shifts in our attention and altered perspectives; we perceive ourselves changing our minds and refocusing on the fly in traffic. In short, in our perceptions we discern ourselves perceiving-and-not-perceiving, no longer perceiving and not yet perceiving at any moment. There is no motion or change without something corresponding to a negation. Hence, unless we are prepared to argue that we do not really apprehend such movements or discern such changes, that is, unless we are prepared to construe them merely as figments of our imagination or creatures of thought, we have to recognize negative facts. At least when it comes to real things, the things that we can encounter perceptually, what corresponds to negation, that is, absence in some sense, is integral to their way of being.

There is a further reason for taking seriously the dynamic character of the interaction underlying perception, apprehension, and

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[48] In other words, what we discern in perception is not restricted to freeze frame mode where we only discern what is present at an instant and/or removed from something else. Movement and plurality are part and parcel of perception, both what and how we perceive. Isolating the apprehension of states of affairs from this dynamic, varied and changing interaction is misleading, since the apprehension cannot be described without appeal to absences and negations; see Gale, "On What There Isn't," 458–9.

judgment.   We may recall that some critics of negative facts balk at them not only because of the alleged lack of empirical evidence for them but also because of their anomalous character.[49] This anomaly supposes the equation of being with presence and, indeed, constant, static presence. However, if all judgment is rooted in apprehensions of states of affairs in perception and this interaction is dynamic, then there is reason to think that there is something quite anomalous about admitting only positive facts within the realm of being.

In the past few paragraphs I have rehearsed four reasons for being wary of an inferentialist approach to negative facts. Having said all this, by no means do I want to deny that we very often come to recognize negative facts on the basis of an inference from apprehension of a positive state of affairs, as Reinach suggests. Yet, however one comes down on this point, the foregoing considerations provide us with ample reason to countenance negative facts as the counterpart of negative judgments. Thus, the judgment that I make when no bicyclist is present is not a judgment about another judgment. Just as the judgment that someone is approaching on my right is about a state of affairs, so the judgment that no one is approaching is about a state of affairs. We sometimes make a judgment about a negative state of affairs, for example, that no bicyclist is coming behind us, where "judging" pointedly means, not asserting, but believing or being convinced of this negative fact by way of apprehending or determining it in a perception.

When I make the judgment that no one is approaching on my right, I am not making a claim about the difference or incompatibility between someone's being there and not being there (which in any case would presuppose negation).   To be sure, the absence of an approaching bicyclist is incompatible with the presence of one, but my negative judgment by no means presupposes such judgments of incompatibility; if anything, judgments of incompatibility depend upon negative judgments. Similarly, the fact that this negative judgment is directed at a state of affairs and not some other judgment flies in the

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[49] Wood, for example, rejects the notion of negative facts on the basis of the empirical argument (shared by Demos) that the absences are not empirical data and the formal argument that negative facts that are "anomalous," if not contradictory; see Wood, "The Paradox of Negative Judgment," 417.

face of the other strategy of eliminating negations, namely, reconstruing them as affirmations of falsity or false beliefs. When I judge that no bicyclist is there, I am not affirming that it is false or false to believe that a bicyclist is there. My judgment is about a state of affairs indicated by a negation, and attempts to eliminate that indication by construing negation as necessarily directed at another judgment falsely misrepresents the phenomena of negative judgments.[50]

There is another piece of the puzzle about negation that deserves consideration here. With the development of truth functional logic, many logicians have attached a priority to negation as a truth function of an entire sentence or, as we might put it, as external to the sentence, as in ~*p*. This priority, traceable to Stoic logic, contrasts with the Aristotelian analysis of negation as primarily predicate negation and internal to the sentence, as in ~*Fa*. In recent years, some linguists and philosophers have taken note of the fact that most negations are internal.[51] For some, this fact suggests that the Aristotelian analysis of negation has a certain priority over the Stoic analysis. Or, at any rate, we typically embed negations in assertions, prefixing them to predicates rather than to assertions as a whole.

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[50] For simplicity's sake, I am speaking of "negative judgment" in only one of three possible senses of the expression. At a purely formal level we have to distinguish (a) not judging at all, that is, not forming any opinion, not having any belief or conviction about something, from two contrary acts of judging, (b) disbelieving and (c) believing. Each of these acts can have a positive or negative content. So, setting aside (a), there are prima facie two different senses of negative judgment, relative to (b) and (c), namely, not believing (disbelieving) that *p* and believing that ~*p*. Reinach argues that there are important differences between them. My disbelief that *p* supposes, he contends, the thought or conjecture that *p*, evidence to the contrary, and my apprehension of this conflict. By contrast, my belief that ~*p* is supposedly based on the apprehension of some fact that is necessarily connected with the fact expressed by ~*p*. To appreciate the sort of difference he may have in mind, consider our earlier example. It is possible for me not to believe that I need to worry about a bicyclist on my right because the car right behind me just made a right turn. Here the disbelief that a bicyclist is dangerously close follows upon evidence to the contrary ("negative evidence," as he puts it). By contrast, my belief (conviction) that a bicyclist is not dangerously close is based upon my perception that the way is clear ("positive evidence" that there is no bicyclist dangerously close); see Reinach 122–25 / 351–54.

[51] Horn, *A Natural History of Negation*, 473–90 and Ruth Millikan, *Varieties of Meaning* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2004), 223–4.

Consider, for example, the two observations: "W is not in the White House" and "It is not the case that W is in the White House"; the former is the more common locution and, with good reason, since we typically assume (as Aristotle does) that, at least for the purposes of our considerations or within the realm of them, the subject of such a sentence exists.

It may be useful to consider my Reinach inspired account of negative judgment in light of this issue. According to this account, negative judgment is often the determination and perhaps even the assertion that a does not possess the property F (that is, that a is not F) or that a does not exist (that is, that there is no a), rather than the denial or rejection of another, positive judgment. If this analysis is correct, then it is consistent with this Aristotelian view of the priority of the internal relation. For the Stoic logician, the primary object of negation is an assertion or proposition; in other words, its main function is to deny something said. For the Aristotelian logician, by contrast, the primary object of negation is a state of affairs, that is to say, a negation is a judgment that an object does not possess a property or does not exist.[52]

IV

Taking cues from the fact that negation is something we do in the course of making judgments, I have tried to sketch a phenomenology of negative judgment and, from that sketch, draw inferences regarding negation's ontological significance. In particular, drawing on the work of Reinach, I have argued that consideration of judgments in the form of convictions/beliefs that something is not the case provides us with compelling reasons to countenance negative facts. The counterparts of negative judgments in this sense and what makes them true are

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[52] As noted above, judgments need not take the form of assertions. Nonetheless, what I mean by asserting a fact can coincide with and motivate my grasp of the fact, indeed, so much so that—in some cases—it could not be grasped or present itself without my doing so. Thus, there are simple negative assertions that, coinciding with negative convictions and beliefs, assert positively that something is not the case. Saying to myself "There's no bicyclist there" no more produces the fact than my nonassertional judgment or conviction does.

precisely facts that cannot be adequately determined without recourse to negation. Along the way, I have offered considerations to counter two central complaints about negative facts, namely, that there is no empirical evidence for them and that they are "baroque" and "anomalous," if not contradictory. However, if negative facts obtain, then the very notion of being must include the counterpart to negation. That is to say, there is something befitting negation in the nature of things or, more precisely, in the way they are.

At the same time, in order to appreciate the full ontological significance of negation, it is necessary to cast a wider net than facts of the matter about various entities, this or that object or subject. For the counterpart to negation—what "negation" can denote—suffuses the very process by which these facts are generated, the interaction of subjects and objects as well as their properties and relations. Negation has this reach because such interactions and their elements are always part of a dynamic process that cannot itself be described without negation, that is, without a passage from what is no longer and into what is not yet. If, in the final analysis, facts cannot be severed from this process, then the case for the ontological significance of negation is even stronger.[53]

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[53] The judgment that A is not here, that is, that "A is absent" is relative, if not to an expectation, then at least to some consideration of the possibility of A's being here. Otherwise we would have no more reason to judge that A, rather than B, C, and so forth, is absent. However, this context of possibilities, while undeniable, does not entail that judging that A is absent is the same as judging that this state of affairs is incompatible with A's presence. To the extent that a negation signals an absence, it further buttresses the case against equating negation with expressions of incompatibilities. For the *locus classicus* of such considerations, see J. P. Sartre, *L'être et le néant* (Paris: Gallimard, 1943), 44–5; see, too, Andrew Collier, "On Real and Nominal Absences," *After Postmodernism*, ed. José Lopez and Garry Potter (New York: Continuum, 2005), 299–313.