CHAPTER 3

The Exhaustive Partition

Presupposes: the self-vindication of difference (Ch. 1); the structural dependence of content on contrast (Ch. 2).

Establishes: the formal exhaustiveness of the diversity/equality partition; its substantiveness, via predicative priority and the constitutive instantiation thesis; the two-names result, with the three-contrast criterion that governs what "obtains" can mark; the exhaustiveness tested against six rival traditions, three of which propose an alternative and three of which, in the appendix, are shown to land inside the partition without having proposed one.

In brief. Every state of reality either contains at least one distinction or contains none. Logic guarantees that much: a condition and its absence leave no third option. What logic cannot guarantee is that the split matters; this chapter argues it does, for a reason no other partition shares. Sorting anything into categories is itself an act of distinguishing, so the partition classifies the very operation by which any partition, this one included, gets drawn. The chapter then stress-tests the claim against six traditions that seem to offer a third option, from Deleuze and Hegel to negative theology, and against the most basic candidate of all: nothingness. Each proposed third either has structure, and falls on the diversity side, or lacks it, and coincides with equality. A test that digests every counterexample looks unfalsifiable; the close explains why this one is exempt — and where the framework can still lose.

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1 Introduction

Does the presence or absence of distinction exhaust the space of metaphysical possibility? The question sounds abstract, and everything that follows in this book depends on the answer.

The previous chapters established that at least one difference obtains in reality and that content is constitutively contrastive. This chapter asks whether the split between the differentiated and the undifferentiated is complete: whether any state of reality neither has nor lacks at least one internal distinction, a structural difference in either of the forms Chapter 2 (§2.1) names, relational or determinative.

If none does, reality admits exactly two structural kinds — states with internal distinction (diversity) and states without it (equality) — and the partition can yield consequences reaching across metaphysics, epistemology, and theology. If some state escapes it, the analysis stays confined to the domain where the partition holds.

Two concerns arise at once. The first is that the partition may be exhaustive only in the trivial, formal sense, since any condition and its negation exhaust the options. The second is that it may be one more binary opposition of the kind several traditions have taken apart.

The chapter answers both. It argues that the partition is substantive, on two independent grounds — predicative priority and constitutive instantiation — and that it lacks the structure of a binary opposition, being defined by the presence or absence of a single condition rather than by two positive terms in contrast. Section 2 defines the partition and establishes exhaustiveness and substantiveness, while §3 tests it against six traditions that propose alternatives, the three lesser cases run in the appendix (§A.1).

2 The Partition Defined

2.1 Diversity and equality

A state of diversity is any state containing at least one internal distinction: one boundary, contrast, or non-identity between two items within it. Our universe is a paradigm, and the definition is minimal, since a state with a single internal distinction — two regions separated by one boundary, two properties differing in one respect — already qualifies. Diversity therefore requires no richness, complexity, or multiplicity. It requires only that the state fail to be entirely undifferentiated.

A state of *equality* is any state containing no internal distinction whatsoever: no boundary, no contrast, no non-identity between any two items. It has no parts, no regions, no temporal stages, no distinguishable properties. In the terms of Chapter 2’s zero/one/two ladder, equality is ontological one: being without internal structure.

The scope of "internal distinction". This needs fixing at the outset, because the framework reads it broadly and later chapters rely on the breadth. A state counts as internally distinguished when it contains two items separated by a boundary, and equally when it is determinately some positive way at all, when it bears a property — a contrastive partition within being, in the sense §3.5 below fixes. On this reading a state with a single property-determination and no further articulation is already diverse. A lack is no way a state is: "lacks distinction" names no articulation within what lacks it, so the negative fact a realist about absences may admit (§3.5) adds no member to the diversity cell and no feature to the equality cell.

Two arguments defend the reading: the analysis of §3.5 below, on which equality has no respect in which a partition could fall, and the phenomenal-idleness argument of Chapter 6 (§2.2) for the case of experience. A challenger who restricts internal distinction to mereological structure — parts, regions, stages — therefore relocates the question to those two arguments.

2.2 Why the partition is exhaustive

The exhaustiveness follows from the bivalence of a single condition. Either a state has at least one internal distinction, or it does not. "Has at least one F" and "has no F" are contradictories, and contradictories exhaust the logical space. This is a logical observation rather than a substantive metaphysical claim.

The question is a threshold question, where the threshold is binary. A state with one distinction sits as firmly on the diversity side as a state with a billion, while a state with no distinctions sits on the equality side regardless of what else might be said about it — or regardless of the fact that nothing else can be said about it, as §2.3 will show. The partition is therefore a boundary defined by a contradictory pair rather than a spectrum.

2.3 Why the partition is substantive

Formal exhaustiveness alone confers no philosophical significance. "Has at least one electron / has none" and "has at least one causal power

/ has none" are each formally exhaustive, and neither carries weight beyond its own domain. The claim is that this particular partition is substantive, for two independent reasons. Distinction is predicatively prior, the precondition for applying every other predicate, and the partition exhibits constitutive instantiation, since its subject matter, distinction, is instantiated by the operation, distinguishing, by which any partition is drawn. No other formally exhaustive partition has both properties.

Predicative priority. The first argument. Distinction is the first thing that can be said about anything that is not nothing. Whatever is given for predication differs, at the least, from its own absence and from what it is not, and that difference is the first thing predicable of it. It cannot yet be said to be blue, noisy, warm, spatial, or causal, since each of those characterisations requires further distinctions to be in place.

The point is structural rather than psychological, since it concerns the conditions for predication rather than the order in which we happen to notice things. Every other predicate presupposes that the state it applies to is already distinguishable from something; the presupposition is the necessity Chapter 2 (§2.4) forces and no more: an application that excluded no alternative would apply to no determinate state, so the primitivist about natures keeps her natures and is denied only a contrast-free predication. Colour presupposes distinction, since a region's being red excludes its being non-red, an exclusion that is a distinction. Shape presupposes it, since a boundary separates two sides that differ. Causation: a cause must be distinguishable from its effect. Temporal sequence: "before" and "after" require two distinguishable moments. Spatial extension: "here" and "there" require two distinguishable positions. Mereological structure: parts are distinguishable from one another and from the whole.

A partition defined by a predicatively prior condition therefore stands apart from every other formally exhaustive partition. The electron partition presupposes that the states it classifies are already distinguishable, and the distinction partition is what supplies this. And since predication is itself an ontological activity, a real event whose occurrence instantiates distinction, as Chapters 1 and 2 established, the

priority is a fact about the structure of reality rather than merely a fact about description.

Constitutive instantiation. The second argument is the constitutive instantiation thesis (CIT). A stronger claim can be established: the distinction partition is the only formally exhaustive partition whose subject matter is instantiated by the operation by which any partition is drawn. Later chapters reference this claim by its label.

A word about the term is owed at the outset. What the thesis claims is that the operation by which any partition is drawn instantiates the condition the partition classifies, since every act of partitioning is an instance of distinction. Instantiation is all that is claimed or needed: each consequence drawn from the thesis requires only that the operation instantiate the condition, which is the reading every later chapter uses; the label says so.

To partition a domain is to draw a distinction within it: to separate states satisfying a condition from states failing it. Partitioning is distinguishing. Yet the subject matter of the electron partition is electrons rather than distinctions, and the subject matter of the causal-power partition is causal powers, so in each case the subject matter and the operation are different things.

The distinction partition stands alone. When it separates states with at least one distinction from states with none, the operation it performs, distinguishing, is an instance of the condition it classifies, distinction. Only the distinction partition is self-instantiating in this sense.

The near misses confirm the claim instead of threatening it. Partitioning is also an event, so “has at least one event / has none” looks self-instantiating too. But an occurrence stands against its own absence, which equality alone does not, so it is diverse (Chapter 1, §§3.3, 5.3), and the event partition is a member of the family rather than a rival to it. The absorption is general, since any partition that self-instantiates does so by being an act of distinguishing under another description, which is why the family has one member.

Two consequences follow from the constitutive instantiation. First, the distinction partition cannot be subordinated to a deeper partition, because any deeper partition would itself be an act of distinguishing — an instance of the condition the distinction partition classifies. The distinction partition is structurally terminal: nothing more fundamental remains to partition with. Second, the instantiation explains why the partition is substantive. Its exhaustiveness comes from logic, and its substantiveness comes from the further fact that the condition it tracks is constitutive of the operation by which any structure is identified. It marks the condition without which no sorting, and so no structure, is possible.

The category-priority of structural difference (Chapter 2, §2.1) shows why the CIT matters for substantiveness. The partition is defined by a condition prior to all categories, identical with the operation of categorising, and therefore impossible to subordinate to any further condition. This is a claim about what makes description and structure possible, not about how we must describe. What substantiveness comes to can then be stated without inflation. Predicative priority and constitutive instantiation are two statements of one priority, for predicates and for operations; the second classifies the act of partitioning, never the state partitioned (§4.5). The partition is substantive because it is terminal, since any deeper partition distinguishes, and because its equality cell has consequences the later chapters derive, from the foreclosure of grounding to the zero-complexity constraint; the priority explains the significance; the consequences show it.

The relational corollary. A third consequence deserves explicit statement, because later chapters lean on it and the instantiation reading, as given, covers less. The CIT covers partitioning: sorting is distinguishing. Chapters 4 and 5 need a claim about relations as such — that grounding, temporal succession, and every other working relation gives out where distinction gives out — and relating is more various than sorting, so the extension needs an argument.

Divide relation-instances by their relata. Every instance either has non-identical relata (x grounds y, a precedes b) or is reflexive, a single

relatum standing to itself (x is identical to x). The polyadic case is immediate: non-identical relata are a difference, so any polyadic instance instantiates distinction. None can obtain wholly within equality, whose interior contains no plurality (Chapter 5, §4: equality admits neither kinds nor instances). And none can obtain across the boundary with equality as a working term, since a relatum must be picked out as that term, and equality offers no feature by which anything relates to it as one relatum rather than another. It is relationally null in both directions (Chapter 4, §2.2, argues this for grounding; the point generalises).

The reflexive case. The reflexive case is real and must be conceded. Self-identity is a real relation with one relatum, so the bare claim that every relation requires two things is false.

The concession licenses nothing, though. A reflexive instance contributes no internal distinction to its relatum, since x's identity with x introduces no articulation into x: it is only the side-less determinateness of merely obtaining, the standing of a whole state against its absence, which §3.5 analyses. So equality's self-identity is compatible with its being equality. And a reflexive instance can do no structural work, on two counts. The working relations are irreflexive by their own formal character, since nothing grounds itself, nothing precedes itself, nothing explains itself (Chapter 4, P5; Fine, 2012; Schaffer, 2009). And even a theorist who relaxes irreflexivity for richly structured entities finds in equality nothing for a self-directed relation to operate through: no power, no nature, no aspect, its only "feature" being that it obtains. This escape has a distinguished pedigree — an ultimate that sustains itself is the shape of classical aseity doctrines — and at the terminus it is closed on both counts at once.

The corollary can now be stated as the licensed form of a slogan the later chapters use: every relation-instance that does structural work — grounding, succession, ordering, explanation — has non-identical relata, therefore instantiates distinction, therefore terminates where distinction terminates. The corollary sits beside the containment order of Chapter 4's Appendix, where equality is the bottom element of a partial order: there is no conflict, because that order relates states by the distinctions

they carry, and equality enters it only as the bound of a descending chain, with no working relation taking it as a relatum — the same standing the limit-ground/relatum-ground distinction of that chapter gives it, which is why the two chapters can call it relationally null and a least element at once.

Fundamentality literature. Two contributions to the metaphysics of fundamentality confirm the substantiveness from outside. Tahko (2018) distinguishes mereological, modal, and explanatory characterisations of fundamentality; the partition holds across all three: it applies to parts and wholes alike, the contradictory pair holds necessarily, and it identifies the condition without which no explanation can begin, since explanation requires distinguishable relata. Morganti (2020) warns that identifying structures settles nothing about which categories are fundamental; the partition presupposes no set of categories and identifies the condition all of them presuppose, the partition that makes structural partitioning possible.

2.4 Why this is not a binary opposition

A natural worry: is this just another binary opposition? The critique of binary thinking developed by Deleuze (1968), Derrida (1968), and Hegel (1812) is powerful. Binary oppositions suppress a third term, generate dialectical contradictions, or conceal a prior play of differences that undermines the clean boundary.

The partition differs structurally from a binary opposition. A binary opposition contrasts two positive terms — presence and absence, speech and writing, being and nothing — each defined partly by its contrast with the other. The diversity/equality partition contrasts a condition (the presence of at least one distinction) with the absence of that condition. Equality has no independent characterisation, no features, no properties, no internal structure, because independent characterisation requires the distinctions it lacks. A “binary opposition” in which one term has no positive content is a condition and its structural limit. The critiques of Deleuze, Derrida, and Hegel target pairs of positive terms, and a condition paired with the point of its own absence gives them nothing to grip.

One clarification forestalls a misreading of "no positive content". The phrase denies equality property-content, features that characterise by internal partition, and leaves untouched the bare determinateness of its obtaining, which §3.5 isolates as a determinateness that is no property; that determinateness is non-contrastive, since equality's obtaining stands against no second term, so it supplies no positive opposite for diversity to be set against.

2.5 Equality as a limit concept

The phrase "a condition and its limit" points to something about equality's conceptual status that deserves development before the partition is tested, because it bears on how the tests should be read and on how equality functions throughout the book. The partition as defined appears to make a strong ontological claim: that undifferentiated being could obtain. The question worth pressing is whether the partition's philosophical work depends on that claim. It does not, for an instructive reason.

Equality as a limit concept. Equality is the value the hierarchy of distinctions approaches as distinctions are removed, and like any limit concept its identification constrains the hierarchy's behaviour whether or not the limit is reached.

The parallel with mathematical limits is close. The limit of sin(x)/x as x approaches zero equals 1, a fact about the function's behaviour that constrains it near zero and underwrites the calculus built on it, while requiring nothing about x ever equalling zero. The limit is identified from within the function's domain, so identifying it is a claim about the domain's structure rather than about a state beyond it.

Equality is identified from within the domain of diversity in the same way: the structural limit that diversity's own character implies when distinctions are progressively removed. The limit is characterised from the side that has material, and §3.5 states the criterion that keeps it so. On the instantiation branch, where equality does obtain, its obtaining is not a further property but the non-property determinateness analysed

in §3.5. The limit framing and the instantiation framing therefore agree on what equality is, and divide only on whether it is reached.

Absolute zero. The parallel with absolute zero deepens the point. No physical system has ever reached absolute zero, and the third law of thermodynamics implies none can, while the concept remains indispensable. It defines the lower bound of thermodynamic behaviour, calibrates every temperature scale, and explains phenomena — superconductivity, Bose–Einstein condensation — that occur as systems approach it. The concept's power is therefore independent of whether the limit is ever instantiated, since what matters is that the domain it bounds structurally implies it. Equality works this way for the domain of distinction.

Whether or not any state of zero complexity ever obtains, the concept identifies the limit the domain of distinction implies at its own boundary: the condition at which the preconditions for content, consciousness, evaluation, and explanation are simultaneously absent. The identification has diagnostic consequences that operate regardless of ontological status; there are five.

It disambiguates infinity, since the standard definition "without limits" runs together the endless extension of internal structure (infinite diversity) and the dissolution of all structure (infinite equality), and the disambiguation requires only that the limit be identified rather than instantiated (Chapter 8). It disambiguates the something-from-nothing question, since "nothing" names non-existence, which cannot obtain, while what the mind pictures under the word is the structural limit of diversity, which is being; the question that survives the substitution is why being is differentiated (Chapter 9).

It fixes the lower bound of consciousness, since the zero-complexity constraint — no property requiring distinction can characterise a state with none — holds as a conditional whether or not zero complexity is ever instantiated, as "at absolute zero, molecular motion ceases" holds whether or not absolute zero is reached (Chapter 6). It specifies the structural limit of explanation, since the grounding relation meets its own presuppositional boundary at the limit, reached or not (Chapter 4).

And it sharpens the critique of divine simplicity, since the doctrine that God has no internal distinction places God at the structural limit, and the zero-complexity constraint applies to anything at that limit, instantiated or not (Chapter 10).

The limit-concept framing also explains why the book's disjunctive architecture, recurring from Chapter 4 onward, is a structural consequence and not a hedge. Every major result is delivered on both branches: the termination branch, on which the limit is reached and equality obtains, and the non-termination branch, on which the limit is approached without ever being reached and diversity is infinite. These are the two structural possibilities a limit concept generates, not competing hypotheses between which the book declines to choose. A critic who denies that equality has ontological status — who holds that nothing could actually be undifferentiated — has thereby placed herself on the non-termination branch, where the structural results of Chapters 4–6 remain intact, since each is delivered there without the limit being instantiated. One result she does touch: the burden analysis of Chapter 11 needs the possibility of undifferentiated being to stay open, so a critic who closes it has taken the kalām's side on that premise; the cost is stated there.

2.6 Antecedents: the limit and the unlimited

The partition has an ancient ancestor, and locating it there is more candid than presenting the partition as unprecedented. The contrast between determinate and indeterminate being is among the oldest in philosophy, and its earliest sustained form is Anaximander's apeiron, the "boundless" or "indefinite" he made the source of all things: a qualitatively indeterminate condition out of which the opposites separate, and into which they return (Kirk, Raven, & Schofield, 1983). The apeiron is therefore recognisably an ancestor of equality, with the world of separated opposites an ancestor of diversity.

What the precedent is. Two clarifications fix it. First, the paired terms peras (limit) and apeiron (unlimited) are not Anaximander's, since his contribution is the apeiron as origin. The structured opposition belongs to the Pythagoreans, who placed it first among the ten

contraries (Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 986a), and to Plato, who in the *Philebus* (23c–27c) makes the unlimited, the limit, their mixture (meikton), and the cause of that mixture the four kinds into which all things fall. To trace the partition to "Anaximander's peras and apeiron" therefore already runs two distinct contributions together.

Second, and decisively, that Pythagorean–Platonic scheme is a mixture model, and the present partition is its structural contrary. In the *Philebus*, reality is the meikton, since limit is imposed upon the unlimited and the two combine, under a cause, into the ordered world: two co-ingredients. Equality and diversity work otherwise, because equality is not an ingredient that mixes with diversity to yield anything; it is the absence of distinction, the point at which the hierarchy of distinctions terminates (§2.5).

And where the ancients offer a cosmogony or a pair of co-principles, the present claim is neither, since it holds that the presence or absence of a single condition exhausts the space of possibility, resting on the constitutive instantiation of distinction by the act of distinguishing (§2.3). No figure in this tradition advances, or could by these means establish, an exhaustiveness claim of that kind.

Two further contributions have no analogue in the tradition. The word naming the ancestor is itself ambiguous, since scholars have long divided over whether apeiron means "spatially and temporally infinite" or "indefinite in kind" (Kirk, Raven, & Schofield, 1983), and the sources run the two together. That is the ambiguity the two-infinities distinction isolates and resolves — infinite diversity against infinite equality, so that "boundless" is shown to name two opposite conditions (Chapter 8). The relationship is thus the reverse of borrowing, since the apeiron is an undifferentiated anticipation that the present framework diagnoses.

And the two-names result of §3.5 — that an undifferentiated condition which obtains is equality while one that does not is non-existence — has no counterpart in Anaximander, the Pythagoreans, or Plato, for whom the apeiron simply is, and is never set against non-being in this way. The lineage is real and worth owning, while the

contribution is the exhaustive partition, its boundary-not-mixture structure, the disambiguation of the boundless, and the two-names result built upon it.

3 Testing the Partition

If the partition is exhaustive, no philosophical tradition should be able to produce a real counterexample: a state that neither has nor lacks internal distinction. This section applies the partition to six traditions proposing candidates for a third option.

The constitutive instantiation argument predicts the outcome, since any proposed third must be distinguished from both diversity and equality in order to be identified as a third, where the act of proposing it instantiates the condition that places the proposal on the diversity side. Each case therefore displays a structural prediction rather than supplying independent evidence for it, where the prediction is falsifiable: a tradition that produced a real third would refute the partition. None does. A final candidate belongs to no tradition and is taken up at the close (§3.5): non-existence, the most basic putative third of all.

3.1 Deleuze: difference-in-itself

Deleuze's (1968) *Difference and Repetition* develops "difference in itself": difference conceived as a positive, generative force prior to identity rather than as opposition between pre-constituted identities. Classical metaphysics, Deleuze argues, subordinates difference to identity, since difference is always difference between things already constituted, and he proposes instead that identities emerge from a prior field of differential relations: an ontology of "virtual multiplicities", structured fields of differential relations and singularities from which actual entities are generated through individuation.

This is the most philosophically serious challenge of the six. Its strongest version runs: the partition presupposes an identity-based concept of distinction (non-identity between two items), and difference-

in-itself is what precedes identity — so applying the partition to Deleuze's field imposes the very logic his project dismantles.

The objection is right that the partition fails to capture Deleuze's distinction between difference-between-identities and difference-in-itself; both fall on the diversity side. And that is a strength mistaken for a weakness. The partition operates below the level at which Deleuze's distinction matters. It asks whether any internal non-identity obtains, not what kind of difference it is. Deleuze's field has internal structure: the relations differ from one another, the singularities are distinguishable, the multiplicities have components — and this structure is what makes the field generative. A field of pure difference with no internal distinction would not be Deleuze's field; it would be an undifferentiated blank. Deleuze's ontology is a theory about what diversity is like. It presupposes that diversity obtains.

A further reply meets the subordination charge on its own ground. The charge assumes that "non-identity between two items" presupposes the two items as prior identities, and the framework's own account of individuation denies just this. A diff's relata are themselves diffs, individuated by contrast and never by prior self-identity (Chapter 2, §§2.1, 2.4), so the regress bottoms out in contrast at every level.

Difference-between, so understood, is therefore not subordinated to identity; identity is downstream of contrast throughout, which is Deleuze's priority thesis translated into the framework's vocabulary. What the framework declines is the further Deleuzean inference that a condition prior to identity must resist thematisation — the Derridean refusal in another key, met where that refusal is met (Chapter 2, §4).

3.2 Hegel: dialectical synthesis

Hegel's dialectical logic holds that any pair of opposed determinations generates a third: a synthesis (Aufhebung) that "sublates" both, cancelling and preserving them in a higher unity. The paradigm is Being and Nothing, which generate Becoming — not Being, not Nothing, not their mere conjunction, but a new determination including both as moments. If diversity and equality are opposed

determinations, the Hegelian therefore expects a synthesis that is neither.

The synthesis does not escape the partition. Becoming has internal structure: it is the passage from Being to Nothing and back, containing both as distinguishable moments. A synthesis that preserves its moments as distinguishable is a state with internal distinctions — diversity. A synthesis that failed to would not be an Aufhebung; it would be a collapse into undifferentiation — equality.

The deeper point is that Hegel's Being/Nothing pair and the diversity/equality partition are structurally disanalogous. Being and Nothing are, in Hegel's own terms, indeterminate, since they lack content and therefore pass into each other. The partition is defined by a determinate condition, since having at least one distinction is a determinate state of affairs, and having none is a determinate state of affairs. The dialectical instability Hegel identifies in indeterminate concepts therefore does not arise for determinate conditions.

The strongest Hegelian response — that all determinate conditions are subject to dialectical development, since determination is negation and negation generates its opposite — meets a two-part reply. First, the partition's condition is not a Bestimmung defining itself against an other but the condition for Bestimmung, operating below the level at which dialectical logic gets purchase. Second, the constitutive instantiation argument gives a structural reason why the spiral cannot subsume this partition, since dialectical synthesis is itself an act of distinguishing — holding its moments apart as the moments they are — and so an instance of the condition the partition tracks. The dialectic therefore presupposes the partition rather than generating a third beyond it.

A further point clarifies the resistance to sublation. Hegel's dialectic operates on pairs of positive opposites: two terms with content pushing against each other. Diversity is a positive condition, while equality is what obtains when it is entirely absent, with no content to bring to a dialectical interaction. The relationship therefore resembles sound and silence rather than hot and cold, since hot and cold are two determinations within a shared domain, while silence does not blend

with sound to produce a third. Sublation requires two structured terms, and the partition has only one.

Hegel's Becoming is nonetheless real — as a feature of the partition rather than a third state beyond it. Read as the first structural transition, the passage from undivided indeterminacy into structured difference, Becoming is the partition itself viewed dynamically: a phenomenology of its dynamic face. The partition therefore absorbs this reading rather than resisting it. What Becoming describes is what the grounding hierarchy formalises as the unilateral boundary, constituted entirely from the diversity side (Chapter 4), and what the temporal hierarchy formalises as the boundary of temporality (Chapter 5).

3.3 Three further candidates: paraconsistency, process, and structure

Three further traditions, with a fourth check appended, can be addressed more briefly, for a reason that changes what the test shows: none of the three ever proposed a third option to the partition, so what remains is a check that each, run through the partition, lands inside it — a weaker result than the Deleuze and Hegel sections earn. The check is run in the appendix (§A.1). Paraconsistent dialetheias (Priest, 2006), process ontology (Whitehead, 1929), and ontic structural realism (Ladyman & Ross, 2007; French, 2014) each land in the diversity cell; so does the fourth candidate, existence monism's blobject (Horgan & Potrč, 2008), by the broad reading of §2.1.

3.4 Apophatic theology: the One, Brahman, the Tao

Apophatic or negative theology holds that ultimate reality transcends all categories, being and non-being included, unity and multiplicity included. Plotinus's One is "beyond being" (*Enneads* V.1–V.5; Armstrong trans., 1966–1988). Advaita Vedānta's Brahman is nirguna, without attributes (Śaṅkara, *Brahmasūtrabhāṣya*; Thibaut trans., 1890). The Tao that can be named is not the eternal Tao (Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*; Lau trans., 1963). If the ultimate transcends all categories, it might seem to escape the partition.

The question remains, and the traditions have not always posed it sharply: does the One, or Brahman, or the Tao, have at least one internal distinction, or does it have none? The claim to transcend all categories is, in the present terms, a claim to stand beyond all predication.

The analysis of predicative priority (§2.3) says what this means structurally. Distinction is the precondition for predication, so a reality beyond all predication lacks all internal distinction, and a reality answering to that description is equality. The identification therefore follows from the apophatic claim's own structural implications rather than being imposed from outside. It runs through the description, and the reach of this conditionality is measured below.

The tradition might resist, insisting that the One is positively transcendent, exceeding the partition instead of falling on one side. Yet "exceeding the partition" would require the One to have neither at least one internal distinction nor none: a middle ground between a condition and its absence, which §2.2 has shown is logically unavailable.

The constitutive instantiation argument adds a further difficulty, since to propose that the One exceeds the partition is itself an act of distinguishing the One from both diversity and equality, which places the proposal within the scope of the partition it purports to transcend. The apophatic vocabulary — "beyond", "transcendent", "ineffable" — therefore gestures at a third option without providing one.

One scruple must be recorded, because the argument's reach should be measured with care. The constitutive instantiation move classifies the proposal, and a gap remains between classifying the proposal and classifying the One: between "the act of pointing beyond the partition is a distinguishing act" and "the thing pointed at falls on one side of it". The deepest apophatic reply lives in that gap, since the discursive machinery, it says, fails to apply to the One at all, without the One thereby falling under the machinery's negations.

Two results, separated. One is unconditional and one is conditional on the tradition's own words. The unconditional result is one of governance. Every saying, thinking, or gesturing concerning the One — the affirmations, the negations, the claim to transcend the

partition, the recommendation of silence, and the silence itself insofar as it is observed as doctrine — is classified by the partition, since each is a determinate act or content and the constitutive instantiation thesis applies to it. No theoretical position concerning the One escapes classification. By the occupancy test of Chapter 1 (§6.4), "there is something to which no predicate, these included, applies" can never be anyone's coherently held position, because holding it applies predicates.

The conditional result is the identification drawn above. If the apophatic description is taken at its word, an ultimate beyond all predication, then the condition described lacks the precondition for predication and is equality. The identification therefore inherits its authority from the description it runs through.

The apophaticist may disown the description, insisting that the One outruns even "is beyond all predication", even "is undifferentiated". The disowning secures ineffability at the cost of theoretical vacancy, since an ultimate about which nothing can be said or thought — not even that it exists, or that it differs from equality — is indistinguishable for every theoretical purpose from equality, because any respect in which the difference could show, in doctrine, inference, or practice, would be a predication. The fork is therefore exhaustive: own the description and receive the identification, or disown it and receive indistinguishability-in-principle from the condition the identification names. What the partition establishes against apophaticism is the fork, where the fork suffices for every use later chapters make of the result.

Plotinus. Plotinus provides a test case. The One generates the Intellect and through it the World-Soul and the material world. The most developed Neoplatonist response to the concern that generation requires distinction is that the One's activity is an overflow of its superabundance (*Enneads* V.2.1): it radiates being as the sun radiates light, without acquiring internal complexity.

The metaphor relocates the problem rather than dissolving it. An overflow that produces really distinguishable things must involve a productive process whose output is differentiated, so if the source is entirely undifferentiated, the transition from source to differentiated

products is itself a distinction. And if the overflow generates nothing distinguishable, the emanation scheme describes nothing. The tradition therefore faces a dilemma: attribute productive capacities to the One, in which case it has distinctions and is diverse, or deny them, in which case it is equality and cannot generate. The zero-complexity constraint (Chapter 6) applies directly, since any property requiring distinction, the productive capacities emanation requires included, is excluded from a state that has none.

The identification of the apophatic ultimate with equality is a structural characterisation, distinct from the traditions' own self-description, and it binds just as far as the traditions own their description. Their insistence that their ultimate is "more" than undifferentiation is intelligible, while the structural question remains: in what does the "more" consist, if not in some distinction? On the fork's second horn they retain an ultimate beyond even that description, at the cost of its theoretical vacancy. Chapter 12 develops the full engagement with negative theology.

3.5 Non-existence

The traditions tested so far each propose a third that, on inspection, either carries internal structure or coincides with equality. One candidate remains; it is the most natural of all, so natural that it is rarely advanced as a philosophical thesis.

It is non-existence: the thought that, beside differentiated being and undifferentiated being, a third standing exists — nothing at all — which is neither diverse, since it has no distinctions, nor equal, since it is not, after all, a state that is. If non-existence is a real third, the partition fails. The reply is that non-existence is not a third option within the partition but the absence of the domain over which the partition ranges, and its appearance as a third trades on an equivocation which, once removed, returns every case to one of the two conditions already named.

The two-names result. Begin with what separates equality from non-existence. By definition neither has any internal distinction, since both are undifferentiated, so they cannot be told apart by any feature,

because neither has a feature by which it might be told apart. The sole respect in which they differ is whether they obtain. An undifferentiated condition that obtains is equality: undifferentiated being. An undifferentiated condition that does not obtain is non-existence: nothing at all.

"Equality" and "nothingness" are thus not two undifferentiated states standing side by side, one exchangeable for the other. They are the two names a single undifferentiated condition takes according to whether or not it is the case. Call this the two-names result; later chapters cite it under that name, whether they draw on the identity it asserts, that an undifferentiated condition which obtains is equality, or on the distinction it draws, that equality and non-existence part only in obtaining.

It follows at once that a non-existence which obtains is a contradiction in its own terms, since the moment it obtains it satisfies the one thing the word "equality" marks, and is equality. Non-existence as such — non-existence that remains non-existence — therefore never obtains, and so is never present to be a third anything.

This turns on one distinction within the word "determination", which the partition itself supplies and on which later chapters rely. To bear a property is to fall on one side of a division within being, F as against non-F, so a property is by its nature a contrastive partition: no contrast, no property. Call this property-determination. Equality, being equal throughout, has none, since it has no within in which a partition might fall.

A state may be determinate in a second and weaker sense, though, since it may obtain rather than not. This obtaining-determination is sideless — not a cut within the state, but the standing of the whole state against its mere absence — and it requires neither a second term nor any internal structure. Equality has this and no more: it is, with no further way that it is.

A natural objection arrives here, and the rest of the book leans on the reply. If equality obtains, the objection runs, then obtaining is a feature it has; a feature is a contrast, obtaining against not obtaining; so

equality carries a distinction after all, and the partition has one cell. The reply separates three contrasts the word "obtains" can invoke, and one criterion governs them: obtaining marks a difference only between states.

Contrast	**What the contrast is between, and where its content lies**	**Verdict**
Equality against nothing	One state only. Non-existence is the absence of the domain, not a member of it, and a contrast with a single relatum is no contrast.	Equality acquires no feature. Existence is not a first-order predicate (Kant; Frege).
Equality against diversity	Two states. The content lies wholly on the diverse side: diversity has distinctions, equality has none, and a lack is no property (Armstrong, 1978).	Equality acquires no feature. This is the unilateral boundary of Chapter 4 (§5): the absence of a visual field is not a dark field (Chapter 8, §3).
Equality as terminus against no terminus	The two branches of Chapter 5. The content is a fact about diversity: whether it is bounded.	Owned as the obtaining residue (Chapter 5, §2.5).

The first contrast is the point that existence is not a first-order predicate. Kant's hundred real thalers have no property the hundred imagined ones lack (Kant, 1781/1998, A599/B627), and for Frege "exists" says of a concept that something falls under it rather than describing the thing (Frege, 1884/1980, §53). Obtaining-determination belongs to that order: it is the fact that there is a condition to bear features, and no feature borne. On none of the three does equality acquire a feature. The same criterion returns the opposite verdict in

Chapter 1 (§5.3), where the denial's occurring rather than not is a contrast between two diverse states of the world, and so is a difference.

Absences as facts. The second contrast is where a realist about negative facts will press. On the view Barker and Jago (2012) defend, in the debate Molnar (2000) opened and Kukso (2006) continued, absences are features with truthmakers of their own, so that equality's lacking every distinction is a fact about equality, and a fact the diverse side does not share. Grant the fact. What the partition asks is where it lies; the criterion just stated answers: between states. A negative fact of that kind is a contrast between equality and diversity; it confers on equality no articulation within it, since "lacks every distinction" names no two items in what lacks them and no way the state positively is (§2.1). The restriction to positive determination is no convenience. What makes property-bearing count as internal distinction at all is that a property is instantiated by the state on one side of a partition within being. A negative property is borne by everything that lacks the positive one, articulated or not, so if lacking counted as articulation every state would be articulated by everything it lacks; the equality cell would be empty by definition, and the partition would collapse into the formal exhaustiveness the substantiveness argument of §2.3 refuses to rest on. The realist who insists that the lack articulates has therefore made "undifferentiated" contradictory by stipulation, a state articulated by its lack of articulation, and the Register counts that stipulation as the premise's rejection. A realist who insists that the fact lies in equality owes the two items it distinguishes there, and "the state and its lack" names one item and a fact about it; Chapter 4 (§7.7) runs the obtaining/determination dilemma in full. The realist about absences therefore keeps her fact while the partition keeps its cell: equality bears, at most, a negative feature located at the boundary with diversity, the unilateral boundary of Chapter 4 seen from the other side, and bears no internal distinction. The premise the two-names result uses is accordingly the narrower one, that a lack confers no internal articulation, which the Register enters among the contested premises.

A residual worry deserves its own paragraph, since obtaining plays two parts that can seem to strain against one another. Within the domain

it is weightless: it marks no contrast, confers no feature, leaves equality featureless. Between the two names it is decisive: it is all that separates equality from non-existence. The criterion dissolves the strain by assigning the two verdicts to different questions. Whether a state has features is settled inside the domain, where obtaining supplies no partition; whether the domain is occupied at all is settled by nothing inside it, so the work obtaining does there is the standing of the domain against its absence rather than the bearing of a feature by a state. One determinateness, existential throughout, carries both verdicts without carrying a property either time.

The appearance of a third option now resolves into a dilemma. When someone says “there might have been nothing”, the word “nothing” is read in one of two ways.

On the first, “nothing is the case” means that not even an undifferentiated state obtains: no state of any kind is. This is outright non-existence; it is no third option in the partition because it is not a state at all. Nothing is there to classify, nothing to be diverse or equal, nothing to stand in any relation. It therefore does not sit beside diversity and equality as a further option; it is the absence of the domain in which options are located.

On the second reading, what would make “nothing is the case” true is that a featureless, undifferentiated condition obtains, and that, by the two-names result, is equality: one of the two conditions already within the partition rather than a third beyond it. On that horn the sentence has stopped being about nothing, since what it says obtains is being, undifferentiated — a condition that looks like nothing to any mind that tries to picture it, and is nothing’s opposite in the one respect that matters, obtaining.

No coherent third reading exists on which “nothing” names a state that both obtains and is distinct from equality. Either it does not obtain, and is no state and so no counterexample, or it obtains, and is equality. The partition closes over both horns.

Noneism. One sophisticated attempt to give non-existence real standing must be met, since it appears to supply the missing third

directly. Priest (2005) argues for subsistent non-existents: objects bearing properties and standing in relations without existing. Routley (1980) developed the first systematic noneist logic, and Zalta (1983) formalised non-existent objects as abstracta that encode their characterising properties in place of exemplifying them. If any such view is correct, non-existence is a populated domain rather than a self-cancelling one.

The reply is uniform, and requires no adjudication of the noneist's logic. Whatever domain the noneist recognises, the diversity/equality partition applies within it, since subsistent non-existents either bear internal distinctions, in which case they are diverse, or they do not, in which case they are equal. Expanding the ontological domain therefore introduces new entities for the partition to sort without introducing any condition that is neither diverse nor equal. The constitutive instantiation thesis (§2.3) secures this for any domain in which distinctions can be drawn, the noneist's included.

The attempt, moreover, defeats itself. To fill the empty standing with an object bearing properties and relations is to fill it with differentiated being, and to fill it with an object bearing none is to fill it with equality. One cannot occupy the place of non-existence without thereby vacating it. The same result meets, from the side of the partition, the retreat Chapter 1 (§5.3) closes by the regress of appearance: an "appearance realm" in which denials merely seem to occur is, if it obtains, a domain within being — its contents either differ from one another or they do not — and the diversity it hosts is ontological diversity under a deflationary name.

A recent strand treats nothingness itself as an object of the theory. Priest (2014) characterises it as the absence of every thing considered as a single item, contradictory by design — an object, so a something, that is nothing — while Casati and Fujikawa (2019) develop the account within an inconsistent mereology, taking nothingness as the complement of the totality. The uniform reply extends without addition. An item admitted into any domain either bears internal distinctions or bears none, so the theory's nothingness is sorted with everything else, while the contradiction it is built to carry marks the cost of housing the

second name as an occupant. What the two-names result offers in place of the paradox is a diagnosis: the object such theories reach for, once required to obtain, is equality — a something that looks like nothing, wearing the name of its absent twin — while non-existence proper, bearing no properties, populates no domain, paraconsistent or otherwise.

Non-existence is therefore not a third option but the limit of the partition's field of application: the absence of the domain rather than a third region within it. This secures the exhaustiveness result against its most basic challenge, and fixes a classification on which later chapters draw.

One limit on what has been shown should be marked plainly, since it is easily overread. The identity settles what an undifferentiated condition is under each existential status, and that non-existence can be no third thing. It does not by itself establish that the undifferentiated can obtain, that a state of zero internal distinction is really possible. That is a separate and more contested question, and its defence sites are listed for the auditor in the note. The exhaustiveness of the partition does not depend on its resolution, since however the possibility question is settled, every state that obtains is either diverse or equal, and non-existence is no third.

Where the argument stands: the partition has been defined, shown exhaustive by logical form and substantive by the instantiation thesis (§2), and tested against six traditions that seem to offer a third option — three that propose one and three that land inside it — and against non-existence, which the two-names result places (§3). What follows meets the objections.

4 Objections and Replies

4.1 The vagueness objection

Objection. The partition assumes that "has at least one internal distinction" is a sharp predicate. What counts as a distinction may be vague (cf. Williamson, 1994). At the quantum level, the boundary between distinct particles is blurred by superposition and entanglement.

If the predicate is vague, borderline cases may exist that are neither clearly diverse nor clearly equal.

Reply. The objection runs together whether a distinction is present and whether we can identify it. Quantum superposition does not eliminate distinction; it complicates our ability to say which distinctions obtain. An entangled system still has internal structure: measurable correlations between subsystems, distinguishable eigenstates, a Hilbert space with more than one dimension. Superposition is a distinctive form of differentiation that classical intuitions struggle to classify; a state in superposition is diverse. More generally, the partition asks whether *any* internal distinction obtains — even one — regardless of whether a particular boundary is sharp or fuzzy. A state with fuzzy boundaries still has internal structure (the fuzziness is itself a structural feature distinguishable from its absence); only a state with no structure whatsoever would be equality. And the same holds if "distinction" is itself a vague word admitting borderline distinctions. A borderline distinction is determinately more than nothing, and more-than-nothing is all that "not equality" requires. Semantic vagueness jiggles the taxonomy within diversity while the zero/non-zero line stays fixed.

The ontic reading of the objection remains; it is the serious one, because two claims travel under the word "exhaustive" and they differ in size. That "has at least one internal distinction" and "has none" jointly cover every state is supplied by classical logic. That every state falls determinately into one cell, with no state of which the matter is worldly unsettled, is a further, metaphysical claim, and the later chapters that lean on the partition — the terminus argument of Chapter 4, the boundary scenarios of Chapter 5, the burden analysis of Chapter 11 — need this stronger claim.

Ontic indeterminacy — unsettledness in the world itself, defended as coherent by E. Barnes (2010) and given its leading formal development by E. Barnes and Williams (2011) — names the gap between the two. A quick refutation of ontic vagueness has been on offer since Evans (1978), and five decades of debate have not ended in its favour. The argument below therefore claims nothing so general. It

claims that one specific question is proof against worldly unsettledness, for a reason specific to the threshold the partition draws.

The precisificational model. On the model of Barnes and Williams, ontic indeterminacy is unsettledness over which fully determinate way the world is. Each candidate precisification is itself perfectly determinate, and the indeterminacy concerns which candidate is actual. Run the partition against the model and it survives the first level untouched, since every precisification, being fully determinate, falls determinately into a cell, so the indeterminacy concerns occupancy alone.

The sting lies one level up. Could occupancy of the equality cell itself be the unsettled matter — two candidate precisifications, one undifferentiated and one differentiated, with the world unsettled between them?

Consider what this indeterminacy would consist in. It is a way things stand: reality hosts an unsettledness between two candidates, and an unsettledness is a real status, since a world at which it is indeterminate whether P differs from a world at which P is settled true and from one at which P is settled false. This is Barnes's own insistence, against deflationary readings of her view, that metaphysical indeterminacy is a feature of reality rather than a gap in description.

And a reality that hosts a real status hosts something, while equality is the condition that hosts nothing — no features, no statuses, no structure of any kind (§3.5). If the indeterminacy obtains, reality is thereby not featureless, so the equality candidate is falsified by the indeterminacy itself. The unsettledness that was to leave "equality or diversity?" open therefore closes it: diversity. Everything else the ontic-vagueness programme defends survives on the far side of that verdict, since which distinctions there are, how many, and where their boundaries lie may all be worldly unsettled. The single question that cannot be ontically indeterminate is whether there is at least one, because the indeterminacy would itself be one.

The reason the argument holds here and nowhere else should be displayed, since a move of this shape fails for ordinary predicates. Say it

is ontically indeterminate whether a droplet belongs to a cloud. The pair thereby bears the status of unsettledness, and the droplet's membership remains as open as before, because the status is inert with respect to the question, adding neither droplets nor belonging. A reply of that shape would rightly be dismissed.

"Has at least one internal distinction" differs in kind, since it is an existential threshold predicate, and indeterminacy is itself structure. For "cloud" the third status is inert; for the threshold predicate the third status is ore, since any unsettledness anywhere is a way things stand that differs from other ways, and one such difference is all the threshold needs. The reply therefore turns on that asymmetry and on nothing else. Predicates lacking it keep their borderline cases, and Barnes's programme keeps its subject matter everywhere except the one cell it never occupied.

The result deserves a label, because later chapters lean on it. Call it the *hard-edge corollary*: the equality cell of the partition is vagueness-proof, since to be equality is to determinately lack everything, indeterminacy included, and any borderline feature is an occupant. The diversity cell may host all the world's vagueness — fuzzy boundaries, unsettled identities, indeterminate counts — without a single case ever going borderline between the cells. Determinate applicability therefore reduces to a question one cell settles for both. Whether a state is equality cannot be worldly unsettled, because a candidate unsettledness about that question is itself disqualifying, and with only two cells, an edge policed on one side is policed on both.

Wilson's determinables. A second model of worldly indeterminacy must be run through the same gate, because it is precisificational indeterminacy's chief rival and its mechanics differ. On Wilson's determinable-based account (Wilson, 2013), a state is ontically indeterminate when it instantiates a determinable property without instantiating any unique determinate of it: coloured, but no particular shade. The account needs no unsettledness over which determinate world obtains, since the world is settled, and what it settles on is determinable-level instantiation.

Run the partition against it and the result is the same, reached by a shorter route. To instantiate a determinable is to be property-determined, since coloured-rather-than-colourless is a contrastive partition within being, whatever becomes of the shades below it. A determinable-bearing state therefore falls in the diversity cell by the very feature that makes it indeterminate, while the equality cell remains sealed for the corollary's reason: a state that instantiated even one determinable would bear a property-determination, and equality bears none. Wilson's model therefore relocates indeterminacy from occupancy to instantiation-depth, while at the threshold the partition polices, instantiation at any depth is already structure.

4.2 The conceptual imposition objection

Objection. The partition is a conceptual scheme imposed on reality. "Distinction" is a concept depending on a mind capable of drawing distinctions; absent such a mind, the question "does this state have internal distinction?" has no answer.

Reply. The objection treats distinction as a cognitive act when it is a structural condition. A boundary between two rock formations exists whether or not any mind observes it, and a difference in chemical composition between two regions of a star obtains whether or not any agent registers it. The partition concerns structural features of states — the presence or absence of internal non-identity — rather than acts of classification, so the question is ontological rather than epistemic.

Sider (2011) makes the same point with his concept of "structure" as the fundamental metaphysical notion, since the question is about what makes a description carve nature at its joints, and structure is a real feature of the world independent of minds, which is the claim about distinction advanced here. The partition classifies states natively, and where a fact-relata idiom is in play it classifies facts through the states they concern. And the objection fails for the same reason the idealist retreat failed (Chapters 1–2), since the very act of imposing the concept of distinction requires instantiating a distinction, between the concept and what it is imposed upon, and that distinction is real.

4.3 The emergence objection

Objection. The partition is static. Reality may include states in which distinction is in the process of emerging: no longer entirely absent, not yet fully present. The transition from equality to diversity would involve a state that is neither fully diverse nor fully equal.

Reply. A state in which distinction is "emerging" already has at least one distinction: between the emerging feature and the background from which it emerges. If the emerging feature were entirely indistinguishable from the background, it would not be emerging, so the moment a feature is distinguishable at all — even minimally, even incipiently — the state is diverse.

The degree of diversity can still vary, since a state with one distinction is less complex than a state with a billion, and the development of diversity from one distinction to many may be gradual. What is binary is the transition from "no distinction" to "at least one". How a state with zero distinctions could come to have one, the mechanism by which the threshold is crossed, is addressed in Chapter 5.

4.4 The classificatory objection

Objection. The partition is a logical sorting device, not an ontology. Any predicate and its negation generate an exhaustive partition; it does not follow that "diversity" and "equality" are fundamental kinds with explanatory power.

Reply. The objection is correct that formal exhaustiveness alone confers no significance, and §2.3 addressed it directly: the partition is terminal, since any deeper partition is an act of distinguishing, and its equality cell has consequences no other formally exhaustive partition's cells have. "Has at least one electron / has none" lacks both, since many things exist without electrons and classifying by electron-content, though it distinguishes, has no bearing on containing electrons. The explanatory power is demonstrated in subsequent chapters. Chapter 4 shows that the partition, combined with the formal properties of grounding, identifies a structural limit on metaphysical explanation.

Chapter 5 shows that it constrains the possible temporal structures of reality.

4.5 The priority objection

Objection. Predicative priority is an epistemological claim about the order of predication, not a metaphysical claim about reality. From the fact that we must first notice a distinction before predicating anything further, it does not follow that distinction is metaphysically fundamental — a version of the Kantian concern that conditions of knowing may not be conditions of being.

Reply. Two independent responses are available. The first draws on the ontological standing of predication established in Chapters 1 and 2: predication is itself an ontological activity, a real event that instantiates a distinction. The predicative priority of distinction is therefore a fact about what must obtain for description, an ontological activity, to be possible at all. The second draws on the constitutive instantiation argument, which is independent of the first: the operation of partitioning, performed by a mind, a physical process, or any other mechanism, is an instance of the condition the partition classifies. This relationship between operation and condition is structural rather than epistemic, holding on any metaphysics of predication.

The two responses reach different targets. The second shows that any operation of partitioning instantiates distinction, which meets the objection wherever it concerns the act of distinguishing. It does not by itself carry distinction into reality, since the gap noted at §3.4 — between the distinguishing act and what is distinguished — applies here too. The first response closes that gap, since it makes predication an ontological event, at the cost of a premise the critic may resist. A critic who grants the ontological standing of predication is therefore answered on both counts. One who resists it is held at the level of the operation, and owes an account of how the act of partitioning could instantiate distinction while reality contained none.

5 Conclusion

The chapter yields three results.

Formal exhaustiveness. The partition is formally exhaustive: a state either has at least one internal distinction or it does not. This is a logical observation, holding independently of any substantive metaphysical commitment, and its strength is excluded middle's.[4]

Substantiveness. The partition is also substantive, on two independent grounds.

Distinction is predicatively prior, the precondition for all other predication, where the priority is structural rather than merely epistemic, since predication is itself an ontological activity; this argument is conditional on Chapters 1–2. And the partition exhibits constitutive instantiation, since its subject matter, distinction, is instantiated by the operation, distinguishing, by which any partition is drawn, making it the only formally exhaustive partition that is self-instantiating and so impossible to subordinate to a deeper condition; this argument is independent of the earlier chapters. The partition is therefore not a binary opposition of the kind Deleuze, Derrida, and Hegel criticised, being defined by a condition and its absence rather than by two positive terms.

The six rival traditions. Six traditions proposing an alternative — Deleuze's difference-in-itself, Hegel's dialectical synthesis, paraconsistent dialetheias, Whitehead's process ontology, apophatic theology, and ontic structural realism — each, on examination, either instantiates diversity or collapses into equality. For apophatic theology the result takes the graded form of §3.4's fork: identification with equality on the tradition's own description, or indistinguishability-in-principle from equality without it. The constitutive instantiation argument explains why the pattern is structural rather than accidental. The chapter acknowledges that a future tradition might propose a counterexample not yet considered.

Is the verdict falsifiable? That acknowledgment invites a sharper question, and the book should meet it here, where the pattern it concerns

is most visible. Every rival examined has been resolved by the same move: either the candidate has structure and instantiates diversity, or it lacks structure and collapses into equality. A sceptical reader concludes that machinery which digests every counterexample is machinery no counterexample can touch, and that immunity of that kind is secured by emptiness.

The charge deserves a direct answer, where the answer turns on the difference between a rigged test and an empty one. A test is rigged when its adjudication procedure is biased, so counterexamples exist and the procedure misclassifies them. A test is empty when the specification of a counterexample is itself unfulfillable, so any attempted fulfilment undoes itself.

The partition's test is empty, and the emptiness was derived rather than stipulated. A counterexample would be a condition identified without being distinguished from its alternatives, and the constitutive instantiation thesis (§2.3) proves that identification is distinguishing, so the specification, though perfectly intelligible as a specification, is self-undermining in every fulfilment. That is a theorem about the candidates, arrived at by an argument that could have failed, rather than a policy about the referee.

Two further considerations keep the emptiness in order. The first is that the derivation has independently checkable joints, each of which could have broken. The blocking tests of Chapter 1 (§2) might have failed to individuate a fourth category. The occupancy test (Chapter 1, §6.4) might have graded the denial of difference as merely assertoric defeat. The determination dilemma (Chapter 2, §2.4) might have foundered on the coarse-grained semantics or on the necessary truths. The hard-edge corollary (§4.1) might have succumbed to the precisificational model instead of absorbing it. The pattern's uniformity is the consequence of results that were severally at risk.

The second is that the framework surrounding the partition remains falsifiable in the ordinary way; the General Conclusion (§2) counts its exposures for the whole book in one place: which specifications are empty by theorem, and which results stand in the ordinary line of fire.

If the partition is exhaustive, a consequence follows for one of the deepest questions in metaphysics: does the hierarchy of explanation have a bottom, and if it does, what is the bottom like? The partition, combined with the formal properties of the grounding relation, identifies a terminus that is structurally foreclosed rather than brute or infinitely deferred, and Chapter 4 develops this result.

A second consequence: the exhaustiveness result discharges the conditionality flagged in Chapter 2 (§4). That chapter's departure from Derrida was staked conditionally on the partition's exhaustiveness, and the present chapter's defence completes the argument, since the deconstructive strategy requires open conceptual space around the proposed foundation, so the partition's exhaustiveness closes that space.

Grades and Dependencies

1. Grades. The formal exhaustiveness of the partition is true by logical form and stands outside the confidence ladder (note 4). Substantiveness is established, via predicative priority and the constitutive instantiation thesis. The two-names result is established, and it carries the three-contrast criterion of §3.5, on which obtaining marks a difference only between states. The testing against six rival traditions is established. The two-names result and the hard-edge corollary use one premise beyond the partition, that a lack confers no internal articulation (§§2.1, 3.5), entered among the Register's contested premises. The Premise Register records the full dependency chain.

2. The corollary's tier. The relational corollary is *established* rather than self-vindicating, since it borrows the irreflexivity of the working relations from the grounding literature's near-universal axiom rather than from the partition itself. A theorist who both admits reflexive structural work and equips the terminus with material for it has left the present framework entirely; Chapter 4 (§7.5) weighs that position on its merits.

3. Defence sites for the possibility question. Whether a state of zero internal distinction is really possible is a separate and more contested question, and since it guards the framework's most-attacked premise, its three defence sites are listed where an auditor will look first: the obtaining/determination distinction on which the answer turns receives its full dilemma at Chapter

4 (§7.7); the formal consistency model is given in this chapter's appendix (§A.2); and both are used where the question carries weight, in the burden-of-proof analysis of Chapter 11 (§4.3).

4. Why the top grade is withheld. The ladder's top term is withheld from the formal exhaustiveness result deliberately. A truth of logic is trivially such that its denial instantiates it, since every content does; a grade every logical truth earns by default reports nothing about this one. The strength here is excluded middle's and should be named as excluded middle's.

Appendix: The Further Candidates, and a Consistency Model for Undifferentiated Being

A.1 Three further candidates: paraconsistency, process, and structure

The three traditions §3.3 dispatches, with the fourth check appended there, are run through the partition here in full. None proposed a third option, so each case is a check that the tradition lands inside the partition; the result is weaker than the Deleuze and Hegel sections earn; no later result rests on it beyond the survey's completeness.

Paraconsistent dialetheias. A dialetheist might accept both "this state has at least one distinction" and "this state has no distinctions" as a true contradiction. Priest (2006) develops the most systematic defence of dialetheism, arguing that true contradictions are actual, in the liar paradox, the boundaries of vague predicates, and the limits of thought.

The response: even if true contradictions obtain, each contradictory proposition has determinate content differing from its negation, since otherwise the contradiction is trivial, and Priest's own formal apparatus, the logic LP, requires distinguishable truth-values and distinguishable propositions to state the contradictions it endorses. A dialetheism in which no proposition were distinguishable from any other would therefore not be dialetheism but semantic collapse. The tolerance for contradiction does not dissolve the partition; it multiplies the instances of distinction.

Process ontology. Whitehead's (1929) actual occasions are constitutively temporal, relational, and creative. A process has internal structure: phases that differ, prehensions presupposing distinguishable relata. A process with no internal distinction would not be a process; it would be a featureless instant. Process ontology is a theory about the character of diversity, not an escape from the partition.

Ontic structural realism. Ladyman and Ross (2007) hold that the fundamental ontology of physics is structure: relations without relata, or prior to relata. French (2014) develops the most eliminativist version, on which no objects stand in the relations.

The thesis denies distinguishable relata without denying that structure is differentiated; it cannot deny this, since a symmetry group is constituted by distinctions and a structure with no internal differentiation would be no structure at all. French's question therefore concerns what bears the differentiation rather than whether there is any. The partition asks only the second question and stays indifferent to the first, so ontic structural realism characterises the fundamental level as diverse, whatever carries the diversity, and lies within the partition.

Existence monism. Horgan and Potrč's (2008) blobject is the nearest thing in the literature to a diverse state without internal distinction: one concrete particular, partless, whose spatiotemporal variation is a matter of how the one thing is, region by region, and never of parts it has. The partition sorts it by the broad reading of §2.1. Variation is distinction: the blobject is thus here and otherwise there, so a way-here that differs from a way-there is an internal contrast whether or not anything is a part. The blobject therefore lands in the diversity cell; the case shows what the broad reading buys, since a partition that counted only parts as internal distinction would have had to call the blobject undifferentiated and lose the variation that makes it a world.

A.2 A consistency model for undifferentiated being

The coherence of equality — defended dialectically in §3.5 and load-bearing in Chapter 11 — admits a formal footing worth exhibiting, because it fixes what the Parmenidean opponent must claim.

Consider a first-order language whose signature is empty: no predicate symbols beyond identity, no function symbols, no constants. Let T be the theory whose sole axiom is that something exists and everything is identical with it. T is satisfiable, since the structure whose domain contains exactly one element is a model. That model has no relations to distinguish regions of the domain, no functions to generate structure, and no properties beyond self-identity — and self-identity is not an internal distinction but the absence of non-identity, a formal feature everything trivially possesses, contributing no contrast within the state. Classical semantics requires a non-empty domain, and the requirement is welcome, since the model is of undifferentiated being rather than of non-existence, whose self-exclusion §3.5 establishes and whose relation to the "empty world" Chapter 9 examines.

What the model shows can be stated in one sentence: the description "something is, and no internal distinction obtains" harbours no logical contradiction, since a consistent structure answers to it. The model also satisfies the criterion of §3.5, since its undifferentiated state's obtaining is represented by the structure's having a domain rather than by any predicate true within it, and in the containment order of Chapter 4 (Appendix) that structure is the bottom element. Any two one-element structures are isomorphic, so the model also shows that equality is unique up to isomorphism; the containment order relies on that for its least element. Chapter 8 relies on it for infinite equality.

What it does not show can be stated in one sentence too: consistency is necessary for metaphysical possibility and never sufficient, so no formal result could demonstrate that equality could obtain. The modal standing the framework requires is nonetheless the standing the model secures. Chapter 11 needs equality to be not-impossible, the Parmenidean needs it to be impossible, and an impossibility that casts no logical shadow — from whose description no contradiction is derivable — is the heaviest species of modal claim there is. The model therefore does not prove the possibility of undifferentiated being; it certifies that its impossibility, if asserted, must be metaphysical all the way down: a substantive thesis about the nature

of being, owed and undischarged (Chapter 11, §§4.3–5.1), rather than a truth of logic the kalām may carry in its pocket.

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