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World? Which World? On Some Pitfalls of a Concept[1]

The aim of this essay is not to provide a solution to a theoretical problem or a clear guide to political action, but merely to point out – in the least technical way possible – certain pitfalls that await us when we attempt to define the concept of world. The latter, in fact, is one of those concepts that seem simple, clear, and self-evident, but ultimately turn out to be very slippery, elusive, and tricky. The very mention of the word "world" constantly leads to ambiguity and paradox for several reasons. First, the word "world" constantly shifts between its cosmological, ontological, theological, chronological, anthropological, sociological, political, and existential meanings.[2] Second, the word "world" can have contradictory meanings even within a single meaning, especially with regard to its definition in terms of space, time, and ontology. The consequences of this affect its strict definition. Moreover, third, the world involves a peculiar paradox. It is with us from the beginning, it is always already there, but not really, or at least not yet completely – what appears to us as the world is either not the world at all, but an erroneous, inaccurate, or false conception of it, or the world itself is not yet at the level of its own concept. Yes, the world is there, but that does not mean it is simply identified with being (all that is) out there. This may seem strange, since "being there", "presence", "the outside", "the real world", and "the external reality" are often used as synonyms for "the world". There are

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[2] There is, of course, a great deal of philosophical discussion on this subject. Although we will not deal with the history of these discussions, here we have drawn on the following recent overviews of the subject: Paul Clavier, *Le concept du monde*, Paris, PUF, 2000; Christian Bernier, *Qu'est-ce qu'une conception du monde?*, Paris, Vrin, 2006; Sean Gaston, *The Concept of World from Kant to Derrida*, London and New York, Rowman and Littlefield, 2013; Kelly Oliver, *Earth and World. Philosophy After the Apollo Missions*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2015; Walter Biemel, *Le concept du monde chez Heidegger*, Paris, Vrin, 2015; Julien Rabachou, *Qu'est-ce qu'un monde?*, Paris, Vrin, 2016.

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already big and important differences between them, but perhaps more important for us here – and that is our fourth point – is that "the world" is not simply identical with external reality or with everything that exists. Nevertheless, and this is our fifth point, "the world" remains at the centre of the questions that relate it to truth: at the end there is always the question of whether it is *really true that the world exists.*[3]

One would have to enumerate many more points here, but from these arbitrarily chosen ones it is clear that "the world" as a concept necessarily presents many difficulties and contradictions. By definition, "the world" is in a quandary. While that may appear to somehow discredit, sully, or even refute the concept, it is, at least in our opinion, its main strength and driving force. For if "there is a world (out there)", it is certainly full of problems, difficulties, contradictions, and antagonisms: that is exactly what the concept of the world should take into account. In other words, the concept of the world, the grasping of the world, must reflect the fact that the world, if there is one, is constantly in disorder, change, and flux. As a concept, it must even embody the end of the world, that is, the end and impossibility of its own object. In this sense, the end of the world is implicit in its concept; just as for Adorno the end of art is implicit in its concept. What we will attempt here follows in the form of an exercise, with somewhat logical reasons and arguments leading in the direction of a dynamic concept of the world. In the process, we will encounter a number of paradoxes. Perhaps the most fundamental thing is that we will constantly move in circles, always returning to the starting point to face the dilemma of the world, or rather, what to do with the world. What, which, and whose world are we talking about in the first place?

On the World

Let us go back, then. "The world," as we have said, is always already "there." What is meant by this? Namely, "the world" is not there only in the sense of our physical surroundings from the micro to the macro level in the sense of the universe and the cosmos, but it is also there in the sense of man, people, nations, and the peoples who inhabit them. Alternatively, as Heidegger put it, we are always already in the world, in the sense of the German word *Mitsein*, being-with, togetherness, companionship. We are always already living in "the world" with

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3   Bas C. van Fraassen, "'World' Is Not a Count Noun", *Noûs*, 29 (2/1995), pp. 139–157.

the Other(s), and we can never really get out, we are always in some relation to it. "The world" shapes, conditions, and creates us in a sense, but it is also constantly changing itself and is never really the same. These changes are also our product, for our relationship to the world is never purely neutral and passive. Even when we do nothing or pretend to be only passive observers of "the world", like Hegel's figure of the "beautiful soul", we are always active and creative: we create "the world".[4] On the other hand, perhaps we only create "our world" and each of us only creates our own private world? How many worlds are there? One world, "the world", or an infinite number of worlds, a multiplicity of worlds? How do they relate to each other and to "the world", if there is one at all? Are these worlds just views of "the world", "worldviews"? Or perhaps we all live today, as Badiou puts it, in a worldless[5] world, in a world that is not a world at all, and we have to fight for a new, better world, a world for all?

But where to begin? There where the world is, of course. For it is presumably "there". Yes, "the world" might be there, but never, already for Heidegger, in the sense of an object, of something that we can literally hold in our hands, that we are facing *vis-à-vis*. *What* is it then – "the world"? In addition, what does it actually mean to "be *in* it", to "be *in it* together", to "*share* it"? If we can "be in it" – does that mean it is some kind of container? Or is it itself contained in something else? Can we locate it, is it perhaps a place – *where* is it? Clearly, "the world" is everywhere and yet nowhere in particular. However, this "being everywhere"[6] still needs to be specified. Does it refer to a whole that has no bounda-

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[4] The motif of the "creation of the world" has been remarkably elaborated by one of the most lucid contemporary thinkers of the problem of the world, the recently deceased Jean-Luc Nancy. Although we do not explicitly follow his arguments here, we are deeply indebted to him and his adage: "*To create the world* means: immediately, without delay, reopening each possible struggle for a world, that is, for what must form the contrary of a global injustice against the background of general equivalence." Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Creation of the World, or, Globalization*, trans. F. Raffoul and D. Pettigrew, Albany, SUNY Press, 2007, p. 54.

[5] For these topics in recent contemporary philosophy, see the excellent: Roland Végső, *Worldlessness After Heidegger. Phenomenology, Psychoanalysis, Deconstruction*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2020.

[6] Here we must mention an old philosophical discussion that is practically never mentioned in discussions of the problem of the concept of "the world", a discussion which has been going on since Anselm of Canterbury on the subject of the ontological proof of God, and which has undergone a kind of renaissance with modern philosophy up to Kant. (*Cf.* Dieter Henrich, *Der ontologische Gottesbeweis, Sein Problem und seine Geschichte in der Neuzeit*, Tübingen, J.C.B. Mohr, 1967.) Kant in a way ended this whole discussion not only, as is

ries, or to something that is itself limited and constrained? The real problem is where exactly to draw a line, demarcation, or boundary. For example, if by "the world" we mean the whole of "the outside world", it is not quite clear where the outside begins and where it ends. Indeed, the inside is already outside in a certain sense, and the outside is already inside. Such an assertion may seem somewhat trivial, but a mathematical object like a Klein bottle shows that there can be no boundary between outside and inside. Lacan even coined the neologism "extimacy" to indicate this and in this precise sense the world would have to be simultaneously inside and outside. This complicates things, because normally we presume that the world is out there – so, it is both outside and inside of us. Of course, this does not mean that the world spreads everywhere, without limits. Another paradox is namely that the world is literally everywhere, yet at the same time many things or beings fall out of it. For "the world" is always about *who or what belongs to it*, it is about setting boundaries and excluding, about questions such as the following: Does it include *us* in the sense of human beings, or rather a collection of living things, humans, animals, plants, viruses, bacteria, etc., along with the non-living things, the earth, the air, the atmosphere, the stratosphere, the galaxy, the universe, space as such? In one way or another, "the world" is always bound up with the problem of demarcation between what is outside it and what is inside it. Heidegger, for example, in his seminar of 1929-1930 drew a line between human beings, animals, and stones – "the stone is worldless, the animal is poor in world, man [i.e. Dasein] is world-forming."[7] Nevertheless, this solution was clearly only provisional for him, for in a sense he never quite solved the problem of delimitation and demar-

often assumed, by repeating the old thesis that existence cannot be a predicate, but also by pointing out that ontological proof is a conceptual operation that connects two concepts, *ens necessarium* and *omnitudo realitatis*. This conceptual operation is, for Kant, found in all other proofs of the existence of God; however, for him it is impossible not only because it is purely conceptual, but also because the concept of *ens necessarium*, of being that is absolutely necessary, is self-contradictory and therefore impossible. Kant's critique opened up new avenues of conceptual thought not only in philosophy, but also for modern physics and evolutionary theory. The second concept that remains from the above-mentioned conceptual operation, the concept of *omnitudo realitatis*, "all of reality", reaches its apogee with Hegel ("Die Wahre is das Ganze", "The true is the whole.") and then remains central to the discussion of post-Hegelian philosophy as well as modern logic and mathematics to this day. The discussion of the "world" being "everywhere" and "all there is" is therefore part of this context, but we cannot go into it more deeply here.

[7]   Martin Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*, trans. W. Mc Neill and N. Walker, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2001, p. 183.

cation. His infamous affair with Nazism, as well as his private anti-Semitism, bear witness to this fact, for instance.

This, by the way, is not just a problem of philosophy or of a particular philosopher, but also the problem of the political itself. What is at stake here is the ideological, political, racial, and cultural appropriation of the world in terms of domination and power over it. In Heidegger's case, of course, the question was whether this "our little world" was the German world, the Western world. Again, not only for him – as Rodolphe Gasché[8] has pointed out, there is a long tradition of equating the concept of "the world" with the idea of Europe. Although we seem to live in a globalized world where we are increasingly becoming part of one big global village, there are still fences, borders, and boundaries. The segregation that Lacan predicted in the early 1970s is on the rise today. In this regard, Achille Mbembe, one of the most important contemporary critics of racial segregation, emphasizes the following: "As has long been the case, the contemporary world is deeply shaped and conditioned by the ancestral forms of religious, legal, and political life built around fences, enclosures, walls, camps, circles, and, above all, borders."[9]

Who belongs on the inside and who belongs on the outside is not only an abstract academic question, but also one of great political explosiveness – the question of borders is particularly important in the contemporary context of heated political debates about migration policy, refugees, "Fortress Europe", and the rise of populisms and illiberalisms.

However, borders and limits are not only spatial, they concern time, too. Everyone agrees today that the American world, the world that was created after the Second World War, is now in shambles and sinking, that relations between the world's geopolitical powers are changing rapidly, and that consequently the world is changing. Or, as current U.S. President Biden pointed out in one of his recent speeches, "The world is changing; it is not the same as it was twenty years ago." (June 14, 2021) Here, by the way, the reader might notice that we

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[8] For more on this, see Rodolphe Gasché, *Europe, or the Infinite Task. A Study of a Philosophical Concept*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2009.

[9] Achille Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*, trans. L. Dubois, Durham and London, Duke University Press, 2017, p. 24.

are suddenly moving quietly and without warning into a different terrain – the world we are now talking about is a geopolitical world, a world of geopolitical and power relations. This world was always about the division of the world into orders, races, and colonies. Today we are witnessing the emergence of new forms of colonialism, and yet, despite these brutal facts, we need to be aware, as Mbembe put it, that

> in the end, there is only one world. It is composed of a totality of a thousand parts. Of everyone. Of all worlds. [...] There is therefore only one world, at least for now, and that world is all there is. What we all therefore have in common is the feeling or desire that each of us must be a full human being. The desire for the fullness of humanity is something we all share. And, more and more, we also all share the proximity of the distant. Whether we want to or not, the fact remains that we all share this world. It is all that there is, and all that we have.[10]

Mbembe knows very well that in the political sense "a common world for all" does not really exist. Not yet, or rather not in the strict sense of the word. Sometimes it is hard to distinguish between the utopian call for a single world that is deeply woven into our Western pop culture (take, for example, Lennon's song "Imagine", which ends with the conclusion, "And the world will live as one."), humanitarianism (like the 1985 mega-pop charity Band-Aid, which installed a phenomenon Keith Tester called "commonsense humanitarianism"[11]), and pure ideology.

The problem is that on an abstract level we cannot refrain from referring to the world – and in the last instance, to a single common world. This is precisely what, at least in our opinion, Mbembe's remark quoted above points to. Even more. Such hesitation, such doubt, such division cannot be eliminated – at least on an abstract level – when we talk and think about the world as such. We cannot help but refer to "the world" in one way or another, and yet we are never sure what that really means, what the world is, if it exists at all. The world seems to be something very solid and present, but as a rule, it always turns out to be the opposite, something very uncertain, floating, something endangered or even

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10   *Ibid.*, pp. 180, 182.
11   See Keith Tester, *Humanitarianism and Modern Culture,* University Park (PA), Penn State University Press, 2010.

threatened. This split between "always already" and "not yet" is constitutive of the very idea, representation, and concept of "the world". On the one hand, in our desperate attempt to hold onto the world, we are constantly confronted with its fragility and uncertainty, its demise, its collapse, its crisis, or its dissolution. Or, as Novalis put it, we have lost the world and the world has lost us. However, one should be very precise here – we may have lost the world, but not completely, there always remains a remainder here that we cannot really get rid of. This can be especially troublesome and painful when we somehow decide to construct for ourselves the new, the true world.

The Two Worlds

There is a classical, typical, and predominant way of dealing with the world, which is found in religion, myths, and other ways of representing the world. The simplistic "two-world-theory" divides the world into two halves and in this way seemingly bypasses many problems with the world: one version of the world, more or less the bad one, makes everything impermanent, changeable, and uncontrollable, while the other, the alternative one, is the good, stable, clean, and pure one. The solution creates two worlds, two diagnoses of what and how the world is: the solution does not abolish the chaos, mess, and confusion of the real world; the latter is superposed by a purified and cleansed version of itself. To illustrate, let us quote a very recent passage from Bernard-Henri Lévy describing the problems with the world in the face of the crisis caused by the Covid 19 pandemic. On the one hand, Lévy says, there is *mundus*

> as the real world. The one in which people strive, grieve, hope, and die. The one that fell into ruins twice in the twentieth century [...] But *mundus* also signifies what is neat and clean. Immaculate and without stain. Aseptic. Sanitized. Disinfected. In Greek, the word is *cosmos*. In French and English, *cosmetic*. [...] it is the name of a too beautiful world in which we are asked to hide the misery, the evil, the Medusas that we would prefer not to see.[12]

It seems that the passage quoted very aptly illustrates the usual way of dealing with "the world" that splits the world into two parts and in this way "saves" its

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[12]   Bernard-Henri Lévy, *The Virus in the Age of Madness*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 2020, pp. 90, 92.

coherence, consistency, and solidity. This procedure involves different levels, reasons, or causes, which according to Lévy are here political, personal-affective, structural, and aesthetic. However, from the passage quoted, it seems that Lévy somehow suggests that the world has always been just that, more or less split into two Manichean halves. It seems that he more or less deliberately presents things in such a way that readers will somehow conclude that any attempt to resolve the contradictions of the real world always leads to disaster, to totalitarianism. This would be the political side of the problem presented above, implying the moral that we should never try to solve the real world, because that would certainly end horribly.

Such a perfidious tactic loses some of its force, however, because the two extremes to be avoided are not really on the same level. You do not have to be Derrida to notice this – although it would be interesting to make a classic deconstructionist reading in this case, but there is no room for that here. The alternative to the real world is perhaps too simply a boring world, a purified and sanitized world that does not work well on the next level, which for Lévy is the level of desire and life. On the one hand, there is a world, Lévy says, "in which people strive, grieve, hope, and die." This is a world of desire, a world of passions, affects, instincts and drives, a world of life, a world of procreation and corruption, reproduction, sex, sin, impurity, change, chaos, and misery. The problem here – and that Lévy knows very well – is that life as such is always accompanied by its negation, death, and that must be present already here and not only in the other world. Why does one need the purified world after all? The same is true of desire. Desire, in fact, is restless, never satisfied, never still and at rest; it is always split between hope and fear, as Hegel would put it, and it too, like life, is meaningless without its negation. In the above quotation, Lévy contrasts the world of desire, the chaotic world, with the world in which this very desire and life are purified and sterilized. Lévy's simile falls short not only because negation is already an inherent and integral part of desire and life, but also because this very logic of negativity produces a surplus that is projected into the other half or the other world. In Lévy's example, one does not really see the dialectical connection between the two halves. The world is now split, and so his diagnosis overlooks how the actual contradictions in the (real) world are related to its splitting. The splitting up of the world, the distinction and separation of its two sides, the good and the bad, the beautiful and the ugly, is obviously done here in a deliberately exaggerated way for pedagogical and moral reasons – again, perhaps to

avoid all extremes. Such a juxtaposition of the two worlds is too Aristotelian, too committed to "maintaining the Golden Mean", whatever that may be.

At the fourth and last level, which we call structural, this becomes obvious. For if we divide the world into two parts, we get two halves, two sets of elements that appear as ordered and as disordered. Where does this very *order* come from? How does it come about, what determines it? This is precisely the question that the principle of avoiding extremes does not raise in any way. It is not only a question of how internal order and disorder are related, or who or what determines and governs them. It is also a question of visibility and representation, a question of how things appear and how the world itself appears, or, in Rancière's sense of the French word *partage*, how it is divided and shared. By being divided, it not only avoids its contradictions and antagonism, but it also produces a certain order of the visible. There are two important consequences of that. They concern the highest and the lowest; the latter is simply that which remains invisible for that order. The former concerns that which shines as the paradigm of visibility itself (the other world as the world of ideas, for example, in Plato), which is projected out of the world onto the imaginary perfect world. In other words, what is missing in Lévy's account of the two worlds is their dialectical connection. What drives the chaotic world, what desire strives for, is represented in the other world in a purified but neutered, castrated, or sterilized way.

Strictly speaking, we could also find in Lévy a relation between the two poles; for him, the reasons for the division of worlds lie in a general explanation similar to Freudian repression: we simply do not want to deal with the unpleasant and ugly side of the world, or, as he puts it, "we prefer not to see." The other world, however, is much more fundamentally connected to the (real) world; it is really an escape and a remainder of its antinomies. The two worlds are much more interdependent; the chaotic world needs the pure world as its complement in order to remain what it is, that is, in order to maintain the intolerable, the unbearable, the repugnant, and the undesirable in it. This is nothing new, of course, but has already been hinted at in the history of philosophy. These are the very questions that Ludwig Feuerbach sought to clarify in his explanation of the origin of religion in his 1841 work on the essence of Christianity. Feuerbach's argument is that

> [r]eligion is the disuniting of man from himself; he sets God before him as the antithesis of himself; God is not what man is – man is not what God is. God is the infinite, man the finite being; God is perfect, man imperfect; God eternal, man temporal; God almighty, man weak; God holy, man sinful. God and man are extremes: God is the absolutely positive, the sum of all realities; man the absolutely negative, comprehending all negations.[13]

At first glance, it seems that Feuerbach acts similarly as Lévy; here too we have two worlds, one imperfect and the other perfect. However, the relationship between the two is set differently – because one is imperfect and finite (man), one needs the perfect and the infinite (God) as his or her complement.

Nevertheless, even that explanation is too simple and a further step has to be taken, a step already taken by none other than Marx. As is well known, Marx criticized Feuerbach in his eleven *Theses on Feuerbach* , which were actually a sketch for the first chapter of the *German Ideology*, a work written with Engels but not later published and left to "the gnawing criticism of the mice." The *Theses* also remained unpublished until after Marx's death; Engels published them in 1888. In them, Marx essentially argued that Feuerbach's materialism was too mechanistic, playing too much of a game of "black against white," while the origin of the problem was to be found elsewhere, in praxis, which Marx himself later explained as the capitalist mode of commodity production. This is what determines the world and its contradictions, and in Marx's view our task is to change it.

The Point Is to Change It

Marx's reading of Feuerbach's view reaches its peak in the form of the infamous 11th thesis: "Philosophers have hitherto only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it." Marx's primary concern here is to abandon the position of idealist interpretation, which merely passively observes and interprets the world in various ways without first considering how much it is itself involved in it and without actually intervening in it. His aim is to initiate a materialist turn that brings materialism, *praxis*, to the fore. This *praxis* is

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[13]   Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, trans. G. Eliot, Walnut, Mt. San Antonio College, 2008, p. 1.

not mechanistic materialism, but a materialism that draws heavily on German idealism. The story is, of course, much more complicated than that, but that is not our subject here. The issue here is primarily Marx's general observation that the world is not something we merely observe, perceive, and describe, but something that is actively produced and created. Not only by others, but also by us. Although Marx here foregrounds change as an alternative to reflection and interpretation, the real problem – also for him in the following decades – is how to explain the changing world, its self-transformation, and its dynamic character. Of course, there are a number of other problems with this point of Marx's as well – is it possible to juxtapose theory and practice in a rather crude naive way? Is theory incapable of thinking of change? How can the world be changed without rethinking it and reflecting about where and how to intervene in it, what to achieve?

These and similar questions have been vigorously debated throughout the history of Marxism. As Frank Ruda has masterfully shown, there are at least three traditions and readings of Marx's theses on Feuerbach.[14] If you look closely, claims Ruda, you can immediately see that Feuerbach's themes are scattered not only throughout Marx's work, but also in every critical theory worthy of its name. That is, if we stay with the problem of the world that interests us here: How does capitalism relate to the question of the world, to the question of whether there is a world at all? If there is one – what options does it leave us and what does it force or coerce us into? Ruda in his text relies heavily on Alain Badiou, who claims

> that, today, the world deprives the vast majority of human beings of their visibility. It is a protocol of exclusion of the visible, and not the transcendental distribution of a situation in the visible. The fundamental question of the world is in reality that of names. Who receives a name? It is not to begin with the question of wealth and its distribution. It is the question of knowing who is counted under its name, and who is not. The old world, which subsisted until the beginning of the 1980s, was in no way perfect, and it was even regularly sinister – but it was a world. [...] Today, we are in an intervallic period in which the great majority of people do not have a name. [...] We are the experimenters of the interval. We are

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[14]   For an astute interpretation of Marx's 11th thesis, see Frank Ruda, *For Badiou. Idealism without Idealism*, Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 2015, pp. 11–31.

> between two worlds, one of which is falling little by little into oblivion, while the other is only fragmentary. What we have to do is pass through. We are passers.[15]

Badiou argues that in today's capitalist world there is no longer a common world,[16] that we are perhaps passers in-between two worlds and that we must act and create a new world, new protocols of the visible and of visibility. We can see in this passage his entire philosophical and political programme in simple but very powerful and meaningful sentences. One can only agree with Badiou; however, perhaps an additional step is required. This is precisely what Ruda provides in his interpretation of Marx's 11th thesis. Ruda concludes the chapter on the 11th thesis with the following appeal:

> To read the 11th thesis today from a Badiousian perspective implies thus initially an affirmation of the existence of a (common) world before addressing the question of how to change it. From a Badiousian perspective and under present conditions, one can rather read the 11th thesis in the following manner: *The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in variant ways; the point is to affirm it.* Or to give a longer version of this reformulation: *The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to affirm its existence.*[17]

This point is particularly relevant to our topic here, too. However, we will add yet another step to the steps presented by Badiou and Ruda. This step simply involves what we are doing here, namely, asking questions about "the world" and about the concept of the world. In other words, before we affirm the world, with the aim of changing it by bringing forth a new one, we may need to devote a little more attention to the question of how the world actually relates to its concept. To do that, we need to return to our question about the world.

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[15]   Alain Badiou, *The Adventure of French Philosophy*, trans. B. Bosteels, London and New York, Verso, 2012, pp. 64–65.

[16]   Of course, Badiou is not alone in claiming that we live in a world that is not a world at all – the worldless world is precisely the subject of Végső's excellent book mentioned earlier. Late Derrida was quite concerned with the end of the world, and for him nothing is less certain than the world itself; the absence of a common world even made him claim that perhaps "there is no world." (Quoted from Gaston, *The Concept of World from Kant to Derrida*, p. 132.)

[17]   Ruda, *For Badiou*, p. 31.

Which World?

The details are crucial here. The very use of a definite or indefinite article in the case of "world" namely implies a choice that has rather radical consequences. In French, for example, it is not the same to speak of "le monde", "the world", or of "un monde", "a world". "The world" refers to something real in the sense of an open whole, whereas "a world" refers to a closed entity or to a particular section, plane, or area of a whole. Here we again encounter the problem of the doubling of the world that we mentioned above in Lévy and Feuerbach. If there the world was divided into two halves, one of which was perfect and the other not, here we find a different division, the division between the finite and the infinite world, known in history from antiquity to the early Renaissance, and then to Newton, Leibniz, and Kant. Alexandre Koyré brilliantly presented the historical and factual story of the process of the gradual abandonment of the ancient conception of the world that took place in the realm of ideas and science. Koyré described the history of the gradual transition from the ancient conception of the world as closed, to the new, modern conception of the universe as infinite from Nicholas of Cusa to Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz.[18] That is why Nancy claims:

> We no longer live in a *cosmos* in the Greek sense of the word – that is, we no longer perceive the totality of an ordered and thus beautiful world – a double signification to which the words "cosmonaut" and "cosmetics" bear witness. Today it's no longer possible to speak of a beautiful, cosmic order because altogether the galaxies do not really present an order – physicists describe a finite world in an infinite expansion. It's no longer possible to describe an order that would be comparable to that of the Ancients, who represented this order as spheres containing one another.[19]

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Nevertheless, even when we stop speaking of the world as cosmos, we still retain some sort of vague notion of "world" for everything that exists, much like *omnitudo realitatis*, which, as we already noted, belongs to a long metaphysical tradition. The claim that the world is all that exists has recently been challenged

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[18] See Alexandre Koyré, *From the Closed World to the Infinite Universe*, Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins Press, 1957.

[19] Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Possibility of a World. Conversations with Pierre-Philippe Jandin*, trans. T. Holloway and F. Méchain, New York, Fordham University Press, 2017, p. 29.

by Marcus Gabriel's thesis that the world does not exist at all. His argument concerns the world in the sense of "everything", "everything that exists". If the world existed in this sense, Gabriel argues, it would be identified with the realm or domain in which not only all things and facts exist with and without us, but also the domain that encompasses everything – life, the universe, and everything else. Gabriel, for whom the world is larger and more encompassing than the universe itself, makes a strong distinction between the world and the universe:

> One must differentiate the world from the universe. However, what is this actually, the world? What does the term "world" refer to? Nowadays we use it in everyday life, among other things, for the earth, for the planet on which we live. In English, it has become naturalized to denote more or less habitable planets, as well as those outside of our solar system, as "worlds." Moreover, there is also the use of "world" in the sense of the world of a novel, the world of the Aborigines, the world of the happy, or the world of the Romans. For starters, by nature, as it were, we tend to identify the world with the totality of all existing objects. However, in order for there to be such a totality, there must be a kind of rule or a law that holds this totality together.[20]

If the world does not exist in the above sense of the domain of all domains, it is perhaps more appropriate to speak of a world, or better still, of a plurality of worlds. Again, there are many meanings in which the latter may be understood. We humans tend to appear in many worlds, or, as Badiou puts it: "Man is this animal to whom it belongs to participate in numerous worlds, to appear in innumerable places."[21] Although it is debatable whether or not we humans are animals, we can indeed appear in and participate in several worlds, which can be further defined and specified by adjectives or other particulars. These worlds are numerous and include domains, spheres, and realms. For example, my world, your world, our world, the world(s) of the senses, the transcendent world(s), the world(s) of fiction, the world(s) of certain fictional characters (such as the world of Don Quixote, the world of Emma Bovary, or the world of Hermi-

[20]   Marcus Gabriel, *Why the World Does Not Exist*, trans. G. S. Moss, Cambridge, Polity, 2015, p. 32.

[21]   Alain Badiou, *Logics of Worlds. Being and Event, 2*, trans. A. Toscano, London and New York, Continuum, 2010, p. 513.

one Granger), the world(s) of philosophy (like the Kantian world, the world of metaphysics), the world(s) of art, the world(s) of science, the world(s) of politics, and so on and so forth. Then there are past or present worlds and epochs of human history (such as the ancient world, the Roman world, the mediaeval world, the American world) or worlds in which a particular political-practical view prevails (such as the Anglo-Saxon world or the Western world, the Muslim world, the Christian world, and so on).

We could go on listing many more examples, variants, and references of the word "world", but one thing at this point is now clear – the concept of world has a difficult task to perform. On the one hand, it must reflect and distinguish many different kinds of world(s); on the other hand, it must present a world as a single coherent entity. It must avoid the Scylla of many worlds and the Charybdis of one world without falling into the trap of the so-called worldview. It must offer a view of the world as a whole without presenting it merely as a limited or particular point of view. Moreover, it must be a view of the world itself and not a view from the outside. Another requirement is that it must be a dynamic and plastic concept, capable of reflecting and interpreting both the world and our place and position in it. Finally, it must really be a concept, that is, something that captures and holds the object with which it is concerned. Nevertheless, how and by what means is it possible to accomplish this difficult and rather paradoxical task?

One of the attempts to resolve this predicament can be to see it as a concept that shapes all other concepts, to understand the *world as a horizon*. Such a horizon determines the understanding of everything that happens in the world, here and now. More than that. Such a horizon also determines what (in such a world) is possible and what is not, and was described by Edmund Husserl as universal horizon:

> Thus in whatever way we may be conscious of the world as universal horizon, as coherent universe of existing objects, we, each "I-the-man" and all of us together, belong to the world as living with one another in the world; and the world is our world, valid for our consciousness as existing precisely through this "living together." [...] The consciousness of the world, then, is in constant motion; we are conscious of the world always in terms of some object content or other, in the alteration of the different ways of being conscious (intuitive, nonintuitive, deter-

mined, undetermined, etc.) and also in the alteration of affection and action, in such a way that there is always a total sphere of affection and such that the affecting objects are now thematic, now unthematic [...]. Obviously this is true not only for me, the individual ego; rather we, in living together, have the world pregiven in this "together," as the world valid as existing for us and to which we, together, belong, the world as world for all, pregiven with this ontic meaning. Constantly functioning in wakeful life, we also function together, in the manifold ways of considering, together, objects pregiven to us in common, thinking together, valuing, planning, acting together.[22]

For Husserl, the horizon described forms a framework of meaning against which all things and actions appear as meaningful. This horizon is not static or unchanging; on the contrary, it is constantly changing, but exactly how this is, Husserl has somehow not really been able to explain successfully. He also conceptualized it as the lifeworld, i.e. as something that is always already there and forms a background for all our common and shared experiences. Yet, the concept of the lifeworld is ambiguous. On the one hand, it still represents something rather self-evident and anthropologically universal, while on the other hand it should be something practical, vivid, and concrete – lived. However, as such it is a unique, a singular world – which, by the way, Derrida dealt with exhaustively[23] – and it seems that Husserl never succeeded in overcoming the dilemma between universality (science, scientific worldview) and singularity.[24] The whole problem of how to understand the dynamic social and political nature of the lifeworld remained a task for Husserl's successors, including Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Patočka.

Although this could be discussed at length and widely, it is clear that Husserl tries to avoid certain problems that arise if one tries to have a static view of the world, or if one tries to neutralize – as we saw above with Lévy and Feuerbach – the negativity and contradiction that one encounters in the (real) world. A viewpoint on the world that attempts to repress or exclude the internal contradic-

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[22] Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology. An Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy*, trans. D. Carr, Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 1970, pp. 108–109.

[23] For an informative overview, see Gaston, *The Concept of World from Kant to Derrida*, pp. 104–110.

[24] See *ibid.*, pp. 47–66.

tions of the world itself is ultimately nothing more than a pure fantasy – and that is why, by the way, for Lacan the world as such is but a fantasy: "the world is merely the fantasy through which thought sustains itself."[25] However, thought sustains itself, if we may say so, in many ways to neutralize the negativity and contradictions in the world. These range from clinical paranoia and conspiracy theories, on the one hand, to "worldview", on the other.

On the Worldview

There is virtually no philosopher who would not reject and strongly oppose what is called "worldview". Why? Because the latter is a static and egocentric machine that neutralizes the disparities, contradictions, and antagonisms that one encounters "in the real world". It is a unilateral view of the world, the frame of which in fact prevents us from seeing the world as it is. The word "worldview" became popular after the French Revolution, at the turn of the 18th century, when the old world of the *ancien régime*, "the old order", was turned upside down and revolutionized. The term *Weltanschauung* was coined later, by the Romantics, as a sort of reaction to the Revolution; Schleiermacher introduced it in his 1813 speeches on religion as a totality of influences. Later with Dilthey, a worldview was equated with an overall view of our place in the world. In its most general terms, it seems that it seeks to fill in the gaps encountered in the real world – recall here Heine's infamous description of the philosopher pictured with his nightcap filling in all the holes in the world. Heine's target here is obviously Hegel as a patchworker, patching up the holes in the world; the trouble is that Hegel himself actually firmly rejected the very idea and concept of *Weltanschauung*.

What exactly is it, how is it to be defined? Why this world when we know that there are other similar terms in German such as *Weltsicht* and *Weltschau*? Freud points out the specific German sense of the word and its fundamental meaning. He points out that

> "*Weltanschauung*" is, I am afraid, a specifically German concept, the translation of which into foreign languages might well raise difficulties. If I try to give you a

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[25]   Jacques Lacan, *Television. A Challenge to Psychoanalytic Establishment*, trans. D. Hollier, R. Krauss, A. Michelson, J. Mehlman, New York and London, W. W. Norton & Co., 1990, p. 6.

definition of it, it is bound to seem clumsy to you. In my opinion, then, a *Weltanschauung* is an intellectual construction which solves all the problems of our existence uniformly on the basis of one overriding hypothesis, which, accordingly, leaves no question unanswered and in which everything that interests us finds its fixed place. It will easily be understood that the possession of a *Weltanschauung* of this kind is among the ideal wishes of human beings. Believing in it one can feel secure in life, one can know what to strive for, and how one can deal most expediently with one's emotions and interests.[26]

Freud is not concerned in this lecture with a systematic elaboration of what a worldview is, but rather with an attempt to place psychoanalysis in the context of a rift between science and religion. Philosophy, which Freud incidentally also mentions here, does not play an important role for him. It namely operates with a technical language that only a few have mastered:

Philosophy is not opposed to science, it behaves like a science and works in part by the same methods; it departs from it, however, by clinging to the illusion of being able to present a picture of the universe which is without gaps and is coherent, though one which is bound to collapse with every fresh advance in our knowledge. It goes astray in its method by over-estimating the epistemological.[27]

The point is that philosophy, for Freud, is dangerously close to a worldview – and here Freud refers to the above quotation from Heine (which was also very close to his heart, as he often quoted it[28]), while psychoanalysis itself, in Freud's own opinion, "is incapable of creating a *Weltanschauung* of its own. It does not need one; it is a part of science and can adhere to the scientific *Weltanschauung*."[29]

And while Freud stands shoulder to shoulder defending modern science, Heidegger famously takes the opposite viewpoint – in modern science he sees the problem, the problem of domination over the world, because science "does not

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[26] Sigmund Freud, *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis and Other Works*, trans. J. Strachey, in *The Standard Edition. The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. 22 (1932-1936)*, J. Strachey and A. Freud (eds.), London, Hogarth Press 1964, p. 158.

[27] *Ibid.*, p. 160.

[28] For more on that, see Mladen Dolar, *Oficirji, služkinje in dimnikarji*, Ljubljana, DTP, 2010, pp. 249–258.

[29] Freud, *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis and Other Works*, p. 181.

think." Nevertheless, there is a line of argumentation with him that is close to Freud, except that Heidegger uses somewhat different terminology. He does not speak of *Weltanschauung*, but of *Weltbild*:

> What is it – a "world picture"? Obviously, a picture of the world. But what is a world? What does "picture" mean here? "World" serves, here, as a name for beings in their entirety. The term is not confined to the cosmos, to nature. History, too, belongs to world. Nevertheless, even nature and history – interpenetrating in their suffusion and exceeding of each other – do not exhaust world. Under this then we also include the world-ground, no matter how its relation to world is thought.

> Initially, the word "picture" makes one think of a copy of something. This would make the world picture, as it were, a painting of beings as a whole. But "world picture" means more than this. We mean by it the world itself; the totality of beings taken, as it is for us, as standard-giving and obligating. "Picture" means, here, not a mere imitation, but rather that which sounds in the colloquial expression to be "in the picture" about something. This means: the matter itself stands in the way it stands to us, before us. To "put oneself in the picture" about something means: to place the being itself before one just as things are with it, and, as so placed, to keep it permanently before one. But a decisive condition in the essence of the picture is still missing. That we are "in the picture" about something means not just that the being is placed before, represented by, us. It means, rather, that it stands before us together with what belongs to and stands together with it as a system. To be "in the picture" resonates with: being well informed, being equipped and prepared.[30]

As already indicated, the problem for Heidegger lies in modern science as well as in modern philosophy, more specifically in Descartes, who introduced the figure of the modern subject: "That the world becomes picture is one and the same process whereby, in the midst of beings, man becomes subject."[31] In other words, as "soon as the world becomes picture the position of man is conceived as world view. [...] The fundamental event of modernity is the conquest of the

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[30]   Martin Heidegger, "The Age of World Picture" in *Off the Beaten Track*, trans. J. Young and K. Haynes, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002, p. 67.

[31]   *Ibid*., p. 69.

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world as picture. [...] Within this, man fights for the position in which he can be that being who gives to every being the measure and draws up the guidelines."[32] According to Heidegger, the key to the picture of the world is that everything is subordinated to man's vision and his will to dominate the world. Moreover, the aspect of perspective is also crucial, i.e. a God's eye or all-seeing view. This emphasis on the fact that what is most important in the worldview or *Weltbild* is precisely a particular perspective is, incidentally, something that others, such as Wittgenstein, have also emphasized: "The concept of surveyable representation is of fundamental significance for us. It characterizes the way we represent things, how we look at matter. (Is this a '*Weltanschauung*'?)"[33]

The Point Is to Liquidate It, in Order to ...

In short, what thinkers as diverse as Freud, Heidegger, and Wittgenstein have in common is an understanding of a worldview as something constructed, but limited by one's perspective and position. A worldview is actually an ideology, a framework that gives us meaning in the world, a framework that gives us direction in our daily lives. As an ideology, a worldview has the function of making sense of our place in the world, of structuring, stabilizing, evaluating, and directing our relationship to the world into a whole, a totality. A worldview gives support and meaning to life in the world, to structure and totality. One could say that the function of a worldview is to domesticate the world, to tame it in order to master it. By providing an overview of the entire world, it gives us a direction as to where we are in the world in the first place. The problem with this is that a worldview is something that is beholden to necessity, urgency, provision, and circumstance, not eternity, universality, or objectivity.[34] Those who want to orient themselves are more than ever lost, says Husserl, pointing to the connection between historicism, scepticism, and worldview. Although a worldview should be an infallible compass that orients us in the world, it is actually something that "locks us into" our private world – and as such it is something that leads nowhere. It is something that is too strong and concurrently too weak, precisely

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32 *Ibid*., pp. 70–71.
33 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations/Philosophische Untersuchungen*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, P. M. Hacker, and J. Schulte, Malden and Oxford, Willey-Blackwell, 2009, p. 55.
34 Edmund Husserl, *Philosophie als strenge Wissenschaft* [1911], ed. Eduard Marbach, Hamburg, Felix Meiner Verlag, 2009, p. 61.

because it is an obstacle to a more objective view of the world. It is something that absolutely does not belong to philosophy, and because it is often confused with personal opinion, it is something that is directly diametrically opposed to philosophy. It is too arbitrary – everyone has his or her own worldview. Fichte was perhaps the first to associate philosophy with a certain personal character; according to him, we choose such a philosophy as we are ourselves. Hegel, as already mentioned, was opposed to the *Weltanschauung*, and it is no wonder that his successors were very critical of it. From a Marxist perspective, a world-view is inherent in ideology as practice, and it is no coincidence that Theodor Adorno, a contemporary of the three thinkers mentioned above, was a great opponent of worldview. In his lectures on philosophical terminology, Adorno emphasized that "a task of philosophy in my view is not to affirm but [...] to liquidate worldview:"[35] For Adorno, the liquidation of opinion is tantamount to the liquidation of worldview.[36]

Our contemporary, Badiou, goes even a step further – it is not only necessary to liquidate worldview, in a sense the world itself must be liquidated. The world, or better, a particular conception of it, must be destroyed, as Badiou says: "philosophy begins by destroying the very concept of the world; it knows, as does Lacan, that there only is a fantasy of the world, and that it is only in its defection, or its defeat, that one can subtractively think some real."[37] However, perhaps the world does not need to be destroyed or liquidated, since it is already destroying itself. This is exactly what Jean-Luc Nancy points out in his works. Nancy starts from the fact that the world is self-destructive; it is destroying itself. For him, this fact is not a matter of exaggeration, fear, anxiety, or catastrophism: "The fact that the world is destroying itself is not a hypothesis: it is, in a sense, the fact from which any thinking of the world follows."[38] However, in order to do that, i.e. to think the world, one must, for Nancy, still free oneself "from the so-called worldview or *Weltanschauung*. Indeed, the representation of the world implies a vantage point, that is, a position outside the world from which the world can be seen and represented." It is only when the world is no longer con-

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[35] Theodor W. Adorno, *Philosophische Terminologie*, Vol. 1, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1973, p. 118.

[36] See *ibid.*, p. 123.

[37] Badiou, *Adventures of French Philosophy*, p. 317.

[38] Nancy, *The Creation of the World, or, Globalization*, p. 35.

ceived of as a (world) representation, (world) picture, or (world) view that "one reaches the most contemporary determination of the world."[39]

The diagnosis Nancy presents here is further elaborated in his many works. Here we can present only its basic coordinates. Why does he speak about the destruction of the world? For him, the real reason for the destruction of the world lies – and here he agrees with Marx's assertions cited above – in the regime of general equivalence that produces global injustice and renders the world "unworldly", *immonde*. For Nancy, the spread of general equivalence in the world is another name for globalization, and he believes that this process leads not only to gross inequalities but ultimately also to the destruction of the world itself. Here Nancy distinguishes between two French terms: *globalisation* (globalization) and *mondialisation* (world-creating or world-building). Globalization is, for him, not just another name for capitalism, but also for the domination of the world by the West, which has established a regime, a network of global capitalism spread through technology. This domination by the West has led not to unity but to disintegration, because the only unifying force is that of ruthless technological and economic exploitation. In this context of global expansion, the West is no longer the harbinger of universal reason. In addition, while globalization implies a form of totality, *mondialisation*, for Nancy, is associated with the potential for a liberatory process of creation. It is a process that extends to the entire human world. The world, in this sense, is undergoing a process of reinvention and exists in the form of the multiple relations between singularities that continually contribute to this reinvention. For Nancy, the creation of the world entails a practice that addresses the injustices of the contemporary world. Let us quote here, again, the task he presents:

> However, as I mentioned, this task is a struggle. In a sense, it is a struggle of the West against itself, of capital against itself. It is a struggle between two infinites, or between extortion and exposition. It is the struggle of thought, very precisely concrete and demanding, in which we are engaged by the disappearance of our representations of the abolishing or overcoming of capital. [...] But such thinking is not only theoretical: now as in the past, it is practically manifest and necessary – in the sense of the necessity and manifestedness of the world – that the struggle is straightaway and definitively a matter of concrete equality and actual

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[39] *Ibid*., p. 43.

justice. In this sense, Marx's demand is not obsolete. The "thinking" of which we are speaking is necessarily involved both in the questioning of the "'sense of the world" and in immediate, political, economic, and symbolic acts. [...] *To create the world* means: immediately, without delay, reopening each possible struggle for a world, that is, for what must form the contrary of a global injustice against the background of general equivalence. But this means to conduct this struggle precisely in the name of the fact that this *world* is coming out of nothing, that there is nothing before it and that it is without models, without principle and without given end, and that it is precisely *what* forms the justice and the meaning of a world.[40]

Therefore, here the real task of the concept of the world begins. After we have made a complete circle – or perhaps we might say that we have turned several times in a similar way – we have come back to our starting point. In the meantime, we may have succeeded in exposing some of the pitfalls that await us in our endeavour, but our task – as inhabitants of the world and as philosophers – remains. This task is set above by Nancy, but it is set in a similar way also by other contemporaries. Let us, at the end of our contribution, once again quote Badiou, who, as always, has clearly and succinctly formulated the only true and legitimate task of contemporary philosophy in this respect: "Philosophy has no other legitimate aim except to help find the new names that will bring into existence the unknown world that is only waiting for us because we are waiting for it."[41]

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40   Nancy, *The Creation of the World, or, Globalization*, pp. 52, 54.
41   Badiou, *Adventures of French Philosophy*, p. 65.

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