Philosophy Is Not the Invention of Narratives: Reason, Knowledge, and the Refusal of Metaphysics

By David Cota, founder of the Ontology of Emerging Complexity

Abstract

This essay defends philosophy as a rational practice founded on knowledge, in contrast with approaches that confuse it with mythopoetic narrative or metaphysical speculation. Beginning with the distinction between *logos* and *mythos*, it argues that philosophy constitutes itself as a critical discipline when it refuses both the appeal to transcendence and the language impregnated with metaphysics. Through the analysis of the proposition *"Evil is a cosmic force"*, it demonstrates how certain formulations fail when confronted with the criteria of intelligibility, criticizability, and public justification. It further maintains that the persistence of the term *metaphysics*, even in contemporary discourses that deny the transcendent, reintroduces through language precisely that which it seeks to refuse. As an alternative, the Ontology of Emerging Complexity is proposed as an immanent philosophical regime, capable of clarifying the real without appealing to ultimate foundations. In this framework, philosophy does not invent narratives: it offers reasons, distinguishes levels, and symbolically organizes the world out of its own complexity.

"Philosophy is not the invention of narratives; it is the use of reason grounded in knowledge."

This thesis does not seek to devalue literature nor to deny the heuristic role of imagination; rather, it aims to trace the disciplinary threshold that distinguishes *logos* from *mythos*. Since the pre-Socratics, the passage from sacred narrative to argumentative interrogation inaugurated a method: to explain through reasons, not through plots. Aristotle gave it systematic form (concepts, causes, demonstration), and modernity reinforced the criterion of justification: Hume imposed the scrutiny of inferences; Kant delimited the legitimate use of reason, rejecting claims that exceed possible experience. In the twentieth century, the analytic turn (Frege, Russell) and the logical-linguistic clarification (Carnap) showed that to philosophize is to analyze problems, refine concepts, and test consequences; Wittgenstein underlined that the philosophical task is to elucidate uses, not to fabricate essences; Popper proposed demarcation through critical control (refutability), and even with Quine's objections, the demand for rational revisability remained. In other traditions, the core is identical: phenomenology (Husserl) disciplines the description of appearances; hermeneutics (Gadamer) binds interpretation to public justification; critical theory (Adorno, Habermas) demands intersubjectively valid argumentation. In common, one norm: it is not enough to suggest powerful images; reasons must be offered, levels distinguished, and criteria of correction submitted to. Narratives—sacred, secular, or "mythopoetic"—may illustrate, but cannot substitute for the burden of proof; when they do, what results is rhetoric, not philosophy. For this reason, too, to confuse "metaphysics" with a license to speculate beyond experience and reason is to reintroduce, through language, what Kant called the

"transcendental illusion": a leap without epistemological guarantees. What I propose, in contrast, is a second-order philosophical practice: explicit reasoning, operative concepts, dialogue with the best available knowledge (natural and human sciences), and a commitment to criticizability. Imagery may inspire; arguments are what compel. Without this link to knowledge and public proof, philosophy dissolves into style—and abdicates its primary responsibility: to render the real intelligible by rational means.

We now proceed to explain in greater detail what is meant here, with the rigor required for philosophy to be treated not as literary ornamentation but as a disciplined practice of reason. The preceding statement is only the initial formulation of a criterion; it remains to be shown, in concrete exercise, how this criterion operates in dismantling propositions which, although suggestive, fail in terms of rational coherence.

Let us take, as such an example, the claim: *"Evil is a cosmic force."* At first glance, it may appear as nothing more than a powerful metaphor, inherited from religious, gnostic, or mythological traditions. Yet, when examined as a philosophical thesis, this formulation reveals the structural confusion of levels that distinguishes myth from philosophy. The term "evil" belongs to the ethical-normative domain: it designates value judgments relative to human actions, intentions, or institutions. "Force," by contrast, is a physical-technical concept, with strict criteria of application—magnitude, direction, measurability, integration into laws. To this is added the adjective "cosmic," extending its scope to the entirety of reality. Thus, in a single gesture, a moral category is projected onto a physical structure, and the whole universe is endowed with an intentionality that cannot be verified. This is a category mistake: demanding that a normative concept function as if it were a natural variable, as if one were to ask what the weight of justice is, or the color of truth.

Furthermore, the proposition lacks operative criteria. If a force is to be quantifiable and reproducible in experiment, where are the units, the equations, the instruments for detecting "evil"? The historical and cultural variability of what is considered "evil"—from the status of slavery to the notion of blasphemy—shows that there is no measurable universality, but rather human practices of normative attribution. Here metaphor gives way to rigor: there are no rules of application independent of our contingent evaluation.

The consequences also prove incoherent. If evil were a cosmic force, it should produce observable physical effects, capable of prediction. Yet everything we call "evil" finds causal explanations in physical, biological, or social processes: earthquakes are explained by tectonics, diseases by microbiology, violence by political and institutional dynamics. The postulation of a "force of evil" adds nothing; it merely duplicates, unnecessarily, causes already known. Violating the principle of parsimony, it becomes an idle hypothesis.

Moreover, the thesis is irrefutable, since any counterexample can be reinterpreted: the absence of suffering would be explained as a weakening of the force; extreme goodness, as the effect of its supposed counterforce. In this way, the proposition becomes immune to criticism, incapable of establishing conditions of defeat. And if nothing can refute it, nothing can confirm it either: it degenerates into unfalsifiable rhetoric.

The final leap is the most revealing. From local experiences of suffering or injustice, an absolute principle is extrapolated to the entire cosmos. This is what Kant designated as a transcendental illusion: the tendency of reason to hypostatize regulative ideas as if they were objects of knowledge. What was originally a practical guide (naming evil in order to organize

moral action) is illegitimately converted into an ontological entity projected onto the totality of the real.

It thus becomes clear why this formulation fails as rigorous philosophy. It confuses normative and physical domains, lacks operational criteria, generates no predictions, is unfalsifiable, offers no adequate public justification, and falls into a metaphysical extrapolation characteristic of transcendental illusion.

Philosophical work, by contrast, must clarify this architecture. "Evil" is not a cosmic force, but a normative category we use to evaluate certain actions and states of affairs. Suffering, pain, violence, and injustice have identifiable natural and social causes; philosophy must clarify these causes and ground normative criteria on the basis of public reason, not multiply mythical entities. The responsibility of reason is precisely this: to resist the temptation of rhetoric and to provide distinctions that render the world more intelligible, rather than obscure it with seductive images.

This aphorism thus condenses a critical position toward two recurring deviations in the history of thought. The first is that of reducing philosophy to literary mythology, that is, of taking narrative imagination as a substitute for rational analysis. The point here is not to deny that imagination has an important heuristic role—one need only recall the power of Platonic images or biblical allegories—but to emphasize that when narrative becomes the criterion of truth, thought ceases to operate philosophically. The distinction inaugurated by the pre-Socratics was precisely this: it is not enough to weave the cosmos into myths; reasons must be given. Xenophanes, in ridiculing the anthropomorphic projection of the gods, already exposed the insufficiency of mythopoeia for grounding knowledge; Heraclitus, in thinking the *logos* as organizing principle, shifted thought from sacred narrative to argumentative order. In that inaugural gesture, philosophy and myth are not annulled, but distinguished: one may inspire, the other must justify.

The second deviation is that of confusing philosophy with metaphysics, as if to think were always to seek a "beyond" of the physical or an ultimate foundation that escapes experience. Aristotle, in the *Metaphysics*, inaugurated the very word, though not in its modern sense. For him, *ta meta ta physika* were simply the treatises that came after the *Physics*. Only later did the term acquire the connotation of "beyond the physical," fueling the idea that philosophy ought to seek first causes and ultimate grounds. The scholastic tradition and Christian theology amplified this movement, identifying metaphysics with the investigation of being as being and, above all, with the search for God as final cause. It is against this deviation that Kant's critique is directed: in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, he shows that every claim to know the noumenal is a transcendental illusion—reason projecting beyond phenomena what it cannot, in truth, know. In doing so, he does not annul philosophy but redefines its legitimate limits.

At this point it is essential to be absolutely clear: it is not possible to accept metaphysics and, at the same time, deny transcendence. The word itself is structurally impregnated with the transcendent gesture, for its semantic core—*meta* as "beyond" and *physis* as "nature"—already carries with it the idea of a beyond-the-physical, inaccessible to sensible experience. Thus, even contemporary discourses that seek to redefine metaphysics as "general ontology" cannot free themselves from this shadow: by maintaining the word, they reinstall through language what they claim in theory to refuse. It is a conceptual duplicity that weakens the discourse itself: it proclaims immanence, yet retains transcendence in its

rhetoric. To accept the term is therefore to perpetuate an ambiguity—to carry with it the residue of a beyond that critical philosophy ought to abandon.

Hence the necessity of a lexical and conceptual rupture: to speak not of metaphysics, but of critical ontology. This designation avoids duplicity and reaffirms fidelity to the real as a process of material and symbolic immanence. Critical ontology means rational analysis of the real without appeal to ultimate grounds, without a transcendent horizon, without the promise of a beyond. It continues the gesture of Spinoza, in dissolving substantial dualisms; of Nietzsche, in denouncing the fiction of "true worlds"; of Simondon, in conceiving being as individuation in progress; and of Deleuze, in affirming the plane of immanence as the sole horizon of thought. Philosophy, in this regime, does not seek an external foundation, but clarifies the conditions through which reality reorganizes itself symbolically from within. Only thus does it fulfill the initial demand: not to invent narratives, but to offer reasons; not to duplicate the real with transcendences, but to render it intelligible with the rigor of immanence.

It is in this horizon that the Ontology of Emerging Complexity explicitly and unequivocally refuses both the transcendent and the metaphysical. This refusal does not arise from ignorance, confusion, or lack of knowledge, but from a lucid and objective gesture of clarification. The transcendent, by definition, refers to a beyond-the-physical, inaccessible to experience and to reason; metaphysics, even in its most sophisticated versions, inevitably carries with it the shadow of such a "beyond." To assume these terms would be to accept a duplicity that undermines the coherence of thought itself: proclaiming immanence while, through language, preserving the horizon of transcendence.

There is, moreover, a decisive point: philosophy, as the rigorous use of reason, cannot accommodate either transcendence or metaphysics, because both are rooted not in doubt but in faith. And here faith does not mean only institutionalized religion: it means every dogmatic belief, every unconditional acceptance of a truth without space for critical revision. Faith, in this sense, begins from the presupposition that there is a beyond, a hidden order, or an ultimate ground that must be accepted. Reason, by contrast, begins with interrogation: it asks whether this beyond is thinkable, demonstrable, or even necessary. The soil in which faith germinates—adherence to dogma—is not the same soil that sustains reason, which feeds on doubt, critique, and logical inference.

The history of philosophy shows this tension with clarity. Augustine or Kierkegaard assumed that faith begins where reason halts—the leap to the transcendent being precisely the abandonment of *logos*. Kant, by contrast, draws a rigorous demarcation: reason must limit itself to the domain of phenomena, recognizing that in attempting to ground God, soul, or world as totality, it falls into transcendental illusion. Spinoza represents a decisive advance, rejecting substantial dualism and proposing the unity of God and Nature (*Deus sive Natura*). Yet this unity does not entirely eliminate transcendence: by conceiving of an infinite substance as the foundation of all finite modes, he still preserves a residue of the absolute, a horizon of finality that exceeds the parts and reintroduces a form of "beyond" into the heart of immanence. Nietzsche, later, will take this critique further: he denounces faith as the "negation of doubt" and exposes even philosophies that claim to be immanentist as often ensnared in wills to truth which, rather than liberating, fix and paralyze the movement of thought.

It is for this reason that faith and reason are not reconcilable. Faith rests on dogmatic belief, on unquestioning trust; reason is grounded in methodological doubt, in logical scrutiny, in openness to revision. One operates through closure (believing without questioning), the other through incompletion (questioning without end). Where one takes root in dogma, the other flourishes in critique. The appeal to transcendence or metaphysics is, at bottom, a reintroduction of faith—not in its devotional sense, but in its structural sense as unquestioned belief.

The position of Emerging Complexity is, therefore, clear: philosophy does not rest upon faith, but upon reason. Its refusal is not born of ignorance, but of coherence. The real is sufficient, and within it lie the conditions for the emergence of intelligibility. The immanence of complexity is not closure, but openness: it is the medium through which the world comes to know itself, reorganizing symbolically into regimes of legibility that make it possible to comprehend the physical itself without recourse to imaginary duplications.

Thus, reason is not an escape to the beyond, but the lucid folding of matter upon itself—a rigorous gesture that cuts off the path of myth and restores to thought its responsibility: to render the real intelligible from within the real.

References

Adorno, Theodor W. 1966. *Negative Dialektik*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.

Aristotle. 1984. *Metaphysics*. In *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, edited by Jonathan Barnes, vols. I–II. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Carnap, Rudolf. 1932. "Überwindung der Metaphysik durch logische Analyse der Sprache." *Erkenntnis* 2: 219–241.

Frege, Gottlob. 1879. *Begriffsschrift, eine der arithmetischen nachgebildete Formelsprache des reinen Denkens*. Halle: Louis Nebert.

Gadamer, Hans-Georg. 1960. *Wahrheit und Methode*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck.

Habermas, Jürgen. 1981. *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.

Hume, David. 1748. *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*. London: A. Millar.

Husserl, Edmund. 1913. *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie*. Halle: Niemeyer.

Kant, Immanuel. 1781/1787. *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*. Riga: Johann Friedrich Hartknoch.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. 1889. *Götzen-Dämmerung, oder Wie man mit dem Hammer philosophiert*. Leipzig: C. G. Naumann.

Popper, Karl. 1959. *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*. London: Hutchinson.

Quine, W. V. O. 1951. "Two Dogmas of Empiricism." *The Philosophical Review* 60 (1): 20–43.

Russell, Bertrand. 1903. *The Principles of Mathematics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Spinoza, Baruch. 1677. *Ethica ordine geometrico demonstrata*. Amsterdam.
Wittgenstein, Ludwig. 1921. *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. London: Kegan Paul.
Wittgenstein, Ludwig. 1953. *Philosophical Investigations*. Oxford: Blackwell.