Table of Contents

Abstract

Within the sphere of contemporary philosophy the quest for the absolute has waned, and the claim that one truly can know it, dismissed as metaphysical speculations. The big questions of what reality really is, and if we can know it, hasn't been asked sincerely for some time. But they have been asked once again, and in a form that is difficult to ignore. Meillassoux asks these questions, and with great sincerity. He believes he can prove that knowledge of the absolute is possible through mathematical discourse, and that reality in and of it self is a hyper-chaos. He claims that we can grasp the absolute without appealing to metaphysical explanations. This is, however, not an easy task. Contemporary continental philosophy has long been able to show the (near) impossibility of 'getting out of ones consciousness' and touch the absolute reality – the objective reality. It seems like a performative contradiction to say that one can think of what is outside thought, but this is what Meillassoux wishes to demonstrate can be done, without contradiction. Meillassoux claims that the natural sciences have this ability due to the fact that they use mathematical modelling to conceive of what unimaginable. Mathematical discourse is 'the language of the real', since it is the only language that is articulate and conceive of a thing such as hyper-chaos. This masters thesis aims to present Meillassoux's philosophy, and put it under a critical loupe, as it aims to answer two questions: Is this truly a non-metaphysical endeavour? and what are the consequences of hyper-chaos for the natural sciences enterprise, and Meillassoux's own philosophy?

Note to reader

There are a couple of things that might be proper to mention, about the form and language of this master thesis. First, my native language is Danish, but since all my primary literature is in English (some of it is a translation from French), I have chosen to lessen the risk of mistranslation by writing in English. Secondly, the thesis is split into 7 parts: I have an introduction and three chapters as well as three meta-chapters; Prelude, Interlude, and Postlude. The Prelude is intended to entice the readers appetite for the problem at hand, by presenting known problems concerning the claims of possible knowledge of the absolute. The Interlude serves as a nexus between Chapter 1 and Chapter 2, in which I freely discuss the content of Chapter 1 as well as directing a critical focus on Meillassoux's argumentation, which leads to questions which are partly answered in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3. The last meta-chapter, the Postlude, serves both as a discussion and conclusion. Lastly; I employ metaphors, metonyms and other rhetorical devises at certain points in the text. These devices are primarily used in meta-texts, and they are used to create momentum and to direct the readers focus in the text, as well as to add some colour to the, sometimes, dry academic language. Throughout the thesis, I switch between a *we* and *I* narrator. The 'we' is mainly used as a neutral narrator, whereas the 'I' is employed when I am being critical or otherwise expressing non-neutral views (my own).

The last remark will not be concerning the content of the thesis, but concerning the philosopher in focus: Of all the modern philosophers I have ever read, I do not think I have ever encountered one that requires so much knowledge of the 'philosophical basics', as Meillassoux. I had to go back and reread Descartes, Locke, Hume, Berkeley and Kant among others. The most remarkable thing about Meillassoux's *After Finitude,* is that it is short book, but the content requires quite a long period of digestion.

Introduction

This thesis will be touching on some of the classical questions of metaphysics, ontology and to some extent epistemology[1], as we ask: what is reality 'really', what really exist and what can we know about it? These questions will be asked through the thoughts of the French philosopher Quentin Meillassoux, within the context of contemporary continental philosophy. I will mainly be working with Meillassoux's book; *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency* (AF)*,* and the text *Time Without Becoming* (TWB). Due to the subjects dealt with, and philosophers mentioned and critiqued by Meillassoux, I will be inviting them into this thesis as well, and indulge in small excursions to deepen some of Meillassoux's points, and/or to broaden the problems presented. This means that we will touching on some of the most famous ideas of Descartes, Berkeley, Kant, as well as some of the concepts of Leibniz and handful others. When I refer to my primary literature, it will be in form of the above shown abbreviations.

The objective of the thesis : My aim with this thesis will be to present Meillassoux's philosophy and test his thoughts within his own framework by scrutinising his argumentation. My focal point will be Meillassoux's claim that mathematical discourse is the key to the absolute, and the claim that reaching that absolute is a non-metaphysical endeavour.

Terms that are heavily used, but not defined in the thesis: I use the term *natural science* and in plural *the natural sciences* instead of simply 'science' or 'sciences', to be specific about the type of science. Even though the natural sciences shouldn't be considered a strictly homogeneous entity, it suffices to say that I understand the natural sciences to seek the unity of nature and as having a strong tendency to explicit mathematical modelling whenever possible. This understanding seems to be identical with Meillassoux's, even though he writes 'science' and 'natural science' interchangeably.

The term *absolute* is used interchangeably with the-thing-in-itself, the real and objective reality. It is understood as something universal, completely independent of any relations, as reality in and of itself.

---

1 As we do not really talk about the nature of knowledge, but rather the possible knowledge of the objective reality.

Meillassoux's mission: In A*fter Finitude,* Meillassoux examines under which set of conditions the natural sciences statements are meaningful in a contemporary philosophical context[2], in particular of distant past events before the emergence of human consciousness. But this is not all, Meillassoux claims that we can know the objective reality that existed prior to all human life. Meillassoux claims that we can talk of an absolute without putting it in citation marks. This may not look like much of a controversial claim, especially when considering that most of us are 'common-sense realists' when we go about our daily business, but when we examine it from a philosophical viewpoint it seems a bit odd, considering the dominant views of contemporary continental philosophy. None are contesting the fact, that the natural sciences has given us technology that has improved our lives, and that today's research into medicine and neurobiology, amongst a great deal of other things, is enhancing and saving lives - even changing the way we understand what it means to be human. But does being able to make predictions, manipulate our environment and ourselves mean that the natural sciences are grasping the absolute nature of reality? We can manipulate the mind with medicine and drugs, yet we still do not know what the mind really is. Sometimes even the 'wrong' idea about reality can produce the 'right' results. Ptolemy was wrong about the sun revolving around the earth and Copernicus was right when he switched the places of the earth and sun, and yet Ptolemy's system could make about as many correct predictions as Copernicus, about where the planets (known at the time) would appear in the night sky. *"Copernicus' model was no more accurate than Ptolemaic astronomy for calculating where the planets would appear in the sky - largely because Copernicus used Ptolemy's 1,500 year old data to build his system"* ([Kepler's Discovery: Three Models](#)). This also goes to show, that the natural sciences – in truth all of us – only can work with what is known at the time. Even though the natural sciences' mode of inquiry requires them to challenge their theories[3], they're not challenging their view of the nature of reality.

There's still a broadly held belief that reality, at its very core, is orderly and predictable if only one could pierce the 'veil of maya', and get a good peek. When Bohr and Einstein argued over quantum mechanics, Einstein famously said, that (his Spinozian) god does not play dice with the universe. He said so, knowing that if the Copenhagen interpretation of quantum mechanics was true, it

---

2   However mostly within the framework of continental philosophy.

3   It is certainly their goal and the virtue of modern science. But if Thomas Kuhn is right about the nature of the nor-mal   sciences and the structure of scientific revolutions, then this virtue is mostly seen to kick in, when their research is producing too many anomalies to be explained by personal errors or faulty equipment . His claim is (put in my words) that the sciences are, in fact, only really revising their hypotheses and theories if they are causing enough trouble to frustrate the scientists, and even then, it still takes quite a lot of work to make the paradigm shift.

would have some messy implications about the nature of reality[4]. Even though most of us trust the natural sciences to provide 'true-ish' statements about the world (from what we know now), few of us might buy into the claim, that the natural sciences must be grasping the purely objective reality to make them. It is not uncommon within analytical philosophy to side with the views of natural sciences, but the talk of something absolute, for both scientists and analytic philosophers, has the air mysticism and metaphysics. Meillassoux however, wants to show both the natural sciences and philosophy, that one can attain this absolute without metaphysics.

 I dare say, that most of us believe that the natural sciences are touching on part of the real, but touching and grasping are two different things. This however leads us into a somewhat fuzzy line of thinking and as thinkers we must, like Descartes, empty our thoughts on the floor in order to see which are rotten and which are healthy. Then we must throw the rotten ones away, so that they won't contaminate the healthy. Put in other words: we must see if we can dispel the fuzzy.

But for now, I think we should explore 'the fuzzy' some more.

It seems when we start to reflect upon our place and perspective in and to the world, it doesn't take many questions to see, that it might not be so simple to claim that we can obtain knowledge of the purely objective reality – less so about a long distant past. And if we take this claim and look at it through the eyes of the history of philosophy, then the claim seems naïve or even flat out impossible. Even those who believe we can have knowledge of the absolute today, have a pretty hard time explaining how we could obtain it. It would help if we were (naïve) realists or any other kind of dogmatic metaphysician, but such a views do not hold much sway today, and are often viewed as remnants of the pre-critical periods of philosophy. Surprisingly Meillassoux ask us to be neither. In fact, we can't be belong to any of these schools of thought if we want to grasp Meillassoux's absolute. Besides this quite extraordinary claim, he also offers a critique of what he calls *correlationism,* which is an umbrella term for all the post-Kantian philosophy that believes that reality is always correlated to the human consciousness and that we cannot speak of any purely objective reality. He takes these philosophies and their critique of the above mentioned schools very seriously, as he thinks that their argumentation against knowing the absolute are strong. He knows that he has got to go through them to reach his goal, and going through them, means refuting them. In order to do so, Meillassoux resurrects the theory of primary and secondary qualities and names mathematics the door to the absolute. He does so knowing the

---

4   Bohr did in fact still believe that the natural sciences would be able to find order in the apparent unpredictable nature of quantum mechanics, however others, like Heisenberg held the view that Bohr is often credited as having (Standford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: Quantum Mechanics)

history of philosophy and makes this reinstating of qualities carefully. This move serves as a bridge between the realism and the correlationism, as it creates a philosophy where the problem the human perspective is taken seriously, but maintains a position where it also can be solved. As Meillassoux writes:

> "The thesis we are defending is twofold: on one hand we acknowledge that the sensible only exists as a subject's relation to the world; but on the other hand, we maintain, that the mathematizable properties of the object are exempt from the constraint of such relation, and they are effectively in the object in the way which I conceive them, whether I am in relation to this object or not" (AF: 3)

After this resurrection of primary and secondary qualities, he proceeds by confronting the correlationists, with what he calls; *the problem of the arche-fossil* which later is reformulated to *the problem of ancestrality.*

First off, Meillassoux assumes that the correlationists do believe in the current explanation of the big bang, and the emergence of life, as most of us do, but claims that in the correlationists must in fact, by their own logic, contest such statements. Meillassoux uses this entry point to unravel the correlationists arguments from within, and then presents his alternative: speculative materialism. This perspective should in turn offer a stance that takes the problem of the human perspective seriously, like the correlationists, and give them the possibility of talking about purely objective matters, like the realists and materialists. On the road to Meillassoux's absolute we will stumble upon some mind boggling concepts and ideas, such as the rejection of sufficient reason and hyper-chaos. We will wander into Meillassoux's hyper-chaotic universe, where chaos can be so chaotic, that it can become orderly and vice versa.

I'd like to start this thesis from the very beginning – the beginning of our universe.

Prelude

The ultimate question of life, the universe and everything

How did it all begin, and can we know it?

Some 13.5 billion years ago there was a big bang and everything expanded near the speed of light. Then everything cooled and energy condensed into matter, mostly hydrogen atoms, which became forced together by gravity forming stars. In the nuclear womb of the stars the heavier elements (such as iron, carbon and silicon) came to be, and these were spewed into the cosmos as the stars died going supernova. As the universe became more abundant with these elements, they began to form small motes of dust and ice, and some began to orbit the stars, slowly forming planets.

About 4.56 billion years ago our earth was accreted, but it wasn't the pale blue dot we know today. It was a big inhospitable ball of molten rock and magma engulfed in clouds of gas. But not long after, a mere couple of hundred million years, the earth's temperature dropped below 100 degrees Celsius and the gas, H2O, condensed to a liquid and rained down upon the earth, forming a great big ocean – the blue dot came to be. Some say that the ancient ocean was a giant soup, and that the (primordial) soup was cooking up something marvellous; life itself (about 3,86 billion years ago). It took a little time, but some life forms became conscious and conscious life became inquisitive. The rest is history, as they say.

Let us take pause and reflect on this grand narrative of the beginning of everything and suspend common beliefs in the validity of the natural sciences statements and method – just for a moment. This way we can ask some seemingly innocent questions. These questions will be sceptical towards the notion of knowledge about the objective reality, and we will proceed down that path in order to work up an appetite for the problem that concerns Meillassoux, and a thirst for some answers.

Subject/object - a dichotomy ?

The first question would be: *How do we really know that's how it all happened when we weren't there to witness it*? Most people will reply " *natural science says so"* and even though natural science isn't a homogeneous entity let us ask; *How does natural science know* ?

How can the natural sciences know these supposedly purely *objective* things like the age of our universe, the accretion of the earth, when it is also known, that we - scientist or not - are *already always* situated in reality from a *subjective* point of view? Some hold that it's because of the scientific method of falsification and the process of double blind studies etc. ensures that science can speak objectively about the world. But do such methods really ensure knowledge of the *objective* reality, or should we rather refer to it as intersubjective knowledge? If we remember the proposal of Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), couldn't we say that there are indeed objects that give rise to the experience of the objects *for* us, but that we aren't experiencing the objects in themselves? In this way there are things we have empirically access to, but only from the human, intersubjective, perspective. As Meillassoux puts it: " […] since Kant, objectivity is no longer defined with reference to the object in itself (in the terms of the statement's adequation or resemblance to what it designates), but rather with reference to the possible universality of an objective statement" (AF: 15). This particular idea of our relation to the world was put forth by Kant to save the sciences from Hume's problem of induction, that showed us that the scientific method rests on a circular logic, and that we infer causality, rather than observe causality[5]. But Kant's attempt to save the natural sciences immunised the real from ever coming into the grasp of the natural sciences. This immunisation is made even though Kant says that we can make objectively true statements. This is because Kant puts an equal sign between what is intersubjectively verifiable and what is objectively true. Kant writes in his prolegomena about objective statements:

> *"*Es sind daher objektive Gültigkeit und notwendige Allgemeingültigkeit (für jedermann) Wechselbegriffe, und ob wir gleich das Objekt an sich nicht kennen, so ist doch, wenn wir ein Urteil als gemeingültig und mithin notwendig ansehen, eben darunter die objektive Gültigkeit verstanden*"* (Kant, §19 [Prolegomena]).

This roughly translates into[6] : "Objective validity and necessary general validity ([what is general] for anyone) are interchangeable concepts, and even though we do not know the object [itself], it is so, that a judgement that can be seen as general and necessary, must be understood as objectively valid". Furthermore, Kant says that reason does not create its a priori laws out from nature itself, or rather the observation of nature, but prescribes them to it (Kant, prolegomena

---

5   This is however still debated by philosophers, and some still hold – like John Searle ([Searle on Rationality & Explanation] : 1:25 to about 4 minutes in)- that we do in fact observe causality and that we are able to speak of laws of nature, not completely unproblematically though.

6   My translation

§36) – very much in line with Hume. We see a problem rising (one we will tend more to in the next chapter): where does that leave statements that are impossible to intersubjectively validate – like those of events that took place before consciousness, like the big bang? If Kant is right, then wouldn't those underlying laws and time itself seem to be of a nature that we couldn't be able to fully know, and therefore leave statements about the very beginning of the universe and life in a sort of limbo ?

The past is past us

So far the knowledge of the world, the universe and the very reality seems to be a sort of a paradox - It is accessible and yet inaccessible. One problem is that we may not have direct access to objects in themselves, but a second problem is time. To keep things simple, let us just take the idea of time as a continuous flow, since that is how we perceptually 'encounter' it. We may be able to look at an apple, a rock, and a tree and agree upon their existence, the way they look, their attributes and so on, but what about tomorrow, and the day after that? At some point in time these objects are no more (except for maybe the rock, depending on the scope of time) or rather have become something else. How can we then determine how these things were – their attributes etc. ?

 Though not quite analogous to the natural sciences propositions about the ancient past, the beginning of the universe and the accretion of the earth, this question leads us to the problem of the (perhaps) inaccessible past.

Let us consider history for a moment. Historians know they can't access our past, but they gather information from, what our ancestors have left behind and correlate them to other data available about that given time in history to form a sort of narrative. But in a sense most historians know, that they're all cursed to commit anachronisms. It seems we can only project ourselves into the past, thus bringing 'the now' into 'the then' – committing the sin of anachronism[7].

How can the natural sciences be any different when they speak of the very beginning of it all?

I hope by now, that we have come to the conclusion, that in order to speak of any of these things, whether they be things that exist now or did for a million years ago, we need a real material world, that is separate and independent from us (at least in some simple, but fundamental way) and a way to access it and know it. But it seems in order to get to the objective reality (if truly possible), there are indeed some problems that needs to be addressed.

---

7   The formulations is inspired by the historian Constantin Fasolt, who describes the problems of doing history in the chapter *A Dangerous form of Knowledge* in *Limits of History* (2004)

The continental materialist

Can we speak of the objective reality and know it as subjective beings ?
Quentin Meillassoux answers: 'yes'. This 'yes' is, surprisingly, uttered by a continental philosopher.
Meillassoux is not the only continental philosopher who says this today, but it is a fairly new trend.
As Levy Bryant, Nick Srnicek and Graham Harman explain:

> "It has long been commonplace within continental philosophy to focus on discourse,
> text, culture, consciousness, power, or ideas as what constitutes reality. But despite
> the vaunted anti-humanism of many of the thinkers identified with these trends, what
> they give us is less a critique of humanity's place in the world, than a less sweeping cri-
> tique of the self-enclosed Cartesian subject. Humanity remains at the centre of these
> works, and reality appears in philosophy only as the correlate of human thought. In
> this respect phenomenology, structuralism, post-structuralism, deconstruction, and
> postmodernism have all been perfect exemplars of the anti-realist trend in continental
> philosophy."
> (Bryant, Srnicek & Harman 2011: 2-3)

But what is a bit surprising, even for this new trend, is that Meillassoux is probably the only one
that claims he can give us the way to the absolute. Meillassoux defines his own philosophy as
speculative materialism (AF: 36) and he writes to underline why he is not a realist that " [...] I
prefer to describe my philosophy as a speculative materialism, rather than realism: because I
remember the sentence of Foucault, who once said: ' I am materialist [sic], because I don't believe
in reality' " (TWB: 19).
Meillassoux is a rationalist, meaning that his mode of inquiry is solely focused on argumentation
and the logic of the systems he critiques and the system he endorses. It is in many ways an attempt
to reinvigorate and arm Descartes' mode of argumentation, by establishing an absolute through
rational means that secures mathematical discourse as a derivative absolute – ultimately, that we
can trust the statements of the natural sciences, by showing that their mode of inquiry is validated
be the nature of reality in itself.

The door to the absolute

Meillassoux's first move is to resurrect the theory of primary and secondary qualities [8], as we mentioned earlier, and rehabilitate them into the contemporary philosophy that normally view this distinction as pre-critical, old and irrelevant (AF: 1). But this resurrection is paramount for Meillassoux as the primary qualities are mathematizable, and thus paves the way for a method that can reach the absolute. Mathematics become the language of the absolute, this 'language' is what Meillassoux calls a *derivative absolute,* as opposed to the objective reality, which he calls the *primary absolute* (AF: 30). For now, let us define what is meant by primary and secondary qualities, and return to the nature of the primary and derivative absolute later in the thesis.

Primary qualities: are all qualities that can be formulated in mathematical terms: length, width, movement, weight, depth figure and size (AF: 3). Meillassoux, however, wants to omit the notion of extension as we can't imagine an extension without colour, colour being a secondary quality. I'm still puzzled as to how we can imagine the other primary qualities without secondary qualities, as per Berkeley critique of Locke – Meillassoux does not comment on how extension is different from any of the other primary qualities. We can in general think of all primary qualities as numbers or vectors – as abstract entities.

Secondary qualities: are all the qualities that rely on an observer; colour, taste, smell, pain, pleasure; all sensible qualities that are not in the object itself, but in the perceiver. If I burn my finger on a candles flame – or anything hot, for that matter – the pain isn't in the flame, but in me. When I taste food the taste is not in the food, but in me etc. As Meillassoux puts it: "Whether it be affective or perceptual, the sensible only exists as a relation" (AF:3).

This first move of reviving the theory of primary and secondary qualities lays the foundation for a thesis that acknowledges that the sensible only exists as a relation to a subject, but maintaining that " […] the mathematizable properties are exempt from the constraints of such relation" (AF:2).

This way, the subjective and intersubjective dimension is retained and taken seriously, but we also have a door open to the absolute, to the things-in-them-selves (via the abstract entities of mathematics such as numbers and vectors).

---

8   The distinction was coined by Locke in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689) , but made earlier by Descartes in his *Meditations on First Philosophy* (1641).

Chapter I

The problem of the arche-fossil

Now let us put ourselves in the shoes and thoughts of Meillassoux and focus on the real problem, so to speak. We asked sceptical questions to begin with, but they served only as an appetiser – let's get to the main course. Following Meillassoux, we are interested in " [...] understanding under what conditions these statements [about the beginning of the universe ect.] are meaningful" (AF: 10)[9]. In this chapter, we will examine how the correlationists are liable to interpret statements about the age of the universe and the accretion of the earth – what Meillassoux calls ancestral statements (the term will be clarified shortly).

First let us turn our attention to the correlationists and produce a clear definition of correlation-ism, and then follow with an extrapolation of ancestral statements and introduce the concept of the *arche-fossil.* Then we will deal with *the problem of the arche-fossil,* which is the opener for the refutation of the correlationists.

The correlationists

Correlationism is an umbrella term that encompasses all philosophies that are critical towards any philosophy that claims to know the absolute; note that this includes both realism and idealism (TWB: 20). Examples of such philosophies are phenomenology, structuralism, post-structuralism, deconstruction, and postmodernism.

Even though they're extremely varied amongst themselves they share the same sentiment: that all laws, objects, beings and events are *already always* correlated with point of view, with a subjective access (TWB: 9). They hold that consciousness cannot escape its own situatedness and thus can-not obtain or have knowledge of the non-correlated reality i.e. the objective reality. Meillassoux refers to this sentiment as the *argument from the circle* (TWB: 10). To state this important concept another way: *there can be no object without the givenness of the object, and no theory of the ob-ject without positing the object.* The real power of the correlationist circle lies in that nearly every

---

9   When Meillassoux speaks of 'meaning' I understand him as using 'meaning' as a term for a correspondence between the signified and the signifying system that is consistent i.e. As we normally understand the term 'mean-ingful'.

objection against the correlationist circle is a performative contradiction, since one can only speak against the circle from within the circle.

Meillassoux makes a distinction between the correlationisms; weak and strong correlationisms (AF: 30).

Weak correlationism: is also called transcendental correlationism. Transcendental correlationism claims that there are some universal forms of subjective knowledge of things (AF: 30). Here we find the Kantians and some phenomenologists. (In the introduction, we 'played' the weak correlationist most of the time in the form of the Kantian.)

An important point to stress is that it is impermissible to hypostatise the correlation for any of correlationisms (AF: 10). Hypostasis of the correlation, would mean the correlation is eternal – one would become an idealist or vitalist.

> "[...] correlationism is not a metaphysics: it does not hypostatize the correlation; rather, it invokes the correlation to curb every hypostatization [...] To say say that we cannot extricate ourselves from the horizon of correlation is not to say that the correlation could exist by itself, independently of its incarnation in individuals" [AF: 11]

Hypostatising the correlation is making the correlation itself absolute, hence undermining the sceptical position of the correlationists. This sceptical/critical position that distinguishes correlationism from idealism is in a very fine balance, and it is this balance that Meillassoux wants to test. This test will be by confronting the correlationists with the problem of arche-fossil, which later will be reformulated to the problem of ancestrality.

Strong correlationism: is mostly occupied by the post-structuralisms/post-modern philosophies. Within those philosophies talking about an object in-itself seems to be futile nonsense. They do not reject that there are things-in-them-selves, but that we can't say anything about them, since we cannot even think them (AF: 30, 35). This is the greatest problem when the argument from the circle is taken up by a strong correlationist; that the things in-itself are more than just unknowable, they are radically unthinkable (TWB: 11).

Correlationism, in either of these forms, denies both realist and idealist absolutes, meaning that they have to produce both an argument against realism, and against idealism. Meillassoux sees this dual nature of the correlationists struggle against any absolute as the weakness of correlation-

15

ism, and this is what Meillassoux wishes to exploit. The objection to realism and materialism is that we only engage with what is given-to-thought, never the thing in itself (AF: 36). This however leaves an opening for the idealist, which then would hypostatise the correlation itself into the absolute. So the correlationists must create a second argument, denying the idealist absolute. The argument denying idealist absolutes, opens up for the possibility of a non-correlated reality (TWB: 21) through the strong correlationist concept of *facticity* (AF: 38). Facticity is the "[...] 'un-reason' (the absence of reason) of the given as well as all of its invariants" (AF: 41). We will return to this later, and in depth in Chapter 2.

One might ask if there is any other reason why Meillassoux is so hostile towards correlationism, other than he believes he has found a better way of thinking. Meillassoux expresses a concern, mostly about the strong correlationism, since he believes it implicitly legitimatises fanaticism (AF: 82) (since it strong correlationism cannot rationally claim that this or that is the ultimate truth), as well as indirectly supporting the new trend of post-factualism. Since correlationism is anti-absolutistic, they will not claim any eternal truth. They say: "We don't know anything about the outside of the circle, not even if there is one – against realism – just as we don't know whether the circle itself is either necessary or contingent – against subjectivism[10]" (TWB: 22). This means, that if a strong correlationist is to be consistent with her or his logic, then she or he, cannot deny or confirm any hypothesis about the absolute. "If the strong model of correlationism legitimates religious discourse in general, this is because it has failed to de-legitimate that there might be a hidden reason, an unfathomable purpose underlying the origin of our world" (AF: 63). The central point being that they must hold that any metaphysical hypothesis, even ones that have less explanatory power than an other, are equally possible (AF:58).

Ancestral statements and arche-fossils

According to Meillassoux, the natural sciences are "[...] in a position to precisely determine – albeit in the form of revisable hypotheses – the dates of the formation of the fossils of creatures living prior to the emergence of the first hominids, the date of the accretion of the earth, the date of the formation of the stars, and even the 'age' of the universe itself" (AF: 9)

---

10 Meillassoux uses the term 'subjectivism' for any philosophy that hypostatise the correlation.

Statements like: the age of the universe is 13.5 billion years, the earth was accreted 4.56 billion years ago and life evolved 3.86 billion years ago, they are all what Meillassoux calls *ancestral statements.*

Meillassoux defines ancestral statements as statements concerning the reality anterior to the emergence of life on earth (AF: 10), but as we will see later, the concept of ancestrality is more than that. Ancestral statements rely on empirical evidence, which Meillassoux calls *arche-fossils.* Normally we understand fossils as mineralised organic tissue and imprints, but an arche-fossil is any material that indicates "the existence of an ancestral reality or event; one that is anterior to terrestrial life [...] for example an isotope whose rate of radioactive decay we know, or the luminous emission of a star" (ibid.)

Meillassoux claims that the ancestral statements present a problem for the correlationist :

> *"*For let us be perfectly clear: from the perspective of the correlationist, the interpretation of the ancestral statements outlined above [the same as in our introduction, red.] is inadmissible – or at least, inadmissible so long as it is interpreted literally" (AF: 13).

That is because that " *an ancestral statement only has sense if its literal sense is also its ultimate sense*" (AF: 17) or as he formulates it in *Time Without Becoming:*

> "An ancestral and scientific statement doesn't say that something existed before subjectivity *for* subjectivity, but that something existed before subjectivity, and nothing more than this [...]" (TWB: 13).

What Meillassoux sees as a reason to criticise the correlationists is, that they hold, that they can accept the statements of science, and yet maintain that ancestral statements always will be 'for-us statements'. This results in a doubling of meaning, a realist one and the more originary correlationist one.

Meillassoux holds that there can be no compromise between correlationism and the ancestral statements of science – "[...] the ancestral statement has a realist meaning or no meaning at all" (ibid.)

The problem of the arche-fossil

So far we've circled the problem, but we have yet to fully unpack it. I will elaborate on the stance of the correlationists, as to make the problem as clear as possible.

As we remember, it is completely impermissible to hypostatise the correlation for the correlationists, as that would place them in an extreme idealist position, like that of George Berkeley (1685-1753) – where the absolute is the correlation itself. Berkeley's fundamental principle of *esse est percipi* (to be is to be perceived) – or rather as presented in his *A Treatise concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge* from 1734, needs a deity in order for it not to implode into solipsism[11]. This was not a problem for the late bishop of Cloyne, but for correlationists, the use of deities to patch holes in ones thinking is absurd. But invoking gods isn't the only way to be an extreme idealist. Schopenhauer was against all religions (and gods) and wrote :

> *"Templer og Kirker, Pagoder og Moskeer, i alle Lande og fra alle Tider, vidner i deres Pragt og Storhed om Menneskets metafysiske Trang, som stærk og uudslukkelig følger i Hælene paa dets fysiske Trang. Den, som er satirisk anlagt, kunde ganske vist tilføje, at samme Trang er en beskeden Fyr, som tager sig til Takke med en tarvelig Kost. Han lader sig undertiden nøje med plumpe Fabler og smagløse Eventyr, som, hvis de blot bliver tidlig nok indprentede, er ham tilstrækkelig Forklaring paa hans Tilværelse og Støtte for hans Moral."* [12]

This roughly translates into: "Temples and churches, pagodas and mosques, in all countries and from all times, testify with their glory and grandeur to the metaphysical urge of humans, which, strong and insatiable, follows on the heels of the physical urge. One who is satirically inclined, could very well say, that the same urge [the metaphysical urge] is a modest fellow, who settles for a shoddy diet. He will, more often than not, be satisfied with plump fables and tasteless myths, which, if they are imprinted on him early on, are adequate enough for him to explain his existence and to provide support for his moral". And yet Schopenhauer places *the will to life* as the constituting principle of all becoming, saying that the will is the Kantian thing-in-itself – the same 'move' as Berkeley. The differences between the Schopenhaurian will and the Berkelean god are many, but both concepts works the same way for the philosophers argumentation. Yet both creates a sort of

---

11 Berkeley argues that there exists two substances in the totality of reality: minds and ideas (what we perceive as objects or rather qualities of objects). But how do we know, if we met a person on the street, that she or he is a mind, and not just a bundle of ideas like any other thing perceived? It would seem that there is no empirical way of proving that there do indeed exist other minds, beside our one (and Berkeley was an empiricist).

12 From *Udødelige Tanker: Schopenhauer*, excepts from *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung ,* chosen and translated to Danish by Thomas Mann in 1939.

circular reasoning, not unlike that of Descartes 'proof' of god. The same problems are found in Nietzsche's *will to power* and Bergson's *vital force*.

Stating to fully know the absolute is simply non-sense in the correlationist view, no matter if the absolute is a Berkelean god or a vitalist force, will or any positing of an external absolute reality as in the metaphysics of realism and materialism. The logic for the strong correlationist who is of a post-structuralistic persuasion is roughly: that all objects and phenomenon are onto-epistemological, meaning that an object or phenomena cannot be formulated in thought without being posited by and in a network of meaning(s)/knowledge(s), since the object needs knowledge to be formulated as thus. An object or phenomenon needs a constitutive frame created by knowledge to become visible for the thought, but that knowledge also creates implicit build-in rules of what possibly can be known – it is both productive and restrictive. The problem being, that we never refer to the object or phenomena outside our systems of meaning, but to the sign created in the context of the sociocultural setting of language and history. These conditions for knowledge and possible knowledge are known as discourses (as used in post-structural jargon). Discourse, as a term, is usually notoriously vague in its description, but it would be fair to call it: a changing system of meaning shared by a group, at a certain point in time, at a certain place[13] that directs their consciousness towards the formulated reality of that given time. It is often also claimed that there is a dominant discourse that all other discourses are directed towards or against; the hegemonic discourse. This means that knowledge and truth are seen as a pluralities in the post-structuralist optic. This should not be understood in the sense, that the objective reality 'isn't out there', but rather that it is too complex to grasp fully, since the nature of knowledge is both productive and restrictive, as described above.

As the post-structuralists would claim, it is more important to look at how we perceive and understand (the social) reality, since those understandings lead to actions that change reality, or rather manifest (social) reality. Take an example from the 'real' world: The formulation of genders has created (and still creates) a very real social praxis on 'how to woman' and 'how to man', which offers a certain set of possibilities, as well as restrictions, when it comes to the aesthetics of apparel and body. If one is unable to or do not wish to play by those rules, one can be severely stigmatized. In some parts of the world, it can lead to bodily harm and even death. But the aesthetics of the genders change over time. Make-up and high heels were once a part of the male aristocrat fashion in the renaissance, today it is predominantly understood as something feminine. This means that

---

13 'Place' in the broadest sense of the word: meaning it also includes websites and social arenas at the same geographical place.

the discourses of gender leads to real actions in the world towards gender[14], and must thus be considered, at the very least, as co-constructive of reality (from the post-structuralist correlationist point of view).

The way to know a discourse is to deconstruct it, and find out how people use the meanings, how they are constructed and so on, but we can never fully be free of the discourses we ourselves are invested in - so we must be content with the perpetual examination of the systems of meanings. We simply cannot rip ourselves out of the sociocultural and historical context – we do, in some sense, walk in the steps of Sisyphus, except that our mountains grow taller and the boulder, bigger. There is no inherent telos, or at least no way of knowing if there is or not.

Research in the natural sciences is often presented in a more teleological form: the goal being to reach complete enlightenment about the unity of reality/nature. This presupposes that there is possible progress towards something, and that something is absolute and unchangeable i.e. reachable. Knowledge about the objective reality is attainable, since reality is singular. Reality will 'fight back' when presented with assertions that are false (when we, as an example, summit our hypothesis to the scientific method).

In the strong correlationist framework, these notions are naïve, and to the natural sciences, the strong correlationist view is simply seen as a fundamental misunderstanding about how the world works. The strong correlationist, being consistent, must hold that knowledge is onto-epistemological in nature, and thus it cannot talk of an absolute objective reality, since that implies the divorce between knowledge and object. This, I'm sure, they would not object to, but the claim that they cannot at all *give* meaning to ancestral statements, would probably be seen as a misunderstanding from the part of the accuser. This we are soon to explore.

For the weak correlationists, as we remember, objective statements can only be understood as intersubjectively verifiable statements. The thing-in-it-self, the absolute, is immunised from the grasp of human consciousness, even though it would seem we can come very close; but close is not what Meillassoux and the natural sciences (supposedly) wants. It boils down to the same problem, the problem of always already being situated in and from a certain perspective. The weak correlationist sees intersubjectivity as the Archimedean point from which one may approach the real, whereas the real, from the strong correlationist viewpoint, always will be seen as a co-construction.

---

14 We perform them by living by the idea of how to be a man or woman, and react more strongly to people who do not play by the same rules or have the different ideals that the hegemonic discourse dictates.

In short: the correlationist deny the possibility of knowing any absolute – whether realist or idealist. But they do, however, not say that ancestral statements cannot be meaningful in their framework, rather they say that there always will be two levels of meaning.: "The immediate, or realists meaning, and the more originary correlationist meaning" (AF: 14). They will hold that the ancestral statements are true, insofar that they are intersubjectively verifiable, but they will always add a simple, discrete, codicil at the end of statements like "[...] for humans (or even for the human scientist). […] this is the codicil of modernity" (AF: 13).

Meillassoux however claims, that confronted with the arche-fossil, every variety of correlationism is exposed as an extreme idealism (AF: 18) where they would be forced to see the correlation itself as an absolute – This is the problem of the arche-fossil. Meillassoux, as we know, also hold that ancestral statements only can be meaningful in a realist/materialist framework.

The correlationist objections to the problem of the arche-fossil

Meillassoux anticipates objections and seeks to intercept them by creating some himself. This procedure also allows him to elaborate the nature of the problem in a deeper way. The objections are made by two correlationist 'characters', against the problem of the arche-fossil. One is the strong correlationist and the other the weak/transcendental correlationist. Meillassoux starts by presenting the strong correlationist's objection and then offers his counter attack; this approach is continued with the transcendental correlationist objection. We shall follow the steps of Meillassoux closely, but first let's recap: what must be true, in order for the ancestral statements to be true.

As we discussed, Meillassoux revived the theory of secondary and primary qualities, and maintained, that the primary qualities are exempt from the constraints of the secondary qualities. The primary qualities are the absolute i.e. the world completely divorced from perception. Ancestral statements are the statements about what we cannot perceive, since they are statements concerning events and entities that predate the emergence of (human) perception, so for us to know them we must have access to the primary qualities. The conclusion is that for ancestral statements to be true, statements invoking primary qualities must be true in a realists/materialist sense.

However, the correlationists 'themselves', should have their say in this accusation. We will know look at the two correlationist rejoinders.

The strong correlationist objection

 This objection is made by claiming that the problem of the arche-fossil is just a familiar and trivial anti-idealist argument, that has no consequences for a correlationist. The strong correlationist proceeds by arguing that it is arbitrary whether it is a distance in time or in space:

> "An event occurring in an immensely distant galaxy, beyond the reach of every possible observation, would in effect provide the spatial analogue for an event occurring prior to terrestrial life. In both cases, what we are dealing with are events devoid of possible witnesses (or at least terrestrial ones), which is precisely the core of your argument since the latter claims that correlationism cannot think that which cannot be connected to a relation-to-the-world. We should therefore be entitled to extend to space an argument hitherto been restricted to time, and adjoin the question of the distant to the question of the ancient" (AF: 18)

The second stage of the argument is then to problematise the terms of 'distance' and 'ancientness' since these conceptions are relative – When does the proximate become distant? The correlationist argues that "the relative proximity of the object under consideration becomes irrelevant to the force of the argument once the scope of the latter has been extended to space" (AF: 19). In other words, the distance becomes irrelevant, meaning the ancientness also becomes irrelevant, since this spatial objection is analogous to the temporal problem. This then reveals the problem of the arche-fossil to be a particular variant of the objection against idealism, according to the strong correlationist. The premise being that what is un-witnessed is un-thinkable, unless by realism, and that since the ancestral past is un-witnessed (per definition) it follows that what is prior to conscious life is unthinkable by the correlationists. The strong correlationist replies that "the lacunary nature of the given has never been a problem for the correlationism", remembering Husserl's thoughts about the nature of the given; 'givenness-by-adumbrations' – *abschattung.* The correlationist comes with an example of a cube; "a cube is never perceived according to all its faces at once; it always retain something non-given at the the heart of its givenness" (ibid.). In other words; the given occurs on the backdrop of the non-given. The correlationist holds that one simply has to introduce a counterfactual; 'had there been a witness then it would have appeared so and so', in order to give meaning to ancestral statements. The distant and the ancestral are thus con-

sidered lacunary, which in turn offers no problem for the correlationist, no matter the distance in time and space – "in either case, correlationism simply says the same thing as science" (AF: 20).

To summarise: the problem of the arche-fossil is claimed to be non-problematic for the strong correlationist, as the lacunary nature of the given offers no problem for the strong correlationist. Put in another way, by example: The claim that the earth was accreted 4.56 billion years ago is an event that is non-given to any consciousness, but the correlationist can 'imagine' how it would be if one could have been there. So the problem of ancestrality is solved by retrojection.

This is however not permissible, according to Meillassoux.

Meillassoux's reply to the strong correlationist

First off, the strong correlationists rejoinder and objection to the problem of the arche-fossil rests on the swapping of the distant for the ancient, and showing that the problem itself is nothing new, but an old attack on idealism, what Meillassoux calls *the objection from the un-witnessed"* (AF: 20). This swapping is what Meillassoux wishes to invalidate, since he argues that the ancestral and the ancient and distant are not the same. The point being (from the strong correlationist view) that the problem of the arche-fossil is a problem of the lacunary nature of the given, which offers no danger to correlationism, since the correlationist invokes the possibility of retrojection i.e. the counterfactual imagining of how the world must have appeared to us if we where there as a witness.

But the problem Meillassoux presents is not a problem of what is unperceived:

> "[...] the correlationist is certainly right about one thing – that the argument from the un-perceived is in fact trivial and poses no threat to correlationism. But the argument from the arche-fossil is in no way equivalent to such an objection, because the ancestral does not designate an ancient event – it designates an event anterior to terrestrial life and hence anterior to giveness itself [...] ancestral reality does not refer to occurrences which a lacunary givenness cannot apprehend, but to occurrences which are not contemporaneous with any givenness, whether lacunary or not " (AF: 20)

In less technical terms, one could say, that retrojection is 'cheating' since the possibility of perception was not even present – or that the strong correlationist misunderstood the notion and nature of the ancestral. The strong correlationist mistook the ancestral problem/the problem of the arche-fossil for an empirical problem, where the problem is to be understood as "[...] the ontological problem of coming into being of givenness as such" (AF: 21). So it becomes the question of how can we talk of events and objects before the possibility of the givenness of them. We here see the reason for Meillassoux's resurrection of the primary and secondary qualities, since an access to the primary qualities is the only way to know what is non-given: since only primary qualities offer a neutral 'perspective'. Meillassoux's reply ends with a snarky remark: "We now see the sophistical nature of this first rejoinder consists in trying to occlude one lacuna by another, in trying to mask the non-being of the given by a given of non-being, as though the former could be reduced to the latter" (AF: 22). I admit to being slightly amused by this verbal stinger at the imaginary interlocutor and it's obvious rhetorical function, this is however not something we are to dwell on, but something we might keep in our thoughts as we proceed our reading of Meillassoux.

The transcendental objection

The transcendental objection is a more incisive objection according to Meillassoux. This objection attempts to deal with Meillassoux's claim; that the problem of the arche-fossil is an ontological problem.

> "The empirical question is that of knowing how bodies that were organic prior to becoming conscious appeared in an environment which is itself physical. The transcendental question consists in determining how the science of this physical emergence of life and consciousness is possible" (AF: 22)

The transcendental correlationist accuses Meillassoux of confusing the empirical and the transcendental level of the problem: The problems are inseparable, but never intersect, like two sides of a paper. The claim is that Meillassoux is making the mistake of allowing them to intersect, making a möbius strip (ibid.) thus conflating the two problems. The transcendental subject is not an organ or an entity (doesn't exist, so to speak), but are "[...] a set the conditions rendering objective scientific knowledge of entities possible " (AF: 23). Bodies, organs and matter in general are spatio-temporal, the transcendental subject is not, and thus do not arise in time and space. This is not to say, that the transcendental subject is some weird mystical entity; it is neither eternal

nor divine, but "out of reach for the scientific discourse about objects because they provide the forms for this discourse" (AF: 23).

I understand the transcendental correlationist arguing that calling the transcendental subject an object, would be like calling space and time objects. They are the condition for objects coming into being and existing, but time and space cannot be said to exist as a tree or a rock does.

> "[...] it is perfectly admissible for you to say that bodies, which provide the objective support for subjects, are born and die, but you cannot say the same about the conditions which permit knowledge of such fact. If you do, you have simply violated one of the basic requirements for the transcendental – but you have not thereby refuted it, you have simply disregarded it." (ibid.)

The transcendental philosopher argues that the arche-fossil is thus not an ontological problem, but an empirical one, since it only pertains to objects (ibid.).

Meillassoux's reply to the transcendental correlationist

The transcendental objection attempts to "immunize the conditions of knowledge from any discourse bearing on the objects of science " (AF: 24) . If we concede the transcendental subject does not exist in the same way objects do, "one still has to say that there is a transcendental subject " (ibid.). Meillassoux insists that one is free to reflect upon the condition of the transcendental subject – one condition for saying that 'there is', is that such a subject takes place (ibid.). By 'taking place' Meillassoux means that the transcendental subject, insofar that it remains free of metaphysical dogmatism, is indissociable from a point of view. " [...] how do notions such as finitude, receptivity, horizon, regulative idea of knowledge, arise? They arise because [...] the transcendental subject is posited as a point of view on the world, and hence as talking place at the heart of the world" (AF: 23-24)

The transcendental subject can only discover a finite aspect. As Meillassoux points out, the transcendental subject is localized among the finite objects of its world and it is ultimately indissociable from its 'incarnation' in a body. Meillassoux grants that the transcendental subject is the condition for knowledge of bodies, but holds that the body is a necessary condition for the transcendental subject to take place (AF: 25). Thus the body is viewed as retro-transcendental and one is free to reflect upon the conditions of the conditions as he puts it. By this manoeuvre,

Meillassoux argues against the transcendental philosopher, maintaining that the problem of the ache-fossil is an ontological problem.

The problem of the arche-fossil concluded

The problem of the arche-fossils function was to show that none of the correlationist are able to give meaning to ancestral statements without losing their 'metaphysical neutral temperament' to an extreme idealism. Meillassoux constructed two objections on behalf of the strong and weak correlationist and attacked the strong correlationists rejoinder as consisting "[...]in trying to occlude one lacuna by another, in trying to mask the non-being of the given by a given of non-being, as though the former could be reduced to the latter" (AF: 22) i.e. Cheating by breaking the rules of ancestrality by retrojection, since "to think ancestrality is to think a world without thought – a world without the givenness of the world" (AF: 28). Meillassoux launched a riposte at the transcendental objection, by maintaining that the transcendental subject – even though a condition for knowledge – is indistinguishable from the body in which it is manifest, and thus should not be considered as omitted from the coming-into-being like other objects.

Thus the problem of the arche-fossil shows that ancestral statements can only be meaningful in a realist/materialist sense, but since Meillassoux also holds that we cannot go back to being naïve realists[15], we must venture forwards towards Meillassoux's answer:

> "To that end, we must once more emphasize what is truly at stake in what we shall henceforth call 'the problem of ancestrality'. Our question was the following: what are the conditions under which the an ancestral statement remains meaningful? But as we've seen the question harbours another one, which is more originary, and which delivers its veritable import, to wit: *how are we to conceive of the empirical sciences capacity to yield knowledge of the ancestral realm?"* (AF:26)

The problem of ancestrality is in other words the problem of how to get at the primary qualities, without regressing to the pre-critical philosophy. As we remember, the primary qualities can be formulated in mathematical terms: as length, width, movement, weight, depth figure and size. This means that the question becomes "[...] how is mathematical discourse able to describe a world [...] that is not the correlate of a relation to the world" (ibid.).

---

15 Since Meillassoux consider the correlationist critique of it as valid

Interlude

I would like us to take a little pause to reflect upon Meillassoux's replies, since the understanding of these leads us to the next plateau. Usually when thinkers take pauses to reflect upon things, it has the same function as when a boxer dances around her or his opponent, giving the opponent the occasional jabs: it's to test the footing of the subject in question, before giving it a real blow – whether landing a blow, knocking the opponent out, missing or hitting a block, one would have learned how stable the subject in question is, as well as ones tool for examining it. This chapter is dedicated to discussing Meillassoux's replies and intercepting the theme for the next chapter. In all honesty, it started as a small footnote where I vented my puzzlement, but both the footnote and my puzzlement grew considerably as I wrote, and it ended up as a bridge from the previous to the next chapter, in which we will be handling the more abstract part of Meillassoux's thinking. Due to the 'origin' of this chapter, it will bear the resemblance of an essay, since I followed a simple question, which evolved as I tried to answer it. The question I more or less asked was: is the problem of the arche-fossil really effective against the correlationists? I asked that particular question, because to me, it was like watching professional boxer close in and deliver a right hook – the general movement was so fast that I couldn't see all the small movements contained within. We must slow time down and play the whole round again, in order to get most important parts of the movement, and see if it lands a devastating blow, or if one only should consider it a threatening display of potential philosophical prowess.

In other words, this chapter is an attempt to get a clear picture of what has happened so far, and use our curiosity as the fuel to drill deeper into Meillassoux's philosophical firmament, so we may catch a glimpse of Meillassoux's absolute later in the thesis.

Drilling is in a sense an act of violence, and part of this chapter will also bear the 'temperament' of drilling, since we will end up focusing a lot of questions on a very small surface.

Needless to say, we have yet to come to the most incisive part of Meillssoux's argumentation. We have yet to see if Meillassoux is able to unravel the argument from the circle. But let us ask for now: Did Meillassoux, with the problem of the arche-fossil, get a hold of any loose seams – is he ready to pull and see the circle unravel?

As mentioned earlier, the objections and replies presented in Chapter 1 served as method for Meillassoux to deepen and fully extrapolate on the problem of the arche-fossil[16]. In the end of all of these objections and replies, we found out, that the problem of the arche-fossil was an entry point to introducing the more originary problem: *the problem of ancestrality*.

Different levels of abstraction

A general observation about the method of refutation is that Meillassoux jumps to different levels of abstraction, so as to attack each objection from a different levels. With the strong correlationist objection, the objection was made at the empirical level, then, when Meillassoux replied, the problem took a step up to the ontological level. When dealing with the transcendental objection, the objection was aimed at the ontological level, and it would seem that Meillassoux once again jumped to a different level of abstraction with his reply, but where to exactly, is a bit harder to pinpoint. I would argue that he lifted the problem to metaphysics, and this is not just to follow the ladder one step up, but because it appears to me, that Meillassoux 'moved the scene' of the transcendental objection to a different metaphysical framework, where it was defeasible through an epistemology valid within that frame of metaphysics. This postulate must of course be supported with some argumentation.

First I will need to clarify what I mean by metaphysics, and secondly how it relates to epistemology.

As I understand it, all ontological statements are statements about existence and what exists, and those statements vary from what metaphysical foundation one builds ones thoughts upon, since metaphysics are the formulation of necessary conditions for ones ontology. Metaphysics is notoriously difficult to define, and this definition is only to be understood as a temporary one, as we shall discuss Meillassoux's definition of metaphysics later, in Chapter 2. We've had the pleasure of inviting Berkeley into this thesis a couple of times before, and now we will briefly summarise his metaphysics. We start at the ontological level and then find our way to the root of his ontology – his metaphysics.

If we consider Berkeley, what exist are ideas and spirit/mind, not material matter. What appears to us as matter are ideas. Take an example of my cup of coffee: when I see it, I have the ideas of colours/light, and when I a take my cup with my hand I 'get' the idea of hardness, through the idea

---

16 As well as using them as a rhetorical device to make the problem of the arche-fossil more convincing, but this is not our focus.

resistance that it offers my grip, as well as the idea of temperature and the texture of its surface etc. When I bring it to my lips, an consequently close to my nose, it produces in me olfactory ideas, and the sensation of the liquids viscosity, temperature and taste. I call this mass of ideas 'coffee', and the other bundle of sensations, that the liquid is in: my cup. According to Berkeley, I only perceive the ideas, which, since they appear together, become objects to me. The objects themselves do not exist in their own right, only as a bundle of ideas – a nominalist view. These ideas are passive, since they only exist when I perceive them. In terms of primary and secondary qualities, we only have access to the secondary qualities of these 'objects'. As Berkeley argues, if we are to think of primary qualities, we only think of them in second quality terms. Suppose I were to think of a shape, then I couldn't help of thinking about it in specific colour or at least with colour accompanying it (if I thought of a transparent object), and if I think of width, height, speed etc., I cannot seem to think of these without an object, that has qualities I can see or otherwise sense/perceive.

A perceiver is an active entity in contrast to the ideas, and Berkeley uses mind and spirit interchangeably, when talking about a perceiver. In order to make sure that those ideas we perceive do not vanish when we aren't perceiving them, and that the world still would be there, even if we all went to sleep at the same time or fell into a coma, there's an all-perceiver: a god. And since ideas themselves are passive, they cannot cause anything: here the god is also needed to cause them[17]. Berkeley's god is also a spirit, since it is active, but whereas the spirit of a person (and other animals) are finite, the god-spirit is infinite [18] - god is the absolute. The god and all-perceiver is the necessary condition for the rest of the ontology of Berkeley, thus the metaphysical foundation for any ontology formulated in the Berkelean idealism.

Returning from our Berkelean excursion, we see that we have a very different ontology in the godhead of Berkeley, facilitated by the completely different metaphysic, than in the material cosmos that Meillassoux inhabits. For Berkeley it is legitimate to talk of substances, and not matter, and for Meillassoux, being a materialist, everything supervenes on the physical [19]. Meillassoux is also, in contrast to Berkeley, a rationalist, whereas Berkeley is an empiricist, meaning that the road to true knowledge for one is rational thought, and the other, the senses.

---

17 Or else they would be dependent upon our mind, and then we will get a solipsist problem, as we have touched upon earlier in regards to Berkeley

18 The general overview was given by reading Standford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: Berkeley, section 3.1.1 - 3.1.3

19 Standford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: Physicalism

My point with presenting Berkeley's world-view in contrast to Meillassoux's is to show, that they are incommensurable, to use a Kuhnian expression. If we woke up in the Berkelean godhead, the materialistic ontology would be false, and the epistemologies (no matter the mode of epistemology e.g. empiricism or rationalism), that are made within a materialistic philosophy would be so as well, and the reverse would be true, if the Berkelean idealist awoke to a material cosmos. What is legitimate in one metaphysical framework, is not in the other. One can in a sense only invalidate a metaphysical system by pointing out a logical inconsistency within the system itself.

As I understand it, the transcendental correlationist world-view entails a different idea about reality and hence a different view on how to approach it and know it. Even though Meillassoux claims that the transcendental correlationism is neutral in terms of formulating the absolute, it would seem that they still postulate metaphysical properties about the thing-in-it-self i.e. the absolute. As Meillassoux writes: two propositions have an absolute ontological scope, for Kant (AF: 31):

1. The thing-in-it-self is non-contradictory

2. The thing-in-it-self exists

These propositions are what the transcendental correlationist build their thinking around, but here we must remember the epistemological constraint of the 'transcendentals' ; that we only have access to the thing-for-us. This is formulated within a metaphysical framework that validates that form of epistemological constraint, so even though they cannot be said to have a very detailed metaphysics, they still postulate a necessary condition for their ontology.

Meillassoux argues, that since the transcendental subject is indissociable from its 'incarnation' in a body, that means that the transcendental subject and the object of which it is manifest must share the same conditions for existing. But this is only a valid statement within a realist/materialist framework, with a realist/materialist epistemology. Meillassoux also focuses on the fact, that one must say that there 'is' a transcendental subject, and that this in some way indicates its existence. That however seems to me, to be a bit odd, since one can say of many abstract things, that they are, but that does not make them exist like a chair, a pencil or a brain, for that matter. If I say that there 'is' goodness in a particular person, this does not imply with necessity, that there is anything that, in and of itself, is good. Then one would have to hold a platonic idealist position, if one were to say, that goodness exists in and of itself. Maybe this is due to the translation, that the particular

phrase is confusing me; I unfortunately am not skilled enough in French to read the original. I do however not believe that this is what Meillassoux means, since that would seem too banal for a thinker of his calibre. However, If I were to play the transcendental correlationist, I do believe that I would be right in saying that he is indeed making a 'möbius strip' via a sort of composition fallacy, since what appears for us, is not what is for itself. Meillassoux tries to dispel that critique by saying that he will grant that the transcendental subject does not exist the same way as a other object, but then continues by saying, that it is indissociable from a point of view. I believe that, that particular move would be permissible within the transcendental framework. But then Meillassoux claims that a subject without a point of view "[...] would have access to the world as a totality, with out anything escaping from its instantaneous inspection of objective reality [sic.]. " (AF: 24). This particular passage is part of the build-up to his positing of the transcendental subject in the body, thus binding it to its retro-transcendental conditions. I wonder if that is how he believes that the transcendental correlationist would think a subject without a point of view would experience the world as a totality, or if this is what Meillassoux himself holds. As far as I can see, such a claim is only valid within a realist/materialist framework. I believe that a transcendental correlationist would simply reply that if there is no perspective, then there would be no possible conditions for knowledge. If Meillassoux wishes that non-perspective would have access to the totality of the world, it would only be feasible within a realist/materialist metaphysical framework. That is to say; that I can only make sense of what Meillassoux is saying, if I understand that any perspective is relating to the secondary qualites, because then a non-perspective is a 'perspective' without relations to the sensible, thus this 'perspective' is pertaining to the primary qualities – the true objective of reality.

That is why I believe that Meillassoux jumped to a metaphysical level in order to attack the transcendental objection. This means that the epistemological constraint of the transcendental was broken, by moving the ontology of the transcendental outside its 'normal' metaphysical context. If we remember, the same happened to the strong correlationist, who was prohibited the use of retrojection as a way to cope the problem of the ache-fossil. But the level of abstraction took a more decisive jump, when it had to deal with the transcendental objection. In order to make sense of Meillassoux's objection to the transcendental reply, it would seem that it was necessary to change the place of the scene, to a realist/materialist metaphysics.

But we must maintain it is permissible so far, as it is true, that there can only be one meaning concerning ancestral statements.

Different levels of meaning

Meillassoux's point regarding the correlationists is of course, that they themselves are supporting statements based on a materialist/realist epistemology, while wanting to maintain their codicil; 'for us'. And as we have already been through, the problem of the arche-fossil was meant to show, how the correlationists were liable to interpret ancestral statements, which led to the conclusion that they would have to take the side of Meillassoux, if not to regress into an extreme idealism, like Berkeley – they cannot remain neutral. But as Meillassoux states, the problem of the arche-fossil and ancestral statements can only be meaningful, if it has a realist meaning (AF:12). As I understand, Meillassoux distinguishes between statements that can have more than one meaning, and statements that only have one meaning. But I have some trouble understanding where one must draw the line, since it seems to me, that Meillassoux has not defined the term 'meaning' in any other context, than the ancestral context. Meillassoux wishes to show, that the correlationists are inconsistent with their own line of reasoning, if they say that they can give meaning to ancestral statements, and retain the codicil of modernity, but does not show how one is able to distinguish between these levels of meaning.

Different levels of meaning have never been a problem for the correlationists; this is in a sense where correlationism thrives, since it is in a sense it's focus. I cannot help but wonder how Meillassoux thinks, a realist or materialist is liable to interpret a metaphor, then, since its meaning is, and must be, ambiguous at least. And what he thinks the relation between the knowledge of reality and language is? A lot of thinkers hold that language and knowledge is metaphorical in and of itself. Metaphor, in this context, is understood as a transfer from one place to another, like the origin of the word, from the Greek *metapherein.* If I, for an example, sense an object, the act of sensing is a transferral of information, and the ordering of the sense data into a context of thought is yet another transferral. But the very transferral from one context to another is transformational. This means that even the idea of something sensed is ambiguous. Ricoeur, as an example of such a thinker, and he argues that scientific models as analogous to metaphors (see The Rule of Metaphor from page 283 – 286). I would very much have liked to hear Meillassoux comment on that idea.

 So far it is apparent that he favours the mathematical discourse, as a language of the primary qualities, but what of the secondary qualities? Meillassoux does claim to take the 'for us' seriously, but he does not show how. I also wonder how Meillassoux is liable to interpret a non-ancestral statement. If I state "*my coffee cup is white and purple*" , do I refer to both my experience of my cup by means of secondary qualities (and the experienced relation between the cup and me), and the objective cup, in terms of primary qualities – or just one of the mode of qualities ? In that

particular case, one could argue that the statement "*my coffee cup is white and purple*" is ambiguous, since I'm both referring to the 'real' cup, and my experience of the cup. If that is so, what implications does that have for natural sciences ability to make non-ancestral statements – is it even a problem at all?

Realist or materialist – there is in fact a difference : So far I have used realist and materialist interchangeable, but there is a difference. I have used them interchangeably because Meillassoux himself writes 'realist meaning', and 'realist sense' in After Finitude, But declares that he is not a realist in *Time Without Becoming*. This has confused me to some extent. Since if we where to take this to a nominalist[20] context, we would see that nominalism in itself is not contradictory to materialism, but it is to realism. My confusion only becomes greater, because I have no clear idea about Meillassoux's stance on language and its relation to the world. We have an idea about how he sees mathematical language as related to the absolute, but not where and how the language conveying this potential truth is in this relation.

This is where I wish to stress my main point once again: It appears that any method of gaining knowledge, and the idea about what can be known (epistemology) is depended upon the postulated ontology, which in turn is built upon a metaphysical foundation. I realise, that this could be considered I correlationist trick, but allow me to elaborate with an example, by taking the nominalist versus the realist.

 A redwood is a tree, a birch is tree, but the term 'tree' is an abstraction of all the different kinds of entities that share some traits, that distinguishes them from another group of entities. The realist might reply, that's not a problem, since 'tree' refer to things that exist, but the nominalist would say that there exists matter, but that trees only are trees because we call them trees, by abstracting from the fact, that every tree, even two birch, are particular, and thus not identical. This would be in line with the Berkelean empiricist, who would state there is only a bundle of ideas/sensations, which we name 'a cup of coffee', no cup of coffee exists as a real object, so to speak. So nominalism can exist both in an idealist, and materialist metaphysical framework.

This is just to show, that there are discussions about how language, knowledge and the world relates, where realists can disagree with materialist, and idealist with idealist. I realise that this is a nuance, but I believe it to be an important one, since what meaning designates and refer to are

---

20 Nominalism can be roughly be understood as two stances on the problem of universal. One version denies the existence of abstract objects, and the other, universals.

different when one is a realist and nominalist. This is why I would have liked to have had a more thorough definition of 'meaning' by Meillassoux. He has, however, expressed that he is not a realist in both his paper in *Time Without Becoming* and book *After Finitude*, since he does not believe in reality, which then would leave him in a nominalist camp, but it is not fair to assume too much.

Interlude concluded

Is the problem of arche-fossil effective in getting the correlationists off balance? I would say both yes and no. I do believe that in order for the critiques to be more effective, he would have had to show, how his philosophy would be liable to interpret statements that are non-ancestral, since is it unclear how he would go about it, and in extension, what his thoughts are about language and reality. I also believe that correlationists would be entitled to critique his replies by saying that he has shifted the battleground to a specific metaphysics, with a specific epistemology. I do however think the aporia of ancestrality is deep, and it does present a great difficulty for thought, if one tries to think of it in non-dogmatic terms.

 But I will dig deeper into the discussion of metaphysics, since I have, in a sense, accused Meillassoux of using a metaphysicians 'trick', and luckily he has prepared for such and accusation, and this will leads us to the next chapter.

Chapter II

The Door to the Absolute

Even though Meillassoux strikes a blow for the natural sciences, a great deal of the natural sciences themselves say that we should let go of the idea of an absolute, but Meillassoux holds that it is the natural sciences themselves that enjoin us to to find and discover the source of their own absoluteness (AF: 28). Scientists will cheerfully use either an experiment approach (typical of empiricist thinking) or mathematical modelling (rooted in rationalist thought) and happily believe that they are working towards and understanding of the unity of nature on this hybrid basis.

I remember a conversation I had with two fellow students, one studied chemistry and the other theoretical physics, and we discussed if it was possible to know the beginning of the universe. I asked if they believed it was plausible (in theory), that the laws of physics could change, so that we in fact never would be able to know the real time of the beginning. The theoretical physicist believed that it was very plausible, whereas the chemist was a bit more hesitant, and replied, that there was no way of knowing. Both expressed something bordering on a transcendental correlationist's view, since they agreed that: we can only know reality as it appears to us (our systems and models of interpretation), and only name things to be objective, if they are intersubjectively verifiable. Even though the chemist was the most sceptical when we talked of changing laws, she still said that if she discovered something going against the known laws of nature consistently, and others were able to repeat the same measurement, she would have to change her beliefs. But she blatantly and honestly replied, that she found questions of the beginning of the universe and the true nature of reality too philosophical, and that she would rather be pragmatic about such statements. I have actually mostly encountered the pragmatic attitude amongst fellow students of the natural sciences – which seems to show a different narrative of the sciences than Meillassoux presents, but this is of course only anecdotal.

Salvaging Descartes' argument for an absolute

How can we talk of an absolute, if we aren't going back to being pre-critical? In order to get at the primary qualities, we must understand how the correlationists refuted the Cartesian argument. Only then is it possible for Meillassoux to salvage the argument for an absolute, and reconstruct it a materialist framework. "[...] as we shall see, it is by grasping the reason for this inadequacy of

Cartesianism that we will be able, through the same movements, to conceive of the possibility of another relation to the absolute" (AF: 29).

Descartes justified his thesis, that mathematical discourse was the infallible 'language' of the absolute, the absolute being god. He used his ontological 'proof' by inferring the existence his god by the definition used to describe the entity; an infinitely perfect being. He argued that since perfection entails existence, the god must exist, it would go against it's very definition not to exist (ibid.).

If we recall Descartes hyperbolic doubt as presented in his *Meditations*. He asked, how we really could know the world out there, when our senses can deceive us? When we put a straw in a glass of water for instance, it looks as if it is bent, but when we put our fingers in the glass to feel it, it feels straight. Which one of our perceptions can be trusted? When I sit in front of my computer, typing away, how can I be certain I'm not just dreaming this, since dreams can be indistinguishable from reality? Descartes then imagined an evil demon (or genius, depending on the translation) that had the power to deceive him. He started doubting everything until he reached the point where he couldn't doubt no more – namely that *he* was doubting. No matter what shenanigans the evil demon would have in store for him, and no matter how much the evil demon would deceive him, Descartes knew for sure, that there must exist a 'Descartes' in order for a Descartes to be deceived. By this tautology Descartes finally gained a footing, and began to 'rebuild' the world. This idea of his self was clear and distinct, he then preceded to test his other ideas for the same criteria. Geometrical and arithmetical ideas survived the test as well as the idea of god. A triangle has three sides per definition, and 2+2=4 per definition, so true knowledge comes from a priori truths[21]. The idea of god was to him also clear and distinct, and since god was to him a infinitely perfect being, and perfection entails existence, it must exist per definition, and since it is infinitely good, then it would not deceive him when he uses his god-given rational faculties. We see the inherent circularity of the argument, since one only has to ask, from whence does these clear and distinct ideas come from? Descartes must answer 'god', and then we can snarkily reply "*so god exists because god has produced in you a clear an distinct idea of god existing, from which you infer it's existence?*", and if we recall correctly, the evil demon also had the ability to deceive logic, so how did Descartes know that his logic was not from the evil demon?

Formulated even more compactly: Descartes justifies his thesis of the absolute existence of extended matter, and consequently of mathematical discourses non-correlated access to it, by saying that since god is all-powerful, perfect, and benevolent " He cannot deceive me when I make proper

---

21 Kant however, would not call '2+2=4' an a priori statement, but a synthetic a priori statements, but this is not so important here, just noting it, if there should be a Kantian reading this and protesting.

use of my understanding" (AF: 29) i.e. when he reasons through clear and distinct ideas. Since it seems to Descartes, that there exists extended matter outside his mind, of which he posses a clear and distinct idea, when he attributes to them the mathematical idea of three dimensions, he can trust that to be true qua god.

Let us look past gods and ideas, to see the raw structure of the argument. Descartes establishes the existence of *a primary absolute*, and derives from it the absolute reach of mathematics, which Meillassoux calls *a derivative absolute* (AF: 30).

> "[...] if we consider the form of which our argument should take, we cannot see any other way of absolutizing mathematical discourse other than by accessing an abso-lute, which, even if it is not itself immediately mathematical [...], must prove sub-sequently capable of following us to derive the absoluteness of mathematics [...] We shall therefore have to strive to provide an argument conforming to the same struc-ture. But in order to bring out the content of our own argument, we must begin by explaining in what regard the content of the Cartesian argument is incapable of with-standing the correlationist critique"[22] (ibid.)

We will start with the weak correlationist critique and then proceed to the strong correlationist one. Through this, we shall see why strong correlationism presents the most radical refutation against any absolute, since it prohibits even the attempt to think one. Only then are we able to fol-low Meillassoux's construction of an argument that can withstand any correlationist critique. First let us see how the weak model of correlationism refutes Descartes ontological argument.

The transcendental critique

This time, Meillassoux doesn't need to create an imaginary opponent, since Kant, in his Transcend-ental Dialectic *Critique of Pure Reason* already proposed a refutation of Descartes ontological argu-ment, and hence the access to the absolute (AF: 31).

For Descartes the non-existence of (a) god is contradictory, as we showed above, since it is the same as "[...] to think a predicate that contradicts its subject". In other words, saying that an infin-

---

22 We will later return to this distinction of the derivative absolute and the maybe not immediately methematical ab-solute, as this is one of the points of which I wish to later discuss.

itely perfect being does not exist, when perfection entails existence, is the same as claiming that there's such a thing as a non-three angled triangle.

But if one where to reject both the subject and predicate, then there would be no problem. This is the point that Kant makes, and the way that he exposes the inherent sophistical nature of Descartes proof. Kant holds that one can maintain, that no god(s) exists without any contradiction. If there really was a contradiction in maintaining that, then Descartes would have proved the existence of his god the and grasped the absolute, but as it happens, Kant is very determined to show that, that's not the case. For Kant, it was indeed crucial to his own philosophy to show that Descartes was wrong, since Kantian philosophy rests on the unknowable nature of the thing-in-it-self, as opposed to the thing-for-us, in order to bridge the gap between rationalism and empiricism. Kant holds that the absolute, the thing-in-it-self, is unknowable, but not unthinkable. For Kant the two propositions that 1) the thing in itself is non-contradictory, and 2) the thing in in itself exists[23] have an absolute ontological scope (AF: 31). The critique Kant offers Descartes ontological argument is, that a contradiction only can exist between an already existing entity or object, and the predicate ascribed to it. As Meillassoux puts it "If we assume that a triangle exists we cannot on pain of contradiction, attribute it more or less than three angles. But if we reject this triangle […] there is no contradiction" (AF: 32)[24]. The idea is however, if we put it in a slightly more formalised manner is, that if I say that y is an attribute of x, then x must exist in order for me to attribute y to it.

> "Kant – following Hume – disqualifies the ontological proof on grounds that there is no contradiction in conceiving of determinate entity as existing or not existing. No determination of an entity can tell us *a priori whether* this entity exists or not – if we mean anything at all by the predicate 'infinitely perfect', we cannot infer infer from it the existence of its subject; and if we do infer its existence, this is because we are no longer saying anything meaningful in using this predicate " (ibid.)

Kant's refutation of the ontological argument has far greater consequences than kicking the Cartesian god off the pedestal. Not only does it disqualify the god-proof, but any proof that wants to demonstrate the absolute necessity of an entity.

---

23 Since perceptions without something being perceived is contradictory (for Kant)

24 I must however mention, that I am a bit confused about the fitness of the example, since I wonder how we shall determine if the triangle existed before the idea of it. What in nature is truly perfectly circular, square and triangular ?

Metaphysics defined

Before we proceed, the reader has been promised a clearer definition of the term 'metaphysics', as well as Meillassoux's definition. So far I have defined it as a postulate regarding the necessary conditions for a given ontology. In other words; the necessary conditions for a postulated reality. We shall start from an encyclopedic point, and then move towards how Meillassoux defines the term.

If one reads the section 1 under 'Metaphysics' in *The Stanford Encyclopedia Of Philosophy* it says :

> "The word 'metaphysics' is notoriously hard to define. Twentieth-century coinages like 'meta-language' and 'metaphilosophy' encourage the impression that metaphysics is a study that somehow "goes beyond" physics, a study devoted to matters that transcend the mundane concerns of Newton and Einstein and Heisenberg. This impression is mistaken. The word 'metaphysics' is derived from a collective title of the fourteen books by Aristotle that we currently think of as making up Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. Aristotle himself did not know the word. (He had four names for the branch of philosophy that is the subject-matter of Metaphysics: 'first philosophy', 'first science', 'wisdom', and 'theology'.) At least one hundred years after Aristotle's death, an editor of his works (in all probability, Andronicus of Rhodes) titled those fourteen books "*Ta meta ta phusika*"—"the after the physicals" or "the ones after the physical ones"—the "physical ones" being the books contained in what we now call Aristotle's *Physics*. The title was probably meant to warn students of Aristotle's philosophy that they should attempt Metaphysics only after they had mastered "the physical ones", the books about nature or the natural world—that is to say, about change, for change is the defining feature of the natural world."[25]

 Put in a popular phrasing; everybody is talking about it, but nobody really knows what it means. There is, however, some agreement upon the subject matter of metaphysics, and for our sake, we shall not make an exhaustive list of those, since it would be quite long. It would seem that metaphysics bears the trait of being reflections upon problems which cannot be empirically resolved, and many metaphysical problems present themselves as having a paradoxical nature[26], in the sense

---

25 Stanford Enclepedia of Philosophy: Metaphysics

26 Take as example the problem of free will. There are empirical studies pointing towards determinism, as well as the opposite. And within physics; the battle over time – is it a flow, a block, or is it an illusion. It would seem that none of these problems are solvable by empirical means, understood in the sense, that they do not seem yield a unequivocal results (and maybe never will).

that there are two or more opposing views, with an equally consistent system. One can think of Kant's antinomies, where one can consistently hold one of each opposing views. I personally favour Schopenhauer's definition of metaphysics, since it creates a simple, but distinct understand of what one can say metaphysics is :

> " Ved *Metafysik* forstår jeg enhver foregiven Erkendelse, som gaar ud over Erfarin-gens Mulighed, altsaa ud over Naturen eller Tingenes Fremtoning for at finde en Forklaring der paa den ene eller den anden Maade betinger Naturen , eller, for at tale populært, paa det, som stikker bag Naturen og gør den mulig"
>
> (Mann 1939: 61-62)

In English: "By metaphysics I understand any claimed realisation/understanding, that extends bey-ond any possible experience, that is, extends beyond nature or the appearance of things [any phe-nomena] that, one way or the other, explains what constitutes nature, or to put it in popular terms ; [an explanation] to what is behind nature and makes it possible". This however does in some way contradict the encyclopedic definition. I would have drawn an equal sign between speculative philosophy and metaphysics here, were it not due to the fact that Meillassoux draws a distinction between what is *speculative* and what is *metaphysical* (AF: 34). By 'speculative' Meillassoux under-stands every type of philosophy/thinking that claims access to some form of absolute, and by 'metaphysics' any type that claims access to some absolute being, or any other absolute by means of the principle of sufficient reason (ibid.). So all metaphysics is speculative, but not all speculative philosophy is metaphysical, according to Meillassoux.

When Meillassoux talks about metaphysics, he often uses metaphysics and dogmatic metaphysics interchangeably. Meillassoux defines dogmatic as: " [...] to be dogmatic is invariably to maintain that this or that – i.e. some determinate entity – must absolutely be, and be the way it is, whether it is Idea, pure Act, atom, indivisible soul, harmonious world, perfect God, infinite substance, World-Soul, global history etc. " (AF: 32).

The escape from metaphysics

The big problem with Descartes attempt to claim access to the absolute, in the eyes of Meillas-soux, is that it posits a necessary entity: god. We are very used to the word 'god', and there are still many, who doesn't bat an eye when (a) god is summoned to help an argument. But what if we called this perfect and necessary entity something else like 'Candy Unicorn' or as many atheist sat-

irists prefer, 'The Flying Spaghetti Monster', we soon see the obvious absurdity. However the blade is two-sided, when, for an example, a proud follower of Hitchens, Dawkins, Dennet and Harris proclaim her or his everlasting allegiance to neo-positivism, they find themselves in a corner of the map of metaphysics – even though they may deny it, since it is dogmatic. That is because we are liable to think, that everything, all events and occurrences must have a reason for being the way they are, instead of otherwise. That line of thinking leads us, hand in hand with Descartes, theist and atheist alike, to the aptly named *principle of sufficient reason* (coined by Leibniz) (AF: 33). As Meillassoux has defined metaphysics, we now see how he needs to proceed in order to escape metaphysics. If all metaphysics believe in an inherent and necessary reason for reality being as it is, Meillassoux must reject all real necessity (ibid.). And that he does – rejecting both subject and predicate, as it were. "Such refusal enjoins us to maintain that there is no legitimate demonstration that a determinate entity should exist unconditionally" (ibid.), but in order to maintain that ancestral statements have meaning " […] we must *uncover an absolute necessity that does not reinstate any form of absolutely necessary entity*" (AF: 34). We have now reached a point where things are going to get delightfully messy. Because this apparent paradox will lead us to Meillassoux's concept of hyper-chaos; however, we need to attend to the strong correlationist refutation of the possibility of knowing the absolute, before we have pierced the firmament of Meillassoux's thinking. Because it is only in turning the epistemic limit of the strong correlationist model on its head, that we get the key to hyper-chaos.

By this interesting twisting of the transcendental correlationist view, Meillassoux seems to have succeeded in manoeuvring out of this circle, but we will later examine if this was because he followed the lines of the edge of a möbius strip, and thus ended outside its circumference, or if he did indeed break it.

Meillassoux's principle of factiality is what he believes is the ultimate amour against any accusations of metaphysical tricks, since:

> "[...] the principle of factiality can be stated as follows: *only facticity is not factual* – viz., only the contingency of what is, is not itself contingent. But it is important to bear in mind the following: the principle of factiality does *not* claim that contingency is necessary; its precise claim is that contingency *alone* is necessary – and only this prevents it from being metaphysical" (AF: 80)

The strong correlationist refutation

As we remember, the strong correlationists are those most opposed to any talk of an absolute, since they hold, that one cannot even think it. *It is simply as illegitimate to claim to know the absolute as it is claim to be able to think it* (AF: 35). But how does strong correlationism de-legitimise thinking about an absolute? Simple, says Meillassoux, by way of the correlationist circle, "For by what miraculous operation is Kantian thought able to get out of itself in order to verify that what is unthinkable for us, is impossible in itself?" (ibid.).

Like the transcendental correlationist, the strong correlationist has established *the primacy of the correlate* (AF: 37) – that we cannot separate ourselves from our relation to the world, we cannot access the uncorrelated. This is also the objection towards realism and materialism. But in order to resist any vitalist and subjective idealist attempt to hypostatise the correlation, a second rule of the strong correlationist must be presented; that of *facticity*. "I call 'facticity' the absence of reason for any reality: in other words, the impossibility of providing an ultimate ground for the existence of any being" (TWB: 21). Like Hume's example of the billiard ball, we only observe contingency, never causality, and with facticity we only observe the fact that some things exist, not why things ultimately exist, or whether they need to or not; meaning that *we can only ever attain conditional necessity, not the absolute necessity*. This is the crack in the circle fortress, since this implicate that *all correlations are factual*, and that means that one cannot maintain that correlations are an absolute necessary component of every reality. To underline the point, Meillassoux uses, what we shall call: *the death analogy*.

> "[...] the fact that I can't imagine the non-existence of subjectivity, since to imagine is to exist as a subject, does not prove it impossible: I can't imagine what it is like to be dead, since to imagine it means we are still alive [sic.], but, unfortunately, this fact does not prove that death is impossible. The limits of my imagination are not the index of my immortality" (TWB: 22)

If the correlationist wishes to maintain her or his refutation of the subjectivist, Meillassoux claims that they "[...] must admit that we can positively think of a possibility which is essentially independent of the correlation" (TWB: 23). According to Meillassoux, he has discovered a performative contradiction in the strong correlationists thinking, since they implicitly have absolutised facticity. This means that facticity is not a fact, but that facticity is an absolute necessity. Meillassoux calls this *the principle of factiality* and with this he maintains that he has reached an absolute irrefut-

able for any correlationist (TWB: 24, AF: 63). The principle of factiality is thus stating, that contingency and facticity are not the impossibility for knowing the absolute, but in fact the nature of the absolute.

Chapter III

The Absolute: Hyper-chaos

Hyper-chaos part I

We have finally pierced the firmament, and are starting to get the outline of Meillassoux's absolute. Meillassoux puts an equal sign between facticity, contingency and his absolute (AF: 62), but what does that really mean ? Meillassoux holds that facticity and contingency is identical, if one does not think of facticity as a possibility of ignorance, but as "[...] comprising a *positive knowledge* of everything's capacity-to-be-other or capacity-not-to-be" (ibid.). He distinguishes between absolute contingency, as described above, which he simply calls contingency, and empirical contingency, which he calls *precariousness.* In the words of Meillassoux :

> "Thus 'precariousness' designates a possibility of not-being which must eventually be realized. By way of contrast, absolute contingency – for which we henceforth reserve the term 'contingency' – designates a *pure possibility*; one which may never realized " (ibid.)

This means that facticity is no longer to be considered the limit of our possible understanding of reality, but reality itself. Seeing as pure possibility cannot be thought of as an entity, it must be understood as a condition, Meillassoux thinks of this condition as a non-physical time (TWB: 25). Meillassoux calls this absolute *hyper-chaos.* Normally when we think of chaos, we think of an indeterministic becoming, but hyper-chaos is a chaos were the condition 'chaos' can change into order and vice versa.

> "[...] its contingency is so radical that even becoming, disorder, or randomness can be destroyed by it, and replaced by order, determinism and fixity. Things are so contingent in hyper-chaos, that time is able to destroy even the becoming of things. If facticity is the absolute, contingency no longer means the necessity of destruction or disorder, but rather the equal contingency of order and disorder, of becoming and sempiternity." (ibid.).

This seemingly paradoxical nature of hyper-chaos needs to be explored further, but we shall start by trying to grasp what is meant with a time outside time.

Time

We will start with a short and simple summary of the different stances on the concept of time, and then proceed to wrap our heads around the idea of a time outside time. This, of course, means that we assume that time isn't an illusion, but exists. We will not be handling the problem of defining the present or any critiques of the various concepts, we are only interested in how they relate to Meillassoux's thoughts about hyper-chaos.

When Meillassoux introduced a time before givenness, via ancestrality, he was not explicit about his conception of time. Now with the introduction of hyper-chaos, as a time outside time, the picture didn't exactly get any clearer. Before we grapple with this odd time outside time, let us pretend that there isn't a time outside time, but only (physical) time. Through this thought-exercise, I believe we will get a clearer notion of hyper-chaos.

What kind of time would fit a hyper-chaos, if it was a physical time, and is it possible to maintain that one can speak of ancestral statements as being true in this type of time? We will start by examining the different concepts of time (of which I am informed) and access what consequences they have for possibility of a time before givenness, and thus ancestral statements validity. Then what kind of time a hyper-chaos would be, if it was, and can be physical, and finally how, if possible, a time outside time can be conceived.

 The nature of time is an ongoing debate within the world of physics as well as in philosophy – nobody really knows what it is. Is it an ever-flowing stream from the now into the future, or is it block-time, in which the succession of events may feel like a flow, but is in fact not – or maybe a growing block-time ? Time is an immensely complex subject; if we for an example talk about time within the 'simple' Newtonian framework, the concept of time contains many features like: duration, continuity, order, simultaneity, flow and the arrow (direction of flow). All of those features are "[...] logically detachable, yet they all stick together in the master clock Newton dubbed 'time' " (Callender 2014: 16). But the fact, that they were/are logically detachable, also meant that sooner or later some sharp minds were bound to act on the fact, and 'make' time an even more perplexing subject. Ludwig Boltzmann (1844-1906) reasoned that one could cut out the built-in arrow of time, since Newton's laws work equally with a time that flows one way or the other. "Instead he proposed that the distinction between past and present is not intrinsic to time but arises from asymmetries in how matter in the universe is organized" (ibid.). And later came Albert Einstein (1879-1955) and demolished the idea of absolute simultaneity, since he believed that according to his special theory of relativity, events are happening relative to the velocity of the perceiver. Einstein

thus did away with time as separate entity from space, but joined space and time together in the famous concept: *spacetime*. And today there exists various conceptions of time, some more exotic than others (in relation to common-sense). We will, however, only be making a very simple sketch from a philosophical viewpoint, since this is all we need in order to get at the heart of the problem.

Block time: Within philosophy of time, this is called the B theory of time, we will however refer to it as *Block Time*[27]. Block time indicates that all time is happening all the time (past, present, and future are all equally real). Within a block-time type of reality, consciousness would in a sense always be present, so there would never truly be a point in time without the ability to be given. Givenness was never coming into being, but was already always there. This is also called an eternalist view of time, and the eternalist ontology of time is tied to determinism. Within this ontology of time, there cannot be a time before givenness, and one can wonder if it makes sense to talk of a beginning of the universe at all, when all time is happening simultaneously, infinitely. If it makes sense to talk of a beginning of the universe in this ontology of time, we can make true statements about the ancient past, but we cannot maintain that they are ancestral statements, as Meillassoux has defined the term. This is because, that this mode of time, which can be supported by the relativity theory, allows one to travel back in time, in certain spacetime configurations such as "[...] a rotating universe, a rotating cylinder and, most famously, a wormhole – a tunnel through space and time" (Callender 2014: 25).

 In the other side of the fence, we have the presentist ontology of time, which is completely indeterministic. They argue that only the now is real, leaving both past and future non-existent.

Time as a flux: This is also called the A theory of time, but we shall refer to it as presentism/presentist ontology of time[28]. In the case of the presentist ontology of time, does it make sense to talk of an ancestral past, from an ontological point of view? The past happened, yes, but is now non-existent, thus no propositions about the coming into being of the given have a referent, only a mental referent of the idea of a past, produced by a system of valid interpretative models; but this idea takes place in the now – so it's a sort of meta-retrojection, since one first must imagine the existence of a non-existent past, in order to imagine a past event in which to retroject. The only reason I speculate about this, is since ancestral statements only can have one meaning – a realist one – then one is permitted to ask why these statements have meaning at all. That answer, I assume, must be because it points to an actual *real* event, but in fact, there is no

---

27 Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: The A Theory and The B Theory

28 Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: The A Theory and The B Theory

longer any event to which one can refer to as real. The point being, that within a presentist onto-
logy of time, the past is not real any more, and it is, as the future, immune to any projections. In
this ontology of time, all pasts are ontologically equally inaccessible, and ancestral statements are
impossible.

Growing block time: In the middle of the extremes we have the idea of growing block time, also
called; growing block universe. This is the concept of time which is closest to our common-sense
experience of time – the future does not exist yet, the present exists and the past exists, although
as something mute, 'frozen' and unchangeable. This can be thought of as an accumulation of time.
Within this concept of time, we can talk about a time before giveness, and it is possible to talk of
ancestral statements.

Hyper-chaos as physical time: If hyper-chaos existed as a physical time, it should be able to jump
between every temporal mode. However, Hyper-chaos cannot subsist in a purely deterministic
time, nor a completely indeterministic time, since both are mutually exclusive, and since hyper-
-chaos can be both order and chaos e.g. both deterministic and indeterministic. Meaning that it
must be a time with both deterministic and indeterministic elements. The only contender left is
growing block time, where we have a set and determined past, and the indeterminate future (let
us forget the present, here) – but there is still a problem. Hyper-chaos should be able to alter the
past as well, since it is pure possibility. We now see why hyper-chaos cannot be physical time. This
supports Meillassoux's claim, that it must be thought of as non-entity, since all these conceptions
of time posits time (whether in the concept of spacetime or otherwise) as an entity.

Hyper-chaos as a time outside time: I'm not sure how we can conceive of a time outside time,
since to think of possible events is to posit them in a line of succession, meaning in an already es-
tablished linear mode of time. Meillassoux calls his hyper-chaos; pure possibility, absolute contin-
gency, meaning that all laws of nature can change at any moment for no reason whatsoever, and
could have done that a near infinity of times, also the nature of time. That however implies a line
of thinking, that posits a linear time, outside physical time. This could mean, that the universe
could have begun and ended a million times before, but we will never be able to know, since we
only have the empirical data (arche-fossils) of this particular beginning. And if the past can change,
wouldn't that undermine his entry point (the problem of ancestrality) to his critique of the correla-
tionists ?

We shall return to these critical questions, after we have re-established the logic behind this hyper-chaos. We have already been through it in a sense, but I believe we are able to make his point even more clear. Only after this clarification, can we discuss the implication of hyper-chaos on his statement, that mathematics are the derivative absolute, and only then can we fully speculate on hyper-chaos's implications for his own philosophy, and the cosmological statements of the natural sciences.

Hyper-chaos part II

We must remember that Meillassoux's mode of inquiry is rationalistic, and that he wants to establish his absolute first, since this will enable him to salvage the Cartesian model, ensuring mathematics as the derivative absolute. In the process he has used the correlationists critiques of metaphysics to find an absolute capable of withstanding any of their refutations, by using the strong correlationist model against the transcendental, and turning the strong model on it's head. He has then ended up, with a non-metaphysical absolute, since he has rejected that it is an entity, and that it provides an ultimate reason – as per his definition of metaphysics. What seems paradoxical is that he by reason, has come to the conclusion, that one must abandon any ultimate reason and establish *unreason* as an absolute ontological property (AF: 53), and that he establish a necessary absolute, that is unnecessary (principle of factiality), while maintaining the principle of non-contradiction e.g. everything could collapse, even logical laws (ibid.), except for the principle of non-contradiction.

In short: reality is without any ultimate reason, and can change or not, for no reason at all, and can even create, what would seem like a necessary entity, but destroy it all the same.

> "We could certainly envisage the emergence of an entity which, *as a matter of fact,* would be indiscernible from a necessary entity, viz., an everlasting entity, which would go on existing, like a necessary entity." (AF: 65-66)

All this sounds rather messy, but let us try to recapitulate the propositions, and logical backbone of hyper-chaos.

In Meillassoux's refutation of the strong model of correlationism, we extracted the principle of factiality, which was the only way to pass through the circle, but this required Meillassoux to turn the chaos of facticity into positive knowledge of reality. In order to curb the chaos from being unthinkable, illogical and self-contradictory, he turns to the weak correlationism to salvage the thinkability of the absolute – the thinkability of hyper-chaos. Meillassoux reformulates Kant's two proposition

about the absolute – that the absolute is non-contradictory, and that there is an absolute – within the framework of unreason (AF: 67).

 "[...] the principle of unreason teaches us that *it is because the principle of reason is absolutely false that the principle of non-contradiction is absolutely true*" (AF: 71).

Leibniz established two principles for absolute metaphysical rationality, that of *the principle of sufficient reason* and of *non-contradiction*. Later in philosophy, as Meillassoux explains, Hegel undermined the principle of non-contradiction in order to absolutise the principle of sufficient reason, in the formulation of his absolute. And closer to contemporary philosophy both principles were de-absolutised in the cooking pot of strong Wittgensteinian-Heideggarian correlationism. As I understand it, Meillassoux is simply saying that you cannot use a reason, absolute or otherwise, to contradict yourself, which proves that non-contradiction is the minimum requirement for any meaningful thought about reality. The principle of unreason ensures that one cannot trump the logical primacy of non-contradiction. One must also remember that the principle of unreason is an ontological premise for Meillassoux. This means that reality cannot be contradictory – what is, is not what it is not, what is not, is not what is. However in the context of unreason it sounds as follows:

1. A necessary entity is impossible.

2. The contingency of the entity is necessary .

 So there cannot be a necessary entity on pain of contradiction (ibid.). "[...] *it is necessary that there be something rather than nothing because it is necessarily contingent that there is something rather than something else.*" (AF: 76)

This may sound like a circular claim, but let us examine it some more.

The fascinating thing about hyper-chaos is that it sounds astonishingly complex, but it seems in fact to be very simple – it is in a way the most minimalistic ontological premise. It only assumes that reality exists for no reason, and it cannot be contradictory, because that would entail absolute necessity/reason for existing. The thesis is thus " [...] *a contradictory entity is absolutely impossible, because if an entity was contradictory, it would be necessary"* . One thing that is very important to understand is that Meillassoux does not claim that a contradictory entity is impossible on *the basis of it being absurd or meaningless/nonsense,* but rather because:

> '"[...] I maintain that contradiction is impossible – that's why I'm a rationalist – but I maintain that it is impossible because non-contradiction is the condition for radical

Chaos, that is Hyper-Chaos. Notice that I don't claim that a contradictory being is impossible, because it is absurd, or because it is non-sense. On the contrary, I think that a contradictory being is not meaningless: you can define it rigourously [sic], and you can reason about it. You can rationally demonstrate that a real contradiction is impossible because it would be a necessary being. In other words, it is because the metaphysical principle of reason is absolutely false, that the logical principle of non-contradiction is absolutely true" (TWB: 28)

One thing we haven't tackled yet is the fact that Meillassoux has described his hyper-chaos in near contradictory terms, when he says it can change into order and back to chaos. I have been unable to acquire a clear passage where he dispels that, but I think it might help if we thought of it in terms 'states'. So the state of *order* is in fact not order, it is just chaos 'doing the same thing', whereas the state *chaos* is chaos doing what we conventionally understand chaos 'doing'. Meillassoux is very 'French' and very continental in his way of writing, and this means that he throws sentences around that does sound contradictory (some even are), but if one scratches beneath the colour of the painting, the logic does seem solid enough, even though a bit odd. First off, it is called hyper-*chaos* and it is described as a radical chaos, so when Meillassoux says it can 'change into order' I believe it is more a rhetorical tactic to vex the reader, keeping the interest peeked – it certainly worked on me – more than a statement about his chaos, that should be taken literally. However, I cannot be completely sure, but for now, this is the interpretation that we will take as being true (we will discuss the other version in the postlude of the thesis)

In the beginning I thought of hyper-chaos like entropy, but it's not like entropy, since entropy is probabilistic. Sure you could in theory experience something chaotic, for an example, there is a probability (albeit infinitesimally small) that half of the coffee in my cup would freeze, while the other half would boil, or that all the oxygen molecules in my flat would cluster together in my bathroom. It is pretty improbable, but not impossible in a probabilistic universe. Probability is often exemplified with the tos of a dice. An adequate example of hyper-chaos would be throwing a dice that turns into a unicorn or destroys reality, or even just behaves as a dice usually would when thrown.

I imagine that if any natural scientist read this, they would get really confused as to how this hyper-chaos is supposed to secure that the natural sciences is making true statements about reality. Whereas Hume's problem of induction was an epistemological problem that Popper tried to solve, the idea of hyper-chaos is an ontological problem of the nature of reality that turns Hume's prob-

lem into reality, so to speak. This must be considered a big problem for the natural sciences, since this means that any uncovered 'law' could change for no reason.

The natural sciences are mainly portrayed as believing that reality to conforms to the principle of causality, hyper-chaos presents an ultimate problem for the natural sciences; denies causality completely. Not even the method of falsification can help in a universe of hyper-chaos, since:

> "Falsification does not claim that the laws of nature could change for no reason in the future but only that the *theories* espoused by the sciences of nature are always susceptible to refutation by *unexpected* experimental results" (AF: 85)

Falsification is simply not an adequate methical approach to Meillassoux's reality. So how would one go about securing the validity of scientific statements ?

Meillassoux realises hyper-chaos presents a problem for the natural sciences, but stresses that it is due to the employment of mathematical modelling that the natural sciences ancestral statements, and statements about reality in general, are true.

Before we tend to how hyper-chaos and mathematics are connected, let's us ask an obvious question, just to stress a point: If reality in-itself is a radical chaos, does the fact the the world is orderly and stable not pose as counterfactual ? The simple answer is 'no'. Reality may seem or even be in a state of 'order' now, but that does not mean that it always was so, or that it always will be so. "Contingency is such that anything might happen, even nothing at all, so what is, remains as it is" (AF: 63).

The language of hyper-chaos: Mathematics

So far we have gotten a clearer picture of what hyper-chaos 'is' or rather what this conceptualisation of reality entails. We have followed Meillassoux's reasoning and argumentation, and we have pierced the firmament of Meillassoux universe. We have answered the question of what reality really is, through the thoughts of Meillassoux, and we have now to answers how we can know it.

Reality in-itself, as we remember, can be thought of in terms of primary qualities, and all primary qualities are mathematizable. An interesting thing about mathematics is that it can deal with weird things that we usually can't comprehend, such as infinities (in plural), and chaos. George Cantor (1845-1918) is the mind that is attributed with making it possible to conceptualise more than one

infinity. When we count '1,2,3,4, … to infinity' (and backwards to a negative infinity) we call that a countable infinity, but what of the decimals in between 1 and 2, or any other pair of numbers – here there is also an infinity, but one that is uncountable[29]. We can see how this mathematical fact could give rise to the idea that time and change is an illusion, like the ancient thinkers Parmenides and Zeno of Elea thought. But Cantor did something remarkable, he created the Set Theory. With this theory you could have a countable infinity with the uncountable infinity in between and more. Suddenly infinity became a lot smaller and a lot bigger at the same time[30]. This seems pretty counter-intuitive and flat out weird to say that there are small and big infinities, but it's not a problem for mathematics. The same goes for chaos and other equally abstract concepts. We will, however, not go into detail about the philosophy of mathematics. We only needed to stress the fact, that mathematics aren't bound by the same limits that our imagination is. That is to say; while we cannot imagine the world consisting of 4, 9 or even more dimensions, mathematics can conceive of it. This is probably due to the fact, that when we imagine things, it is for-us – en secondary quality terms.

In theory, one could make mathematical models of an infinity of universes, with an infinity of different laws, and an infinity of universes without any laws etc. You could even have a finite set of universes that expands infinitely, or an infinity of universes, where some of them are finite.

Even though mathematics is thinkable, it can still conceive the incomprehensible.

> "Whatever is mathematically conceivable is absolutely possible (take the whole quote)" (AF: 126).

Mathematics, are for Meillassoux, the only tool that the natural sciences can utilise when dealing with events that are impossible to be given. This is not restricted to the ancestral realm, but to any future were consciousness is non-existent. Meillassoux uses the term *dia-chronicity* to characterise any statements about events anterior and ulterior to consciousness (AF: 112). Within the term 'Dia-chronicity' we see the road to objectivity . If we believe that the natural sciences can make meaningful statement's about any time without consciousness, we must hold that they are able to make meaningful statement's about what is outside consciousness, thus that they are able to make objectively true (or false) statements.

---

29 This is because it impossible to actually start counting with decimals – were would we put the first decimal, when counting?

30 Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: Set Theory

Postlude

Contrary to the other meta-chapters, this one will not begin with a long colourful introduction. Let's get straight to the point. During our reading and examination of Meillassoux's philosophy and consequently his quest for the absolute, we have gathered a few loose ends. It is time to see if we can tie some of these together, and thus conclude our journey. We will make a short list of questions which we shall address and discuss. Through this, we shall reach the endgame, where we confront Meillassoux, and ourselves, with his hyper-chaos.

A)   Can Meillassoux place hyper-chaos beyond the realm of the physical, when Meillassoux is a materialist?

B)   Can Meillassoux, as a rationalist, deny the principle of (sufficient) reason?

C)   Does the principle of factiality truly deny the possibility of some encounters with the real being a correlation?

D)   Would it be possible through the concept of hyper-chaos that there exists a world were the human consciousness is trapped in the correlationist circle?

A and B: The escape from metaphysics part II

Meillassoux calls himself a materialist and a non-metaphysician, but his concept of hyper-chaos seems to be something that transcends those labels. As I have come to understand hyper-chaos, it is a simple, if not the simplest, principle for any ontology, but the problem as I see it, is that is placed beyond the realm of the physical:

> "[...] [Hyper-chaos] is inconceivable for physics, since it is capable of destroying, without cause or reason, every physical law, just as it is inconceivable for metaphysics, since it is capable of destroying every determinate entity, even a god, even God."
> (AF 64)

Is it possible for a materialist to hold the view that the condition for the physical reality is beyond physics, and does this not pose a problem for the natural sciences? I would like to reawaken the discussion about metaphysics first, and then we shall approach the question on what consequence

this has for the natural sciences, since immunising the natural sciences from correlationist critique was part of his mission.

If we remember correctly, Meillassoux made a distinction between metaphysical and speculative thinking. As Meillassoux defined them; speculative thinking was the type of thinking that claimed to have the ability to access *some form of absolute*, and metaphysical thinking was the kind of thinking that claimed to be able to access some form of absolute being " [...] or access the absolute through the principle of sufficient reason" (AF: 34). This of course means that all metaphysical thinking is speculative thinking, while not all speculative thinking is metaphysical thinking, as we covered in the interlude. The question I wish to ask is; should we accept that distinction to begin with ? I hold the belief that definitions should have the function of giving ones thought a clearer passage, when going through difficult mazes of theories, thoughts and ideas. But definitions only hold meaning in the specific context they are formulated in – what Plato defines as an 'idea' is quite different from what Hume defines as an 'idea'. This was also, in a sense, formulated in the in- terlude, where we saw that one epistemological system was valid in one metaphysical context, and not in another, due to the initial ontology formulated in said context.

So far, we have extracted from our reading that Meillassoux is a materialist, and that his mode of inquiry is rationalistic. Part of the goal of his philosophy is show the correlationists that they can- not maintain their views and support the claims of the natural sciences in earnest, as well as demonstrating that the natural sciences can have full access to the absolute (by mathematical dis- course). This was done by rendering the correlationist critiques mute by his new formulation of the absolute – hyper-chaos. Meillassoux's absolute is reached through non-metaphysical speculation, since he reaches it without claiming to access an absolute being (or necessary entity), or without appealing to the principle of sufficient reason (but through the principle of non-contradiction and his own the principle of unreason or factiality).

Two things thoroughly puzzles me: That a materialist can claim that there is a non-physical ontolo- gical premise, and that it is possible for a rationalist to deny reason itself. Meillassoux has written that he does not believe in reality, a statement that still seems odd to me, unless understood in the sense that he is indeed a nominalist (which we also reasoned to be the case in the interlude, but were we halted the conclusion).

The speculative materialist: Materialism is a monism that holds the belief that matter[31] is the fun- damental substance from which everything else arises. Within materialism, you cannot have any-

---

31 Energy is also considered matter ($E=mc^2$).

thing that does not supervene on the physical, meaning that nothing should be inaccessible for the science of physics, within this speculative framework. My question here is, does Meillassoux, when he holds that hyper-chaos is non-physical, create a dualism, thus undermining his position as a materialist?

I will start by saying 'yes' and 'no'. Hyper-chaos is a non-entity and is thus not a thing that exists. As I understand it, you can only have a 'real' dualism when we split the world into different substances, like spirit and matter and the like, which have fundamentally different properties. This is not the case with Meillassoux's hyper-chaos. He does, however, insists that it is inconceivable for the science of physics, and he has also expressed that it is something non-physical – we will examine whether or not this is a metaphysical claim shortly. The only way, as I see it, to maintain his position as a materialist is to say that *hyper-chaos is a theoretical concept* about the nature of reality. Keep in mind that Meillassoux does *not* claim that is the case, this is my own speculation.

Hyper-chaos as a theoretical concept: If hyper-chaos is to be considered a theoretical concept, in order for Meillassoux to maintain a materialist position, we must ask whether or not this poses a problem for the natural sciences. Every scientific theory, if we are to believe and accept Poppers claim, can only be considered scientific insofar that it can be subjected to falsification. If that is not possible, then, Popper would call it metaphysics. We have, however, already discussed to problem of falsification – it does not resolve the problem of induction. So what are we to think ? If we think of it as a theoretical concept, then we ruin Meillassoux's concept, since it is supposed to be ontological, and not epistemological.

But if Meillassoux holds that it is not a theoretical concept, then we must insist that it creates a form of dualism, albeit not one of substances.

Hyper-chaos and metaphysics: Let us return to our discussion of the distinction between metaphysical thinking and speculative thinking. Seeing as this concept is supposed to secure the natural sciences access to the objective reality from correlationist critiques, I think it would be fair to view the distinction of metaphysical and speculative thinking in light of the natural sciences enterprise. Does the distinction matter, when both types of thinking posits the ontological premise of reality 'behind the scenes' ? To my mind, it doesn't have any practical value for the natural sciences, since both speculative and metaphysical claims are equally difficult to prove or disprove by empirical means. It does not make things less complicated. And I wonder if one couldn't re-formulate a metaphysical claim, so that it would be indistinguishable from a speculative claim. We must remember that the distinction hinges on whether ones claim is made with the assumption that the

principle of sufficient reason is true, or/and if one claims epistemological access an absolute entity. Whether one is able to make reformulation of a metaphysical claim to a speculative one remains to be seen, but I admit that I believe it can be done.

Unreasonable reason: Meillassoux has deduced the principle of factiality i.e. hyper-chaos, and deduction is the way of the rationalist. Meillassoux's denies reason, and creates his own principle of unreason, which, together with the principle of non-contradiction, secures the logic of hyper--chaos. How can one distinguish an unreason from a reason, besides its name? To my mind, when one claims to know why things are the way they are, and why one can know them, they give a reasons for that being the case – if there is none to be found, then why posit a non-reason, why not just leave the 'space' where reason normally is put empty[32] ? My confusion may be caused by semantics, or because I am unable to comprehend the profundity of Meillassoux's unreason. Either way, the question remains unanswered.

A and B conclusion: It would appear that Meillassoux has created a form of dualism with the concept of hyper-chaos, which is in conflict with the monism of materialism. Whether hyper-chaos should be considered metaphysical or speculative concept is actually not important, since it poses the same problem for the natural sciences, leaving the distinction mute within their particular framework. In other words; the context in which the distinction was formulated is different from the context of the natural sciences. I do, however, believe the distinction does serve a purpose for philosophers, but I do not see it as effective as it would seem Meillassoux believes it is.

Can Meillassoux 'abandon reason' and call himself a rationalist? It would seem like a straight forward answer: "*no*". But nothing is straight forward with Meillassoux. When I tried to answer the question, the answer was like a slippery eel, squirming free of my grip, and I stand empty handed, but with a sense that there is something odd going on.

---

32 Meillassoux does keep the principle of non-contradiction, but that is all. That is 'rationalism on one leg', and one could also ask: couldn't this leg be destroyed as paraconsistent logicians and philosophers, such as Graham Priest, have done.

C and D: The revenge of the Cartesian demon (?)

When Meillassoux refuted the strong correlationist, he showed that the shield, named facticity, held to protect the strong correlationists from the idealist and vitalist attempts to hypostatise the correlation, was a sword pointed at the correlationists themselves. As we wrote in *Chapter 2: Refutation of the strong correlationists* : facticity implicates that all correlations are factual, meaning that not all correlations are an absolute necessary component of every reality. But does this ensure that every reality is free from correlation ?

Saying that all correlations aren't an absolute necessary component of every reality, is also saying that not every reality is necessarily absolutely free from correlations. Can we truly know which encounter with the real is a correlation, and which is 'direct' ?

Meillassoux would answer: "*well yes, of course, by way of mathematical modelling ! "*. Through our journey we started with the aporia: the problem of the arche-fossil. This was later reformulated to the problem of ancestrality, and this led us to Meillassoux's concept of dia-chronicity. With dia-chronicity, Meillassoux showed us, that if we believe that the natural sciences can talk of a time and a reality without human consciousness, then we must believe that they can make true statements about the objective reality – about the absolute. And as we remember, anything that is mathematically possible is absolutisable, this, however, does not mean that what is mathematically possible is true of reality. But how do we know what mathematical model is true of reality, when we have no empirical access to determine whether it is true or not?

There is no reason as to why things are the way they are, and they could change for no reason. Is there any reason why mathematical discourse should be different from any other discourse? Mathematics can conceive of a myriad of – for a lack of a better word – insane realities, unimaginable realities. Could it not conceive of one where our conscious access to reality was governed by a chaotic algorithm? Sometimes it would be true/direct, other times it would be 'fuzzy' (partly true and false) and other times completely false – Like in a dream where everything makes sense, no matter how reasonable, weird or unreasonable it seems when one is awake. Before we continue, I want to express that I think it seems highly plausible that mathematics are able to present a model of reality that has practical value. But as I see it, there is two major problems, connected to what we could call *the problem of facticity* : 1) Meillassoux has a derivative absolute and a primary absolute, but no way of showing that the derivative absolute is actually grasping the figures of primary absolute (as it was, or as it will be), only that is possible to do it 2) In the realm of Hyper-

-chaos, it is possible to conceive of a world where consciousness and our logic is trapped in a cor-relationist circle.

C and D conclusion: It is unclear to me how Meillassoux would be able to cope with the scope of hyper-chaos, and this masters thesis would need to be continued into a ph.d. thesis in order to get closer to an answer. Not surprisingly; it is easier to come up with questions, than answers, easier to critique an argument, than construct one.

Meillassoux's quest for the absolute

The questions of what reality really is, how it came to be, and whether or not we can know it, haven't been asked for a while within philosophy, and they are mostly used as examples of pseudo-questions – remnants of pre-critical period. Meillassoux, however, insists that they are questions worth posing, if they can be reformulated from a metaphysical context into a speculative one. Even though it seem that Meillassoux is pointing his finger at contemporary philosophy, and telling it get 'off the natural sciences back', he is also pointing his fingers at the natural sciences, telling them that they themselves cannot hold that their strongest tool (mathematical modelling) is valid, if the do not buy into the idea of the absolute and a way to know it. As Meillassoux writes :

> " Since science has convinced us that all metaphysics is illusory, and since every ab-solute is metaphysical, then it follows that, in order to think science, we must re-nounce every form of absolute. But by the same token, we must also renounce the belief in absolute scope of mathematics – the absolute scope that actually consti-tutes the very essence of the revolution in thought engendered by modern science "
> (AF: 125)

In my thesis I have sought to look at Meillassoux philosophy with a (very) critical loupe, and I have focused on what I believed to be problems in his philosophy. But would like to finish my thesis by expressing my deepest admiration. Meillassoux has delivered a whole new way for me to think about the status of contemporary philosophy. I, myself, have been enchanted with post-structural and postmodern philosophy, but I have also been disenchanted by the fact that it is unable to cri-tique ideologies, fake/pseudo science, and think outside the world of discourses, I, however, did not see the crack in the circle. Whether Meillassoux's critiques all are warranted and valid need to be examined more in depth, but he has, for me at least, punched some holes in the strong correla-tionist circle fortress. Another fantastic thing about Meillassoux is his insistence that the great

questions are still worthy of being asked. We shouldn't be afraid, as thinkers, to ask the big questions again, but we must also remember our past. We cannot go back to being dogmatic, or pre-critical, but we can't stay within the correlationist circle fortress – we can't let post-factualists and flat-earthers opinions be as valid as scientific data (social science and the humanities included), because they are not. It would seem that we can in fact know reality, 'the how' is a more complex question to answer, but that is exactly we we shouldn't stop asking it.

> "If Hume's problem woke Kant from his dogmatic slumber, we can only hope that the problem of ancestrality succeeds in waking us from our correlationist slumber, by enjoining us to reconcile thought and the absolute" (AF: 128)

I will leave my thesis on this high note, concluding my composition, and our journey following Meillassoux's quest for the absolute.

Literature

Berkeley, George. *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Understanding,* Oxford University Press, 1998, Oxford.

Bryant, Srnicek, Harman et al. *The Speculative Turn,* Re-press, 2011, Victoria.

Callender, Craig. *Is Time An Illussion?* Scientific American p. 15-21 Vol. 23 No. 4 Autumn, 2014.

Descartes, René, *Meditationer over den første Filsofi*, Det lille Forlag, 2002, Viborg.

Fasolt, Constantin. *The Limits of History ,* University of Chicago Press, 2004, Chicago.

Mann, Thomas. *Udødelige Tanker,* Martins Forlag, 1939, Copenhagen.

Meillassoux, Quentin. *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency,* Bloomsbury Academic, 2015.

Meillassoux, Quentin. *Science Fiction and Extro-Science Fiction,* Univocal Publishing, 2015, Minneapolis

Meillassoux, Quentin and Longo, Anna, *Time Without Becoming,* Mimesis, 2014.

Kant, Immanuel, *Prolegomena,* Det lille Forlag, 2. press, 2011, Viborg.

Ricoeur, Paul, *The Rule of the Metaphor,* Routledge, 2003, London

Links:

Bagaria, Joan, "Set Theory", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2017 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2017/entries/set-theory/

Downing, Lisa, "George Berkeley",*The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2013 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2013/entries/berkeley/

Ismael, Jenann, "Quantum Mechanics",*The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2015 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2015/entries/qm/

Markosian, Ned, "Time", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2016 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2016/entries/time/

Searle, John, "Rationality and Explanation", *Philosophical Overdose,* Youtube (Feb 2017) URL= https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dsbCc5hqG6A&t=797s

Stoljar, Daniel, "Physicalism",*The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2016 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2016/entries/physicalism/

Unknown author, "Three Models", *Kepler's Discovery,* last visited 26-9-2017, URL = http://www.keplersdiscovery.com/Hypotheses.html