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Of *Apousia* and *Parousia*: The correlation between Heidegger and Meillassoux

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The essential is contingency. I mean that, by definition, existence is not necessity. To exist is simply to be there*; what exists appears, lets itself be* encountered*, but one can never* deduce *it. There are people, I believe, who have understood this. Only they have tried to overcome this contingency by inventing a necessary, self-caused being. Yet no necessary being can explain existence: contingency is not an illusion, an appearance that can be dissipated; it is the absolute, and therefore it is perfect gratuitousness.*

—Jean-Paul Sartre, *La Nausée*[1]

Introduction

The question of contingency has been asked by philosophy for more than the last ten years; it is however only upon the publication of Meillassoux's *After Finitude* that it has come to the front of philosophical enquiry. Granting Sartre an exceptional philosophical acumen in foreseeing it, the issue nevertheless arises with respect to the emergence itself of the questioning

[1] Jean-Paul Sartre, *La Nausée* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1938), p. 155, my translation.

of contingency. Has it been an advent, a *surgissement* as Meillassoux would have it, *ex nihilo*? Or, instead, can we trace its arrival through the history of philosophy itself? We might even say, without anticipating the work ahead, that according to Meillassoux there has almost been a forgetting of the question of contingency—better yet, a duplicity, a deception, or a disguise have characterised this questioning: for contingency has never been hidden, it has simply not been taken seriously. It is there as a category of the understanding in Kant's *Critique*, or in the unfolding of the Concept (*Begriff*) in Hegel's *Logic;* finally, Sartre states that contingency is the absolute itself. Despite these appearances, with Meillassoux we face a revelation, an epiphany regarding the status of contingency: contingency is the Absolute. Not the absolute for our understanding, for-us (*für uns*) or for existence. It is the Absolute in-itself. With Meillassoux we discover the displacement of contingency and the deprivation of the thing itself present within previous philosophical inquiry. The conclusion is decisive: '*we are going to put back into the thing itself what we mistakenly took to be an incapacity in thought*'.[2] Contingency does not represent the insufficiency of our reason, unable to grasp anything but the fleeting nature of every being. This very possibility of every being to be other than it is represents our very access to the Absolute. Everything is contingent: not just for us, but as a real possibility for every being, principle or physical law to be other than it is. This is the only certainty that presents itself to thought, as a property of beings themselves rather than of their correlation to thought. Contingency: the real impossibility of any being whatsoever to be necessary, to be incapable of being other than it is. Contingency, *and contingency alone*, is necessary: this is the principle of 'unreason'. There exists no being that has a necessary ground for being the way it is and that could prevent it from being other than itself. This is the one and only necessity that thought has to face. Everything is without reason.

This essay confronts the thinking of the necessity of contingency alongside the ontological opening carried out by Heidegger. This is not an

[2] Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*, trans. by Ray Brassier (London: Continuum, 2008), p. 53.

arbitrary choice, but one which reflects the theoretical framework that underlies Meillassoux's project in his doctoral dissertation, *L'Inexistence Divine*. In *After Finitude* the necessity of contingency is asserted in virtue of its anhypothetical character, namely the impossibility to contest the principle of unreason without inevitably having to resort to it (the reference is to the anhypothetical character of the principle of non-contradiction in Aristotle). On the other hand, in *L'Inexistence Divine* the principle of unreason receives the full theoretical background that it deserves. In order to ground the necessity of contingency, Meillassoux resorts to the Heideggerian framework and identifies his principle of unreason with the ontological difference. The anhypothetical character of contingency is therefore explained and the necessity of contingency secured. Through a close reading of Meillassoux's argument, the aim of this paper is showing that in *L'Inexistence Divine* the necessity of contingency is in fact grounded upon a misreading of the ontological difference. On the one hand, the metaphysical tradition operates an effacement of the latter by conflating the being of beings[3] with their being-ness (*Seiendheit*, *ousia*), and predicating the latter in an ontic fashion (the ontological difference as the impossibility of asserting that being 'is'). The claim presented here is that the 'speculative' argument, rather than equating the principle of unreason with the ontological difference, operates an effacement of the latter by predicating that being 'is not'. In effectively collapsing the being of beings to its being-less-ness, it is argued that the ground upon which the principle of unreason relies is therefore compromised. If the metaphysical tradition operates under a horizon of temporal presence (*parousia*) that underlies the conflation of being to an ontic being, this paper intends to show that the horizon underlying speculative thinking is one of temporal absence (*apousia*), arising from the collapse of being to a non-being.

The second contribution of this article lies in a renewed look at the problem of 'correlationism' from the standpoint of the analysis of the

[3] Throughout this article, 'being' translates the German '*Sein*' and (ontic) 'beings' translates the German '*Seiende'*.

necessity of contingency in *L'Inexistence Divine*. Meillassoux's project has as its aim that of reaching "the great outdoors"[4] of the in-itself thanks to the necessity of a speculative principle. Post-Kantian philosophy, in his reading, has constantly worked under the assumption that it is possible to access only the correlation between thought and being, but never either of these polarities as subsisting in themselves. Through the affirmation of its necessity, contingency is read instead as the in-itself that can be reached outside of any correlationist logic. Thanks to the necessity of contingency, the Absolute, i.e. the uncorrelated in-itself, can finally be accessed and thought can rise once again to the dignity it deserves. Meillassoux's critique of correlationism is then considered, and we move from the preceding analysis into the status of contingency vis-à-vis the ontological difference. If the necessity of contingency cannot be affirmed without contradicting the ontological difference, the possibility of accessing an Absolute independent of thought is also compromised. In order to confront this problem, it is necessary to engage with Meillassoux's account of Heidegger's failure to escape the boundaries of correlationism.

The Necessity of Contingency

I.

The coordinates along which the thought of contingency is unfolded can schematically be presented in the following way (in reverse order vis-à-vis *After Finitude*). Meillassoux looks back upon Hume's problem of the grounding of the principle of causality, and asks whether there exists an alternative solution to the transcendental deduction of the categories, as put forward by Kant in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Meillassoux dismisses the latter option, attributing to it the inability to escape the correlation between thought and being: 'correlationism', Meillassoux claims, is the trademark of post-Kantian philosophy. In order to be able to reach outside the correlation into 'the great outdoors', Meillassoux decides instead to follow Hume's problem to its conclusion, and to affirm the lack of any ground

[4] Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, p. 7.

underlying the principle of causality. The result is the statement of the sheer contingency of the world: there can be no sufficient reason if we are to avoid hypostatising a necessary entity as a guarantor of the stability of beings. Meillassoux categorically refutes any such necessary entity, which would represent the seal of metaphysics, but nevertheless recognises the need for a necessary principle. This thinking, as opposed to metaphysics, he names 'speculative'.[5] It is contingency which conquers the title of necessity, thus revealing that the world is in no way endowed with a lawfulness to be grounded, but rather with one to be dispensed with. The necessity of contingency (and *only* of contingency) expresses the impossibility of finding a sufficient reason to ground beings. This principle is named by Meillassoux the principle of 'unreason' or principle of 'factiality'.[6]

Given these few premises, the notions of ground and reason already come to the fore. One of the most challenging confrontations with these two notions is found in Heidegger's course on *The Principle of Reason* (*Der Satz vom Grund*). Ground and reason (*Grund*) are there thought in their unity not as a principle, a *principium* or an *archē*; but rather in hearing the German *Satz* as a *leap*. The leap is the opening of the ontological question, the question of the being of beings. The leap at stake is the leap from the 'guiding question' of metaphysics to the 'basic' one, the question into the meaning (*Sinn*) of Being, its truth (*alētheia*), and finally its topology (*Topologie*). The correlation between Heidegger and Meillassoux sits at the boundary between the history of metaphysics and its overcoming. It is apparent that in order to escape the province of metaphysics it is not sufficient to find the ground of beings in a *lawful* becoming: the law itself would then serve as the *archē* and the *telos*, the actuality present in all beings and the actual presence of the horizon under which beings are already disclosed. Heidegger writes, 'In accordance with metaphysics, all beings, changeable, and moved, mobile and mobilised, are represented from the perspective of a 'being that is at rest', and this even where, as in Hegel and

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 34.
[6] *Ibid.*, p. 79.

Nietzsche, 'Being' (the actuality of the actual) is thought as pure becoming and absolute movement'.[7] It is a *lawless* becoming which structures reality for Meillassoux, where reality itself is nothing but this very lawlessness. The principle of unreason reads: everything is without reason; everything is contingent; nothing is necessary. Every time it is uttered, however, the principle of unreason cannot avoid adding an exception. Everything is without reason—*but* contingency; everything is contingent—*but* contingency; nothing is necessary—*but* contingency. A ground has been found: it is contingency. Let us hear Meillassoux himself in this respect: 'Contingency is a common property of all relativisms of all times, on all planets. That's why I made contingency the real ground, the universal and eternal ground, of every relativism in the universe—I'm sure of that'.[8] The abyss itself serves as a ground, the final ground of contingency from which thought can rise again to the dignity it deserves. But, we should ask, can the abyss itself serve as a ground? This appears, at first, as the question that Heidegger asks in *The Principle of Reason* when he states that being is the abyssal ground of beings. But is being the abyssal ground or the grounding abyss? In fact, one cannot be careless in speaking about Being, and it is imperative to keep in mind that being 'is' not, since only ontic beings 'are'. Or was it that being 'is not'?

II.

Meillassoux claims that contingency alone is necessary. The principle of unreason asserts the non-facticity of facticity: contingency is not an additional contingent fact. This is not an axiom, a postulate or an assumption, and it can be demonstrated without deduction from a higher principle. It is taken as the *principium grande, magnum et nobilissimum* because it is an 'anhypothetical' principle: it is not possible to contest it without inevitably

[7] Martin Heidegger, 'On the Question of Being', in *Pathmarks*, trans. by W. McNeill, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 291-322 (p. 299).
[8] Quentin Meillassoux, 'Speculative Realism: Presentation by Ray Brassier', in *Collapse*, vol. 3 (2007), pp. 308-333 (p. 330).

resorting to it. Contingency is 'an absolute that cannot be de-absolutised without being thought as absolute once more'.[9] The reference is to the anhypothetical character of the principle of non-contradiction according to Aristotle: as soon as one begins to argue against it, one inevitably does so according to the law of non-contradiction itself. Similarly, one might assert: contingency is not absolute; contingency is in fact contingent. But in so doing one resorts to the absolute possibility of everything to be other than it is, that is to the existence of an absolute contingency. This contradicts the starting point. Therefore, the attempt to show that contingency is itself contingent fails. Meillassoux writes: 'to contest this principle is already to have presupposed it'.[10]

Contingency is therefore not contingent: contingency is necessary. The principle of unreason consists exactly in this remarkably short step. As it will be argued, the inference that leads from the impossibility of asserting that contingency is contingent to the assertion that it is therefore necessary contains a number of assumptions that Meillassoux does not hesitate to subsequently 'derive' from his principle of unreason. He calls these properties 'figures'[11] and grants them the status of eternal properties of contingency.[12] In *After Finitude* nothing more is said of this step. One cannot assert that contingency is contingent: therefore, contingency is necessary. A reader of Heidegger cannot help but wonder whether the essence of technology, in being nothing technological, is in truth something *non*-technological. What if instead contingency were neither contingent nor necessary? But, for sure, everything, namely every being, must either be

[9] Meillassoux, *After Fintude*, p. 58.
[10] *Ibid.*, p. 61.
[11] *Ibid.*, p. 80.
[12] Note: one might think that the principle of unreason in the form 'only this is necessary: that there be no necessities', is paradoxical or self-contradictory. This point is raised by Ray Brassier and dealt with by Meillassoux in a private communication by distinguishing between the *referent* of the principle and the *existence* of the principle itself. For completeness, this discussion can be found in Ray Brassier, *Nihil Unbound: Enlightenment and Extinction*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 91-92.

contingent or be necessary. The Gordian knot is cut exactly in stating that contingency is not an ontic being. The problematisation of this step is not just a small pedantry, but the turn upon which the principle of unreason hinges. Meillassoux is in fact well aware that the step he is taking is a risky one. To find a proper exposition of this problem, one has to turn to his doctoral dissertation, *L'Inexistence Divine*. In this work, the principle of unreason is supported by the leap that is lacking in *After Finitude*, namely by the opening of the ontological question.

As already suggested, contingency is not an ontic being. Contingency is to be identified with the being of beings. The Heideggerian framework is introduced in *L'Inexistence Divine* in order to demonstrate the principle of unreason without deducing it. This is the advantage that 'speculative' thinking affords: the possibility to ground a necessary principle without deducing it from a necessary being. Guided by the principle of sufficient reason, metaphysics is caught under the insistent question 'why?' in a regress *ad infinitum* that has to terminate in a necessary entity that serves as a guarantor for the whole series. 'Speculation', on the other hand, is grounded on a principle that is both necessary and, in virtue of its anhypothetical character, immune to the demand that it be deduced from a higher principle or entity. The task of philosophy is then to demonstrate such a principle without incurring a process of deduction that would result in the hypostatisation of a necessary being (i.e. metaphysics). As already stated, contingency stands for the being of beings. We read, 'what makes a being a being is that it is contingent […]; the being of beings is rightly identified with its facticity'.[13] Contingency is not an additional transcendental category, it is the transcendent lack of a sufficient reason for a being not to be other than it is.[14] To be, for Meillassoux, means to be contingent. A being

[13] Quentin Meillassoux, *L'Inexistence Divine*, Doctoral Dissertation, (Université de Paris, 1997), p. 74. My translation. Note that 'the term *facticity* is here used as strict *synonym* of the notion of contingency'. *Ibid.*, p. 43.

[14] The modal categories are then defined in terms of this non-transcendental contingency: impossible is what is necessary (i.e. non-contingent), actual is what is contingent, etc. See *Ibid.* pp. 83-4, 210-11.

is in as much as it is possible that it be other than what it is. The being of beings is therefore contingency. Meillassoux's 'demonstration without deduction' of the principle of unreason is then carried out elegantly as the statement of the ontological difference. Being is not an ontic being:

> To believe that the facticity of beings is itself a fact is thus revealed as the true *forgetting of being*. For to state the contingency of contingency, is to speak of the latter in the manner in which one speaks of a contingent being—it is to turn being as the facticity of beings into an additional factual [i.e. ontic] being.[15]

Only beings are, that is, only beings are contingent. Contingency, as the being of beings, is not a being, and it is therefore incorrect to state that contingency 'is'. This is, of course, Heidegger's crucial statement of the ontological difference. But since to be for Meillassoux means to be contingent, it follows that it is incorrect to state that contingency 'is contingent'. One can finally conclude that contingency is necessary. Once again, we witness the step that leads to the principle of unreason, but this time it is possible to recognise why it falls short of its destination. It is not correct to state that being 'is'. But in no way does it follow that being 'is not'. However simple this conclusion might seem, its consequences are anything but trivial. Meillassoux invokes the ontological opening in order to show that contingency is necessary; on the contrary, this very move shows that contingency is neither contingent nor necessary. Since it is incorrect to assert that contingency 'is contingent' (being 'is'), Meillassoux concludes that contingency 'is not contingent' (being 'is not'). But again, and this cannot be overstated, being neither 'is' nor 'is not'. Beings are. Non-beings are not. Being essentially occurs (*das Sein west*). It gives being (*es gibt Sein*). It lets being (*es läßt Sein*). In grounding the principle of unreason in the statement that being 'is not', Meillassoux is effectively collapsing being and non-being. The anhypothetical character of contingency is nothing but the fact that being cannot be predicated, as the 'is' already assumes what it

[15] *Ibid.*, p. 72.

is supposed to predicate. In Heidegger's account, the fault of metaphysics is to understand the being of beings as an ontic being, and predicate that being 'is', thus revealing that the thinking of being already unfolds in an unquestioned horizon of temporal presence (*parousia*). Meillassoux's thinking sets off exactly from the impossibility of predicating that being 'is', trying to respect the ontological difference. However, rather than recognising the undecidability intrinsic to being, Meillassoux remains in the province of metaphysics in predicating that being 'is not'. As it is clear, this reveals a horizon that regulates the ontological thinking in terms of a temporal absence (*apousia*) which will be turned to next.

III.

Meillassoux's fundamental merit is to have recognised that contingency is *not* a transcendental category. He writes, 'we cannot ground the awareness of the contingency of the categories on an additional category [i.e. contingency] that will be itself contingent, in which case this category would require itself, for being perceived in its contingency, a contingent category of contingency'.[16] In addition to this, he recognises that *necessity* not only is not a category, but moreover it is not a predicate of anything (albeit, of contingency). However clear this might seem at this point, this result remains crucial. Meillassoux's merit is doubtless that he has realised, from *within* a metaphysical framework, that the categories of contingency and necessity have infiltrated the realm of the transcendental. Nevertheless, from the insight that contingency is not a transcendental category, Meillassoux concludes that contingency is transcendent and eternal.[17] This eternal structure is then seen to represent time itself and its necessity.

[16] *Ibid.*, p. 210.

[17] This is most clearly seen in the mathematical modelling (Badiou's) from which Meillassoux's ontology draws. At any moment within a series contained in a certain cardinality ('empty set, a, b, c, …') the event can arise as the transfinite to that cardinality (W_0). The transfinite then is the starting point for a new series (W_0, W_1, W_2, …), which is interrupted by a new event $W(W_0)$—namely a cardinality that is

As the notion of contingency is Heideggerianly 'destructed' from an ontological standpoint, the other face of the principle of unreason appears. The strict identity posited by Meillassoux between contingency and the being of beings represents the guideline that can be followed in order to understand Meillassoux's notion of time. Meillassoux does not formulate the same argument for time as he does for being, but it is clear that the same matrix underlies his understanding of both. Time is not an ontic being, therefore one cannot assert that time 'is': for Meillassoux this is equivalent to the impossibility of asserting that time is contingent. As it has been argued, the principle of unreason consists in concluding that time 'is not', i.e. that time is necessary. Meillassoux concludes that the course of time can never be disrupted; 'Only time is eternal'[18], only time is necessary. To think otherwise leads to what he names an anarchic or religious notion of contingency.[19] But again, time 'is' neither a being nor a non-being. To predicate of time simply means to understand it already either in terms of presence or absence. In collapsing time to a non-being, the presence and absence occupying the current now and the next one have simply been exchanged. The *apousia* of being (since being 'is not') reigns over the current now and its *parousia* will flood the next now through a contingent and possibly incommensurable advent (*surgissement*) *ex nihilo*. But the *nihil* out of which the contingent event (the *surgissement ex nihilo*) is supposed to arise is simply the *apousia* of being that 'is not' in the current now.[20] If in Meillassoux's 'philosophical drama'[21] *l'être* is dispensed with in favour of *le peut-être*, this is simply because the *apousia* of being in the current

incommensurable to the first transfinite itself. This represents the starting point of a new series, and so on. It is evident how this advent can change neither the structure (the series) nor the event itself, since it is always the same kind of interruption, simply displaced phoronomically along the series. See *Ibid.*, p. 146.

[18] *Ibid.*, p. 158.

[19] *Ibid.*, p. 283.

[20] Cf. Harman: 'To be caused by nothing or caused by oneself amounts to the same thing'. Graham Harman, *Quentin Meillassoux: Philosophy in the Making*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press Ltd, 2011), p. 156.

[21] *Ibid.*, p. 146.

now has replaced a *parousia* that is expected to arrive through a contingent event. Following Heidegger, as the mode of presencing (*Anwesen*) of being cannot be reduced to the presence (*Anwesenheit*) of the present (*Gegenwart*), so its mode of 'absencing' (*Abwesen*) cannot be collapsed to the absence (*Abwesenheit*) of the non-present (*Un-Gegenwart*). Heidegger writes, 'It [Being/Nothing] is not a being, but this in a manner that is thoroughly different from the sentence: the being [*das Seiende*] is not (which would be an ontic proposition)'.[22]

The point is not to collapse the present analysis of Meillassoux's work to a prosecution for a concealed understanding of *ousia* as *parousia* or *ousia* as *apousia*. It is rather to take stock of Meillassoux's merits, most notably the problematisation of the notion of contingency. The necessity of time makes it so that whatever happens, every contingent event, even the most unimaginable advent of a contingent God, will just be another point on the line of an absolute Time. This is the Derridean spectre of Leibniz's principle of reason haunting the principle of unreason. '[S]uppose for example', Leibniz writes, 'that someone jots down a quantity of points upon a sheet of paper helter skelter, […] now I say that it is possible to find a geometrical line whose concept shall be uniform and constant, that is, in accordance with a certain formula, and which line at the same time shall pass through all of those points, and in the same order in which the hand jotted them down'.[23] The de-totalisation of being by the hand of the transfinite takes place at the cost of the totalisation of time. The absolute, after all, was just a line.

Correlationism

Meillassoux's strategy in coming to terms with the issue of correlationism is, per his own admission, strictly Cartesian in nature. The necessity of

[22] Martin Heidegger, *Four Seminars*, trans. by A. Mitchell, F. Raffoul. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), p. 58.
[23] As quoted in Jacques Derrida, 'Force and Signification', in *Writing and Difference*, trans. by A. Bass, (London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 1-35 (p. 21).

contingency serves the purpose of granting access to 'the great outdoors', as God does in Descartes' *Meditations*. Thought is restored to its own dignity and can escape the boundaries of the correlation with being, reaching the in-itself of contingency. If in *L'Inexistence Divine* Meillassoux relies on the central tenets of the opening of the ontological question and of ontological difference, in *After Finitude* the dismissal of Heidegger is instead carried out with no possibility for appeal: 'the notion of *Ereignis*, which is central in the later Heidegger, remains faithful to the correlationist exigency inherited from Kant and continued in Husserlian phenomenology, for the "co-propriation" which constitutes *Ereignis* means that neither being nor man can be posited as subsisting "in-themselves"'.[24] However, once the necessity of contingency has been shown to arise from a misreading of the ontological difference, the possibility for thought to reach the in-itself is automatically compromised. Meillassoux categorically refutes the possibility of dispensing with the ontological difference, and in fact claims the equivalence of the latter with his principle of unreason; but at the same time, the necessity of contingency is asserted at the cost of predicating that being be not. It has been argued that the principle of unreason, rather than representing the statement of the ontological difference as Meillassoux would like to maintain, consists in the very effacement of the latter through the collapse of being to a non-being. Since the ontological difference in no way allows one to conclude that contingency, in not being contingent, should therefore be necessary, the ground that allowed speculative thinking to leap beyond correlationism disappears.

On the other hand, Heidegger's standpoint vis-à-vis correlationism deserves a reassessment. A specific engagement with the matter at hand is carried out in *Identity and Difference*, which Heidegger considered the most important work he published after *Being and Time*. Heidegger unfolds his thinking of the principle of identity starting from its first utterance, found in Parmenides' fragment 3: *'to gar auto noein estin te kai einai*'. The

[24] Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, p. 8.

usual translation reads: 'for thought and being are the same'.[25] Heidegger's move consists in questioning neither thought nor Being, but rather *the same* (*to auto*) that they are said to be grounded in. Heidegger writes: 'the Same [*das Selbe*] is not merely the identical [*das Gleiche*]'[26]; rather, 'we interpret Sameness to mean a belonging together'.[27] This belonging together, however, is still understood metaphysically as long as one hears it as a belonging *together* (*Zusammen*gehören). 'In that case, "to belong" means as much as: to be assigned and placed into the order of a "together"'.[28] Heidegger claims instead that the Same should be understood as a *belonging* together (Zusammen*gehören*): 'the "together" is now determined by the belonging'.[29] Identity has been thought throughout the history of metaphysics as a characteristic of ontic beings and made into a property of their being-ness (*ousia*). The discovery of the self-identity of the being-ness of beings is nothing but what has been covertly assumed throughout the quest for the truth of the latter—namely the horizon of presence of that essence. Heidegger writes: 'The doctrine of metaphysics represents identity as a fundamental characteristic of Being. Now it becomes clear that being belongs with thinking to an identity whose active essence stems from that letting belong together which we call the appropriation [*Ereignis*]'.[30] As a result, the question of correlationism itself is overturned by Heidegger. On the one hand, it cannot be claimed that the relation between thought and being relies on a metaphysical hypostatisation that would grant access to Being. But neither can Heidegger's later work be reduced to the assertion

[25] See e.g. Thomas V. Smith, *From Tales to Plato*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1934), p. 15.
[26] Martin Heidegger, 'The Onto-Theo-Logical Constitution of Metaphysics', in *Identity and Difference*, trans. by J. Stambaugh, (New York: Harper & Row Publishers Incorporated, 1969), pp. 42-74 (p. 45).
[27] Martin Heidegger, 'The Principle of Identity', in *Identity and Difference*, trans. by J. Stambaugh (New York: Harper & Row Publishers Incorporated, 1969), pp. 23-41 (p. 28).
[28] *Ibid.*, p. 29.
[29] *Ibid.*
[30] *Ibid.*, p. 39.

of the priority of the (cor-)relation itself. This aspect has in fact been dealt with for the first time in *Being and Time* as a critique of phenomenological intentionality. To dismiss Heidegger's thinking as just another instance of correlationism is to disregard the attempt to rethink the notion of coincidence or sameness that is said to relate thought and Being. Meillassoux recognises in a footnote that 'Heidegger insists that the "co-" ('*zusammen*') in the term "co-propriation" should be understood on the basis of belonging, rather than belonging being understood on the basis of the "co-"'.[31] However, he concludes, 'it is not a question of abandoning the "co-", but [simply] of rethinking its originary nature beyond the schemas of representation'.[32] Let us now approach the task that Heidegger sets forth.

Meillassoux would like to operate an 'abandonment' of the 'co-'. This abandonment can only be carried out at the expenses of the ontological difference, either through metaphysical thinking in predicating that being 'is' (*idea*, *energeia*, substance, monad, spirit, etc.), or through 'speculative' thinking in predicating that being 'is not' (i.e. in asserting the necessity of contingency). Either the 'co-' or the ontological difference are to be abandoned. And this is actually the subtlety that Meillassoux himself disregards, in not recognising what Heidegger names 'the danger [*Gefahr*] of the ontological difference'.[33] Heidegger's most remarkable thinking, which is at times neglected, consists in the acknowledgment of the need to overcome the ontological difference itself. As he writes, 'from the perspective of the appropriation [*Ereignis*] it becomes necessary to free thinking from the ontological difference'.[34] The move toward the giving and letting itself of being unsettles the ontological difference to a degree that it is now possible to affirm the following: 'Perhaps "is" can be said only of being in

[31] Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, p. 8, note 9.
[32] *Ibid.*
[33] Heidegger, *Four Seminars*, p. 24, emphasis removed.
[34] Martin Heidegger, *On Time and Being*, trans. by J. Stambaugh, (New York: Harper & Row Publishers Incorporated, 1972), p. 37.

an appropriate way, so that no individual being ever properly "is"'.[35] And similarly: 'The full essential occurrence of beyng in the truth of the event [*Ereignis*] allows the recognition that beyng and only beyng is and that beings are *not*'.[36] Translated in Meillassoux's framework this is equivalent to affirming that 'perhaps' *only contingency is contingent*, while the same cannot be said of beings. This is the crucial undecidability that arises with the opening of the event of the appropriation (*Ereignis*). This undecidability is not a lack in thinking or an opposition in need of reconciliation or sublation: it 'is' the giving itself of being. When Heidegger finally translates Parmenides' fragment as 'thinking and being belong together in the Same [*das Selbe*]'[37], this move does not simply represent an inversion of the priority between the 'co-' (*zusammen*) and the belonging, but the opening of a space—that of the Same or of the *Ereignis*—that signals the overcoming of the ontological difference and the impossibility of settling once and for all whether being 'is' or ontic beings 'are'. The 'co-propriation' of being and thought signalled by the *Ereignis* can in no way be reduced to a residual element of 'togetherness' or correlationism. On the contrary, this element of correlation persists only so long as the relation between thought and being is heard as that of the identical (*das Gleiche*) rather than as that of the Same (*das Selbe*). From the latter perspective, the focus is shifted from trying to understand how to either bridge the gap or accept the coincidence between thought and being to a thinking of the significance and relevance of this coincidence itself. The question as to whether the thinking of the *Ereignis* is successful at solving the problem of correlationism misses the most important aspect: the thinking of the event of the appropriation represents neither a solution nor a failure, but the recognition that the problem itself arises *within* the categories of metaphysics (or of speculation) and cannot be resolved within those very boundaries. The question

[35] Martin Heidegger, 'Letter on Humanism', in *Basic Writings: Martin Heidegger*, trans. by HarperCollins Publishers Inc., (New York: HarperCollins, 1993), pp. 217-265 (p. 238).

[36] Martin Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy (Of the Event)*, trans. by R. Rojcewicz, D. Vallega-Neu. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012), p. 372.

[37] Heidegger, 'The Principle of Identity', p. 27.

cannot be whether thought and being are identical or whether a necessary entity or principle exists that can bridge the gap between the two; rather, thinking is to ask how the appropriation between thought and being is *such that* the very question of their identity or difference can arise in the first place. Said otherwise, the issue is not whether thought and being should be related through identity or difference, but how thinking should approach the opening out of which identity and difference themselves arise and present the epiphenomenon of correlationism. It is crucial that the opening of this space, that of the appropriation, is not understood as that of the reconciliation of identity and difference, of the coincidence or divide between thought and being. The fundamental reversal is pointed out by Heidegger during the 1966 Heraclitus seminar, in which Heidegger replies to Fink: 'Your way of Heraclitus interpretation starts out from fire toward *logos*; my way of Heraclitus interpretation starts out from *logos* toward fire'.[38] The Hegelian system aims to show the unity of thought and being as a process and as a result that obtains throughout the *Encyclopedia* and is completed in Absolute Spirit. Heidegger, on the other hand, questions the very *parousia* of this unity and ventures to think the opening out of which thought and being themselves arise—before the question of their dialectical reconciliation is asked in the realm of the logocentric closure of metaphysics.

Le Néant et le Rien

The engagement with Heidegger's thought in *L'inexistence Divine* is not limited to a discussion of the ontological difference. It is in fact through a discussion of 'nothingness' and negation that Meillassoux grounds his whole theoretical project, particularly with respect to Heidegger. The exposition appears in section 5 of *L'inexistence Divine*, titled "*Néant et Rien*". Meillassoux writes: 'The principle of factuality includes in itself *two*

[38] Eugen Fink, Martin Heidegger, *Heractlitus Seminar 1966 / 67*, trans. by C. H. Seibert, (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1979), p. 112.

negations, whose distinction is essential for its comprehension'.[39] The first negation, *le rien*, is the one at the core of the definition of contingency, namely, 'that which exists can-*not* exist and that which does *not* exist can exist'.[40] These two 'not' are identical, they mark the passage from being to non-being and from non-being to being. They ground contingency as the possibility for a being to be other than what it is. In addition to *le rien*, there is a second negation, *le néant*. Everything is contingent and can be other than what it is, *except* for contingency, *but* contingency, *not* contingency. The second negation, *le néant*, is that which grounds the statement 'contingency is *not* contingent', so that 'the median negation [i.e. *le rien*] governs the passage, but it can*not* itself pass'.[41] *Le rien* regulates the ontic realm: every being can be other than (i.e. *not*) what it is. *Le néant* enacts the ontological difference: contingency is *not* contingent, since only beings are contingent, but contingency is not an ontic being. It is crucial that *le néant* and *le rien* remain distinct and the principle of unreason holds because and only because the two negations cannot be conflated. There is an ontic negation/difference (*le rien*), and an ontological one (*le neant*), which prevents the former from changing (i.e. it prevents contingency from being itself contingent). Meillassoux engages in a lengthy analysis of Heidegger's texts dating before and after *die Kehre* in order to argue that Heidegger's fundamental mistake consists in the identification of the two negations to the disadvantage of *le néant*. Meillassoux writes: 'the Heideggerian Nothing corresponds to the collapse of the negation of *le neánt* into that of *le rien'*.[42] The consequence, Meillassoux claims, is that Heidegger, in not recognising the regulative action of *le neant* upon *le rien*, allows for an almighty contingency—'an anarchic contingency'.[43] Contingency itself can 'pass', since the action of *le néant* does not forbid this passing itself: anything can happen, 'even a logical-mathematical

[39] Meillassoux, *L'Inexistence Divine*, p. 87.
[40] *Ibid.*
[41] *Ibid.*
[42] *Ibid.*, p. 248, emphasis removed.
[43] *Ibid.*, p. 254.

aberration'.[44] Despite his analysis, however, Meillassoux does not address Heidegger's exact engagement with the question at hand. It is in the 1949 preface to the 1929 essay "On the Essence of Ground" that Heidegger addresses the relation between the '"not" of beings'[45]—i.e. why this being is *not* that being (ontic difference)—and the '"not" between beings and Being'[46]—i.e. the ontological difference. These two 'not' are what Meillassoux calls, respectively, *le rien* and *le néant*. The relation between the two 'not' is settled by Heidegger in the following way: '[they] are indeed not identical [*einerlei*], yet they are the Same [*das Selbe*] in the sense of belonging together'.[47]

Similarly, Meillassoux claims that the strict identity of being and Nothing is equivalent to the principle of unreason. He writes, 'Being cannot be, and as such is identified with Nothing'.[48] The identification of being with Nothing implies, and is implied by, the fact that one cannot assert that being 'is'. As it has become clear by now, in the system of facticity this means that one cannot assert that contingency is contingent. This time Meillassoux draws support for his thesis from Heidegger's "What is Metaphysics?" where the crucial quote of Hegel's *Science of Logic* is reproduced: 'Pure being and pure Nothing are therefore the same [*dasselbe*]'.[49] Meillassoux concludes that 'this thesis of Hegel remains true'.[50] However, as it is, the statement is misleading since Heidegger follows up right away by stating that this is correct 'not because both—from the point of view of the Hegelian concept of thought—agree in their indeterminateness and

[44] *Ibid.*, p. 238.
[45] Martin Heidegger, 'On the Essence of Ground: Preface to the Third Edition', in *Pathmarks*, trans. W. McNeill, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 97-99, (p. 97).
[46] *Ibid.*
[47] *Ibid.*
[48] Meillassoux, *L'Inexistence Divine*, p. 245.
[49] Quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 247.
[50] *Ibid.*

immediacy'.[51] But rather because 'being and Nothing do belong together'.[52] Heidegger returns to the admittedly misleading quote both in *Contributions* where he states that the quote 'signifies—and can signify only this—a general agreement with regard to *bringing together* [*Zusammenbringung*] being and Nothing',[53] as well as in the 1969 Le Thor seminar where he concludes that it would have been appropriate to write the following formula: 'Being: Nothing: The Same [*das Selbe*]'.[54]

The two principal contributions made in this article can be renewed in light of Meillassoux's discussion of nothingness and negations. First, we see once again that the assertion of the necessity of contingency is not equivalent to the statement of the ontological difference, but represents in fact the effacing of the latter. *Le rien* (the ontic difference) consists in the possibility for every being to be other than it is; said otherwise, it stands for contingency itself. *Le néant* forbids one to assert that *le rien* 'is', something which translates in Meillassoux's framework into the impossibility of asserting that contingency is contingent. Meillassoux concludes from this that contingency is not contingent. Let us signal the negation of *le rien* by a 'not' and that of *le néant* by a 'Not'. Then *le néant* enacts the ontological difference in the following way: 'contingency is contingent'—Not, where the 'Not' invalidates the previous assertion. The legitimacy of this statement is indeed sanctioned by the ontological difference ('being is'—Not). It then becomes clear that Meillassoux conflates the previous assertion (the impossibility of asserting that being 'is') with the following: 'contingency is not contingent' (i.e. contingency is necessary). The conflation of the two statements is equivalent to the statement that being 'is not'. Thanks to *le néant*, it is indeed possible to affirm that 'being is'—Not; but in no way does it follow that 'being is not'. *Le néant* exactly prohibits this since it appears in the two statements: 'being is'—Not, *as well as* 'being is

[51] Martin Heidegger, 'What is Metaphysics?', in *Pathmarks*, trans. by W. McNeill, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 82-96, (p. 94).
[52] *Ibid.*
[53] Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy*, p. 209.
[54] Heidegger, *Four Seminars*, p. 57.

not'—Not. *Le néant* is in fact the guarantor of the impossibility of predicating that being is (metaphysics) and that being is not (speculation).

The second aspect that the discussion of negations affords is a renewed appreciation for Heidegger's work on the principle of identity. Once again, the claim is that, in the history of metaphysics, identity (of thought and being, of being and Nothing, of *le néant* and *le rien*) is only thought as the identical (*das Gleiche*), as 'the stale emptiness of that which, in itself without relation, persists in monotony'.[55] The strict identity of being with Nothing or the collapse of the negation of *le néant* into that of *le rien* cannot be maintained. Heidegger is clear in both respects: being and Nothing, as well as *le néant* and *le rien*, 'are indeed not identical [*einerlei*], yet they are the Same [*das Selbe*] in the sense of belonging together'. It becomes crucial to pay heed once more to the realisation that the ontological difference is just 'a necessary impasse [*Holzweg*]'[56] on the path of thinking. On the one hand, it is clear that where metaphysical thinking substitutes the being of beings with an ontic being (being-ness as the *ousia* of beings), speculative thinking operates a parallel substitution of the being of beings, not with an ontic being, but with the *ontic* difference itself. This is the identification of being (contingency) with the ontic difference (*le rien*) that reveals the horizon that pre-determines the thinking of *ousia* as *apousia*. On the other hand, Heidegger shifts the task for thinking from the two possibilities of effacing the ontological difference to the overcoming of the latter itself. The ontological difference and the ontic difference, *le néant* and *le rien*, are neither to be conflated nor to be separated; Heidegger claims that after the closure of metaphysics it becomes imperative to heed the opening of their belonging together, the Same of their appropriation that precipitates in the history of metaphysics (and of speculative thinking) into the presence or absence of a necessary entity or principle.

[55] Heidegger, 'The Principle of Identity', p. 25.
[56] Heidegger, *Four Seminars*, p. 61.

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To a certain extent, the present analysis of Meillassoux's work follows a parallel route to Heidegger's reading of Nietzsche. Heidegger's gesture consists in the unification of the will to power with the eternal return, following a certain reading of the 'recapitulation fragment' by Nietzsche: '*Recapitulation*: To *stamp* Becoming with the character of Being—that is the supreme *will to power*'.[57] Heidegger claims that this is evidence that the 'will to power in its *most* profound essence is nothing other than the permanentising [sic] of Becoming into presence'.[58] Similarly, the gesture carried out by the present work could be extended in the same manner to the unification of Meillassoux's contingency with what he names 'the world of justice', under the guideline of a 'stamping of Becoming with the character of Nothing'. This would reveal the most profound essence of contingency as 'the permanentising of Becoming into absence'. Nonetheless, it is not accurate to identify Heidegger's work with a prosecution for a concealed understanding of *ousia* as *parousia* or *ousia* as *apousia* that results in the effacement of the ontological difference. The move towards the opening of the appropriation between the ontological difference and the ontic one remains Heidegger's most crucial step after *Being and Time*, and the relevance for Meillassoux's understanding of correlationism cannot be ignored. The question of correlationism persists only within the province of metaphysics, only so long as the identity of thought and being is questioned through the ontic categories that have been inadvertently carried over into the ontological realm—or, rather, so long as the latter has been substituted with the ontic realm of being-ness. To keep asking whether thought and being are identical is equivalent to assuming that something like a strict identity could ever relate the two. The task is shifted by Heidegger to the thinking of the opening out of which the question itself of the identity or difference of being and thought arises. How

[57] As quoted in Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche. Volume III: The Will to Power as Knowledge and as Metaphysics*, trans. by F. A. Capuzzi, D. F. Krell, J. Stambaugh, (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), p. 156.
[58] *Ibid.*

is this appropriation to be thought so as to take into account the fact that the correlation itself can arise as an epiphenomenon? This is the question that Heidegger's later work attempts to think.