

Speculative vs. Transcendental: a Deleuzian Response to Meillassoux

by MEHDI PARSA*

Abstract

In “Iteration, Reiteration, Repetition”, Quentin Meillassoux accuses Deleuze of forming a subjectalist philosophical system, that is to say, despite his critiques of subjectivism and representationalism, Deleuze absolutizes the correlation between thought and being, while failing to grasp absolute exteriority. Meillassoux’s main argument in support of this claim is his interpretation of Deleuze’s ideas of “intensity” and “intensive difference” as a “difference of degree” instead of a “difference in nature”. In this paper, I argue against Meillassoux’s reading, and claim that, in his early works, Deleuze constructs a transcendental philosophy very different from Kantian transcendentalism, in which exteriority is graspable through the eventual aspects of our experience. Meillassoux accuses Deleuze of being a philosopher of continuity and homogeneity, and believes that the only way to evade subjectalism is by establishing a Cartesian dualism of subjective and objective realms. I claim, however, that Deleuze is the true philosopher of heterogeneity, and that continuity in Deleuze’s thought is simply a means of inducing heterogeneity everywhere. In order to reach the absolute, we do not need to establish a sharp dualism; what we need is a Deleuzian version of transcendental realism, which induces transcendental/empirical distinction everywhere, into both the inorganic and organic realms.

Following *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*, in “Iteration, Reiteration, Repetition: A Speculative Analysis of the Meaningless Sign,” Quentin Meillassoux makes a more concerted effort to denounce some of the post-Kantian philosophers who, far from being correlationist (which is a form of skepticism or anti-absolutism), affirmatively absolutize the correlation, and are as such dubbed subjectalist. This new task is more delicate, given that Meillassoux defines his own philosophical project as the sketching of a thought which is capable of acceding to the absolute. But he distances himself from the so-called post-Kantian absolutisms, by defining the absolute as the absolute exteriority (he refers to the etymology of the word absolute: “the *ab-solutus* is first of all the separate, the non-relative”; Meillassoux 2016: 118). Hence, he triggers a battle on the absolute with subjectalists who are, according to him, metaphysical absolutists who believe in the subjective principle of reason. He designates his own position as *absolutory*, in order to distinguish it from any

* Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität Bonn

metaphysical absolutism. And he divides the latter into two main fronts, namely rationalism or idealism, exemplified in Hegelian philosophy, and vitalism, which includes Nietzsche, Bergson, and Deleuze. In what follows, I will focus in particular on Meillassoux's accusation that Deleuze is a subjectalist, in the context of his vitalism. I believe that the core of Meillassoux's criticism against Deleuze is not, however, the fact or not of his vitalism, but rather the notion that his philosophy falls short of attaining the thought of the absolute. Against Meillassoux's reading, I will argue that Deleuze in fact advances a peculiar kind of vitalism, which might better be called mortalism, alongside a peculiar kind of rationalism which is better called irrationalism. Further, I will try to defend the thesis that Deleuze's philosophical system satisfies Meillassoux's main requirement, which is to say, it provides the outlines of a thought which is capable of attaining that which is beyond thought. In order to do this, I focus on the contingency of Deleuzian thought, and claim that a contingent absolutism like that of Deleuze reaches a point not far from what Meillassoux defines as the main aim of his philosophy.

Meillassoux's main argument to demonstrate that Deleuze's philosophy falls short of attaining the absolute outside is to interpret his ideas of "intensity" and of "intensive difference" as "difference of degree" instead of "difference in nature". Accordingly, Deleuze can never grasp a difference in nature between human and the non-human, resulting in the absolutization of what is human (intensive difference) and taking it as commensurate with reality. In this reading, intensive difference is what Deleuze takes from subjectivity and applies to external reality. Instead, Meillassoux maintains a sharp, Cartesian distinction, between thinking subject (or organic world) and pure objectivity (or inorganic world). For him, the rigor of this distinction is necessary in order to reach his absolutory position. In this manner, he claims he can save objective reality from any taint of subjectivity.

I argue, in what follows, that a difference in nature, or a sharp dualism, is not necessary for reaching absolute exteriority. My claim is that absolute exteriority is reachable, in Deleuze's philosophy, through a radical change in subjectivity based on thinking as an encounter with problematic events, rather than on knowing (or recognition) as grasping the nature of objects. In this context, I claim, recognition would be a thought which is closed-in on itself, and problematic thought would be open to an exterior reality. In this way, there will be no need to protect reality from subjectivity, because we can follow a different path in which we understand subjectivity as based on absolute exteriority. This amounts, indeed, to a kind of materialization of subjectivity. It is not the case that Deleuze derives his realism from subjectivity, but rather that he understands subjectivity as a result of material reality. Meillassoux's speculative materialism meanwhile maintains that the only way to hold a realism is to consider reality as devoid of any dynamism and productivity (any intensity). According to him, reality should be dead because life in all of its forms belongs to subjectivity. Deleuze, in his turn, dedicates his philosophy to tracing the death of subjectivity. In this

regard, intensive difference is not an aspect of subjectivity, but is what attacks subjectivity from the side of absolute exteriority.

This position is only possible if we can provide a non-vitalist reading of Deleuze. And in order to attain this reading, we need to focus on the central role that death plays in his philosophy. Indeed for Deleuze, what differentiates and is productive is not life, but death. As David Lapoujade states,

Deleuze's "most 'vitalist' texts are always at the same time texts concerned with death, with what life puts to death in us in order to liberate its forces . . . Life isn't restricted in Deleuze to producing organisms, nor does it invariably take organic form. Aberrant movements partake of an 'inorganic life' that permeates organisms and undermines their integrity . . . (Lapoujade 2017: 36)

Deleuze's philosophy is not about disseminating oneself everywhere, even into rocks and particles, as Meillassoux sketches it, but rather, it brings what exists in rocks and particles into selves in such a way as to undermine their integrity. Deleuze is a transcendental philosopher in the sense that he focuses on the conditions of our experience. But for him, the transcendental is not consciousness or one of its affiliates. His transcendentalism entails that which is the trace of external reality in our experience, and which conditions it from without. This is how he proposes real conditioning (the conditions of real experience) against the Kantian formal conditioning (the conditions of possible experience). A real condition tears the conditioned apart. A real experience marks at once the de-subjectivization of our subjectivity and the way our subjectivity grasps the absolute exteriority. This entanglement of condition and conditioned in the real experience can also be called production. Real conditioning entails the production of the conditioned and therefore Deleuze's transcendentalism marks the contingent production of experience by reality. This is why transcendental empiricism is also a transcendental realism.

Hence, Deleuze can conclude that external reality (nature) is productive, but its productivity is not the productivity of life, but rather that of death¹. The difference is that life always has a telos and a direction (explained for example through the principle of reason) but death produces with absolute contingency. Through a reading of the Stoics, Deleuze indicates that this contingent productivity is necessary for any materialism, and this is the point of Deleuze's comparison of the Epicureans and the Stoics in *Logique du Sens*, where he puts the Stoic "double causality" against Epicurean "single causality" of bodies (Deleuze 1969: 115).

¹ Jason M. Wirth, in his *Schelling's Practice of the Wild: Time, Art, Imagination* (2015), offers an extensive comparative study of Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* and Deleuze's idea of the imageless image, introducing the notion of the "wild" in order to advance a non-vitalist conception of the life of nature. He thus claims that, "*Nature is through and through alive because it is wild*" (xiii; italics in original). In *Logique du Sens*, Deleuze refers to the ancient Stoics, and not Schelling, in elaborating this non-vitalist view, and I limit myself here to the latter. But Wirth's study goes in the same direction and is valuable in this regard.

The latter amounts to a materialism without productivity and without the ability to explain the Stoic puzzles of sense (*lekton*) (Meillassoux meanwhile believes that the Epicureans are the true materialists. Deleuze however claims that their materialism, unlike that of the Stoics, fails to explain the production of novelty in nature). The Stoics introduce material reality as a conflagrant fire whose components burn one other, with sense as nothing but an attribute (or effect) of the internal interactions between these components. Deleuze ascribes a kind of causality (a “quasi-causality”) to these attributes or effects, which explains primordially the emergence of incorporeal agencies such as consciousness. Epicureanism lacks this explanatory tool (yet, Deleuze in “*Lucrece et le Simulacre*” brings forward an Epicurean transition from corporeal simulacra toward incorporeal “phantasms”. If we accept this reading, we would disagree with Meillassoux, for whom the Epicureans hold a bare materialism; Deleuze 1969: 321; Meillassoux 2016: 120). Nevertheless, this Stoic explanatory tool is not at all an aspect of organic life. The Stoic conflagrant fire exists anterior to every subject, and organic life and has no resemblance to it. Its organization is inorganic. What makes it different from organic organizations is its contingency, as explained in Deleuze’s *Logique du Sens* with reference to Cicero’s notion of fatality in *De Fato* (Deleuze 1969: 199). In Deleuze’s reading, the Stoic fatality has nothing to do with predictability (any principle of reason) and he explains this by pointing to the way in which Stoic astrology differs from Chaldean astrology. The former is not about finding laws of nature in order to predict its behavior, but feeling the lawfulness of nature and waiting for its contingent behavior. This is the meaning of *Amor fati* for the Stoics, and explains the central role of death in their philosophy: death, as the ultimate fate, in fact marks the ultimate contingency.

For Meillassoux, what guarantees both the exteriority of reality and its non-dependence on subjectivity is what he calls “the necessity of contingency”. A necessary contingency, according to Meillassoux, is an ontological one, a contingency which is not the result of a lack of knowledge, but of a positive property in reality itself. It seems that the point which distinguishes Meillassoux’s account of contingency from that of Deleuze is thus the way in which the former is speculative, the latter transcendental, which is to say that for Deleuze, contingency is the matter of experience. From a Deleuzean point of view, Meillassoux is right to say that “the necessity of contingency” guarantees absolute exteriority, but it does not entail a rupture from the problem of access and transcendentalism *tout court*. After all, it’s Meillassoux himself who affirms that it is the result of an encounter: “I affirm that the only point of absolute exteriority encountered by thought is that of contingency” (Meillassoux 2016: 142)². Therefore, although Meillassoux claims to go so far, to absolute exteriority and

² The quote continues: “. . . its own contingency, and that of its world”. We know that “Iteration, Reiteration, Repetition” is the text of a talk Meillassoux gave on the 20th of April, 2012, in Berlin. In the original talk, this sentence was: “I affirm that the only point of absolute exteriority that thought encounters is that of the radical contingency of our world”. This change from the “contingency of our world” to “its own contingency” is very significant for our purposes. The necessity of contingency entails the contingency of exteriority, but our thought encounters the absolute contingency of exteriority through the contingency of our world, which

ancestrality, he remains, ultimately, at the level of the contingency that thought encounters. My claim here is that Meillassoux's speculative account of reality (his positive philosophy) is not so far from Deleuze's transcendental empiricism, given that despite their radical differences, both philosophers seek the experience of exteriority through an encounter with contingency. In fact, along with Catherine Malabou, I claim that we cannot relinquish the transcendental (Malabou 2014: 247-254), because even a speculative materialism has to limit itself to the absolute exteriority that thought can "attain", "accede" or "encounter" (Meillassoux 2016: 119, 120, 142).

Hence, we can make a distinction between Meillassoux's negative philosophy (his arguments against "the era of the Correlation") and his positive philosophy (his principle of factuality and the thesis of the necessity of contingency), and claim that his negative philosophy can be read partially as a follow up to the critiques of representation and subjectivity in Heidegger and Deleuze (taking these philosophers as themselves the subjects of their own critique). Further, that his positive philosophy is perhaps compatible with Deleuze's transcendental empiricism, specifically with what in *Logique du Sens*, Deleuze refers to as his idea of fatality, defined as an aggregation of necessity and contingency (Deleuze 1969: 47). Fatality is Deleuze's account of the necessity of contingency, or his factuality. The difference is that he also takes into account the accessibility of ontological contingency and its appearance in experience (his transcendentalism), which, as we have seen, despite his best efforts, Meillassoux cannot elude. And the fact that Deleuze takes into account the accessibility of contingency does not mean that he reduces it into this accessibility.

In *After Finitude*, Meillassoux criticizes transcendentalism for its reliance on transcendental subjectivity, but never examines a transcendentalism without subjectivity, such as is exemplified in Deleuze's transcendental empiricism. In "Iteration, Reiteration, Repetition," he claims that the transcendentalist philosophies which attack subjectivity are themselves subjectalist, given that they criticize subjectivity while relying on notions like perception or will. A problem with Meillassoux's negative philosophical endeavor is, however, that he considers subjectivity as a coherent realm in which life, perception, productivity, will, etc. share uniform values distinct from materiality. But the point is that these aspects of subjectivity are diverse; some of them are more material, more unconscious, more external. Indeed, there is a difference between someone who understands the world as thought or spirit and someone who considers all entities as dead or the products of blind force. To imbricate all of these attitudes is a simple reductionism. Deleuze's transcendental empiricism indicates a move, not (a representational extension) from subject to objective reality, but the other way around, from the real (the transcendental) to the subject as a product (the empirical). The question for him is how material reality can (contingently) produce consciousness, and his answer is: by an infinite production of reasons (Meillassoux's answer is: by no reason! But

signifies nothing but Deleuzian transcendental empiricism. The change in the sentence demonstrates that Meillassoux is well aware of the problem and wants to bypass it.

Deleuzian contingency of the multiplication of reasons entails that reason here does not at all mean an established direction). But what causes Meillassoux to consider Deleuze a subjectalist is the fact that, according to Deleuze, the contingency of nature is not limited to the contingent production of consciousness- indeed all productions in every aspect of reality or nature are contingent. Deleuze is thus a metaphysician, positing contingency as productive of all acts of nature. For Meillassoux, the non-organic world is a homogeneous reality, and the only heterogeneity is in relation to the organic world. For Deleuze however, every corner of the world harbors heterogeneity. The inorganic, before the emergence of intelligent life, was full of quantum fluctuations, full of the capability to produce new forms, and this is not at all an image of subjectivity, because this production is absolutely contingent, very different from conscious subjective production. Besides, we haven't learned this through the human sciences, but rather through the natural sciences. And the transcendental aspect of Deleuze's philosophy entails that we can know the contingency of being in itself through the experience of contingency which harbors the trace of the real in our experience. Deleuze's transcendentalism does not maintain that there exists a fixed logical precondition for existence. It rather holds that a fluid transcendental/empirical distinction is necessary in order to get rid of a dogmatic image of reality composed of objects (referents) and their correlates, namely subjects and concepts. Therefore, for Deleuze, the transcendental/empirical distinction is not a distinction between subjectivity and objectivity, but a distinction within objectivity based on the real existence of subjectivity.

Meillassoux claims that if we take reality as absolutely devoid of any capacity to produce subjectivity and organisms, we will discover an infinitely more interesting world, in which there is *ex nihilo* emergence of realities that potentially did not exist before. Against the Bergsonian and Deleuzian idea of creation and virtuality, Meillassoux defines his absolute reality by the idea of "pure ruptures" (Meillassoux 2016: 146). But he understands Bergsonian and Deleuzian virtuality as submitted to the principle of sufficient reason. Again, I believe that Meillassoux's interesting and acceptable position, which takes "pure ruptures" as defining absolute exteriority, is not so far from Deleuze's position, with the difference being that Deleuze multiplies infinitely these pure ruptures (synthetic reasons, or reasons of being), whereas Meillassoux tends to fix them in a Cartesian manner. Besides the fact that, in my reading, Deleuze's real (that is, not fixed) transcendental/empirical distinction suggests nothing but what Meillassoux takes as a pure rupture, Deleuze deals directly with the result of this distinction in the explanation of reality in itself, when he quotes Spinoza's claim that "we do not even know what a body can do" (Deleuze 1990: 255). The *ability* of body to produce realities that absolutely did not exist before is not at all a subjectivization of body. Meillassoux is right to put contingency against the principle of sufficient reason and define it with the principle of unreason. But the latter entails that we can never know what a body will do. Meillassoux is also right to assume that subjectivity follows the principle of sufficient reason. But he then gives a generalized account of reason that includes unconscious and poetical

reasoning, and accuses the philosophers who deal with these kinds of reasoning of again being subjectalist, without considering the essential contingency of their reasoning and the absence of the principle of reason in this contingent (and material) reasoning. The Deleuzian distinction between the necessary reasons of knowledge and the contingent reasons of being is absent in Meillassoux's thought, and this is why he cannot give any account of the nonsensical intelligibility of being. I would claim, however, that no contingent account of the real is subjectalist, and this holds perfectly in the case of Deleuze. Meillassoux's characterization of Schopenhauer's will or Nietzsche's power is only correct if will or power determine a definite direction (or reasons of knowledge). No extrapolation is possible if they are blind.

Hence, Deleuze is a true philosopher of contingency regarding the problem of the emergence of life. It is not the case that, according to Deleuze, intelligent life already exists in dead matter, the point is rather that dead matter can contingently produce intelligent life, or in other words, can produce heterogeneity (because intelligent life is not something determinate. It could have any other form. Its current form is absolutely contingent, though this does not deny the difference in nature between the material world and intelligent life. I insist that Deleuze is a philosopher who wants more, not less, heterogeneity. And Meillassoux believes that in order to affirm heterogeneity in its true sense, you have to accept only one heterogeneity, which is between subjectivity and absolute exteriority). Inorganic matter is not already living or intelligent, but we never can know what it can do.

Meillassoux asks how "a non-subjective real is perfectly thinkable"? In the context of Deleuze's reading of Leibnizian-Maimonian rationalism, we can refer to the intelligibility of reality as the condition of its accessibility for thought. Meillassoux refers instead to the mathematizability of reality. It is thinkable because it is mathematizable. He claims that the difference is that intelligibility provides us with continuity, while mathematizability with rupture. My claim, based on Deleuze's transcendentalism, is that mathematizability marks a rupture within experience that provides us with the thought of the absolute real – not a rupture from experience into the absolute real, because mathematics is after all a human endeavor, and it has a certain place in the history of our thought. Mathematics indeed indicates a part of our thought which provides us with the maximum of objectivity, but if so, Meillassoux follows nothing but Deleuzian transcendental realism (not speculative materialism) in which we search for that which is *in* our subjective experience but not subjective. On the other hand, Deleuze's account of intelligibility differs from the post-Kantian one in a crucial aspect, which is its contingency. In this vein, Deleuze's rationalism should be considered as an irrationalism, in the context of its focus on the nonsensical nature of its logic. If Hegel's logic is a logic of sense, as Hyppolite in his *Logic and Existence* claims (Hyppolite 1997: xiii, 170), Deleuze's is a logic of nonsense. Hence, we have here a kind of intelligibility that does not form a continuum but rather is based on ruptures. Therefore, Deleuze's peculiar kind of intelligibility (to take nonsense as the genetic element of sense) satisfies Meillassoux's requirements in pursuing the mathematizability of reality.

The result is again a reverse move in Deleuzian ontology, from absolute exteriority to subjectivity, not the injection of subjectivity everywhere, to which Meillassoux ascribes it. For example, the Deleuzian idea of nomadic distribution is not a consideration of all distributions based on human nomads, but rather a consideration of human nomads as distributing like molecules or chemicals. The same holds for Deleuze's references to the history of mathematics through the works of Albert Lautman. Although Lautman takes the real of mathematics as lying in the work of the mathematician, this is not a subjectivization of mathematics, because according to him, in this way it reveals "precisions, limitations, exception" (Lautman 2011: xxvi). It's true that Lautman deals with "the effective life" of mathematics, but this does not render him a vitalist, because real mathematics is alive in its precisions, limitations, exceptions, or, in a word, in its contingency. Here, untotalizability reveals itself in limitations and exceptions, in every mathematical act, against the totalizability of mathematical theories. One could say that although set theory propounds the idea of untotalizability, in being a theory it is totalizable. A well-formed and coherent mathematical theory does not define a dead objectivity, as Meillassoux claims about set theory, but rather a deep subjectivity that projects its own image onto the real. A dead pattern or structure is a perfect image of the work of a living established subject. Lautman is a true realist in his effort to transcend subjective mathematical theories and look into what renders mathematics real, namely its contingent historicity as its life.

This is the basis of what Deleuze considers the problematic, what demonstrates thought's encounter with the real. Meillassoux reads Deleuze's "intensive differences" as "differences of degree" and therefore considers his philosophy as a continuative monism, and he is right in believing that every such monism is a subjectivism. He is also right to say that "what we need are *dualisms everywhere*- pure differences in nature", not differences in degree. Meillassoux advocates, in apparent opposition to Deleuze, the need for "*The heterogeneous turned against the intensive, difference in nature turned against difference in degree; the eternally possible polydualism of Hyperchaos against the pseudonecessary monopluralism of Chaosmos*" (Meillassoux 2016: 132), as if Deleuze were a philosopher of homogeneity, and his *chaosmos* a homogeneous sphere subject to the principle of sufficient reason. This neglects the fact that the alleged continuity in Deleuze's thought is in fact a way to induce heterogeneity everywhere. If Meillassoux believes in a dead dualism of nature between subject and object, he would be a subjectivist Cartesian; if he believes in a "poly-dualism" which induces heterogeneity everywhere, he would be a genuine Deleuzian. And I think there is indeed an inconsistency in Meillassoux's thought between these two poles. But the crucial point here is that from a Deleuzian point of view, Meillassoux's Cartesian account of heterogenesis remains at the level of the actual, and never reaches the point of virtual or differential heterogenesis. Or, as I'll elaborate shortly, his criticism of transcendental philosophy remains at the level of the empirical. Thus, what Meillassoux takes as difference in nature in his definition of heterogeneity amounts to an empirical difference, which in its turn needs to be explained based

on its genetic structures. The problem can also be traced through Deleuze's deviation from Hegel, the way in which he searches for non-contradictory heterogenesis as the genetic motor of his dialectic and condemns Hegel for taking conceptual contradiction as a negative motor. In this regard, Meillassoux stands besides Hegel and against Deleuze, and would be the perfect subject for a Deleuzian criticism of conceptual and extensive difference.

Meillassoux defines the absolute as that which is separate and independent from us. Therefore, what is absolute must be, and really is, contingent (independent from the subjective principle of reason). Hence, the laws of nature discovered by mathematized physics are contingent. And the contingency of the laws of nature means that natural events could be otherwise. But the connection between laws and events entails that the revisability of laws and the contingency of events are the same thing, which is to say, that the revisions of the laws of nature throughout the course of the history of physics demonstrate a change in the content of physical theories, namely natural events. Of course, physical laws change in interaction with their experimental (or laboratory) contents. But obviously, it is not the case that the world was Newtonian in the time of Newton, and Einsteinian in the time of Einstein. I believe that the only way to solve this dilemma is to abandon the idea of the absolute independence of the laws of physics, and to affirm that their revisability indicates the real work of the physicist, which is, of course, also part of the real.

Based on this, I think, Meillassoux's use of set theory is absolutely negative. As mentioned above, he defines the absolute (his *deuteroabsolutory*) as what is independent of our thought. Then he takes formal meaning, provided only by set theory, as the only meaning "*capable of producing deuteroabsolutory truths*" (162). Formal meaning has this capability only because it is pure, devoid of any content or definition. But why does this deficit give formal meaning this capability? Because any content or definition comes from us. Thus, to grasp absolute exteriority, we need an absolutely structural and formal instrument, namely set theory. But, as I have said, this move is thoroughly negative. Is evacuating any subjectivity the means to open up the space for objectivity? I doubt it. My question, in this context, would thus be; is mathematics pure symbolism, or it is *about* something? Meillassoux takes mathematics as pure symbolism, because for him any content constitutes a trace of subjectivity. My response is to point once more to the Lautmanian-Deleuzian approach to mathematics, according to which it is indeed about something at the points of its impurity, which is to say, at its problematic points. But of course, this response assumes that subjective activity is part of (and a result of) objective reality. Therefore, the "*ontology of empty signs*" that Meillassoux proposes is a negative ontology, or better, a destructive one, which exists only in order to reject any subjectalist ontology. My point here is that we can think a meaningless sign because it is not absolutely independent of us; it rather *connects* us to the absolute outside; it is the problematic. This is exactly the play of sense and non-sense that Deleuze brings to the scene. A sign devoid of sense is that which we encounter in order to commence generating sense. The Deleuzian disagreement with Meillassoux is thus not that a meaningless sign is not a sign

(nor that it is not meaningless), rather that it is not absolutely distinct; it is the point of an encounter with the absolute. We might consider the realm of sense as the circle of correlation. Now, nonsense as the genetic element of sense would tear this circle (as Deleuze declares in *Logique du Sens*, regarding the circle of proposition; Deleuze 1969: 29-31) and make the encounter with the absolute possible. Thus, Deleuze's irrationalism is fundamentally different from the subjectalist rationalisms which are subjected to Meillassoux's criticism.

Meillassoux considers this emphasis on the encounter that which renders Deleuze's thought a transcendentalism based on the priority of perception. In contrast, he himself focuses on the capability of pure thought to grasp the absolute, and pure thought reveals itself only in mathematics. This stands in contrast to Deleuze's interest in sensation as a rich activity of thought, likewise his use of literature and of poetic language in the context of philosophical thought, alongside his interest in transcendental philosophy and the problem of the conditions of sense-perception. Thus we might say that the difference is between Deleuze's definition of thought as an encounter with the event as absolute exteriority, and Meillassoux's definition of thought as an encounter with the absolute. And this difference lies in the problem of purity and impurity.

For Meillassoux the thing in itself would be "intemporal and non-spatialized" because time and space are the forms of perception, which is in its turn an extension of subjectivity. Pure thought, revealing itself only in mathematical set theory, is that which can grasp the thing in itself. This is why he renounces Bergson and his heirs (or Merleau-Ponty as the philosopher of perception). The problematic claim here is that a pure thought, devoid of any perception, is possible. Deleuze indeed defines thought in such a way as it includes Bergsonian perception. There is no pure thought for him, and his account of the priority of contingent thought, his (ir)rationalism, establishes the priority of impure thought over pure recognition or understanding, which are subject to the economy of representation. Thought is the product of disjunction in our experience, and by positing an ontology based on such a thought, Deleuze distributes disparity and heterogeneity everywhere, instead of establishing as distinct the two homogeneous and pure realms of subjectivity and absolute objectivity.

This belief in pure thought, and the separation Meillassoux makes between thought and perception, indeed resembles the Kantian separation of understanding and sensation criticized by both Maimon and Deleuze, and makes of him a representationalist. This is confirmed by his discussion of the contingency of the laws of nature. As he reminds us, Kant assumes the necessity of the laws of nature, such as renders him an uncritical metaphysician. Kant believes that the laws of nature are necessary and are the condition of possibility of our representations of nature. Meillassoux, however, holds that the laws of nature need not be necessary as the condition for our representations of them. They can be (indeed have to be, based on the principle of non-contradiction which Meillassoux assumes as the only ontological principle) contingent. The only condition is that they don't change frequently. Thus, his semi-Kantian argument would be that since we have representations of the laws of nature

(and these representations are authentic), the contingent laws of nature do not change frequently. In this way, Meillassoux is a possible target for the critics of representation, including Deleuze, as Anna Longo suggests in “The Contingent Emergent of Thought” (Longo 2014: 47)³. Meanwhile, one of Meillassoux’s critiques against Deleuze is that the latter is a philosopher of chaotic becoming or frequent change, which I think is a confusion of the empirical and the transcendental regarding Deleuze. To understand this confusion, let’s compare Deleuze’s chaotic becoming and Meillassoux’s contingent being.

According to Meillassoux, nature can change without any reason, but fortunately, it does not change frequently, and this is why we can discover the laws of nature which are the representations of what governs nature. For Deleuze, chaotic becoming is not the physical change of empirical beings but is what makes thought as the encounter with the problematic possible. In *What is Philosophy?*, Deleuze, together with Guattari, states:

The plane of immanence is like a section of chaos and acts like a sieve. In fact, chaos is characterized less by the absence of determinations than by the infinite speed with which they take shape and vanish. This is not a movement from one determination to the other but, on the contrary, the impossibility of a connection between them, since one does not appear without the other having already disappeared, and one appears as disappearance when the other disappears as outline. Chaos is not an inert or stationary state, nor is it a chance mixture. Chaos makes chaotic and undoes every consistency in the infinite. The problem of philosophy is to acquire a consistency without losing the infinite into which thought plunges . . . (Deleuze & Guattari 1994: 42)

The laws of nature are the local appearances in the objective fields of sense, and chaotic becoming is the aggregation of these localities in a whole, something like a conflagrant fire. As Deleuze and Guattari state, “The problem of philosophy is to acquire a consistency without losing the infinite”. Consistency is what provides the laws, while the infinite is a look to the aggregate, to the chaotic transcendental. The immanence of the transcendental is what distinguishes philosophy from science. The plurality of the laws of nature is only possible in the immanence of the infinite, where each law “appears as disappearance when the other disappears as outline”. In other words, for Deleuze, laws are local appearances (something like Graham Harman’s subjectalism), but if we extend perception with the help of philosophy, we can reach an infinite or a chaos (different from Meillassoux’s “trans-finite” or “hyper-chaos” only in being immanent) which is not local any more, even if it is immanent to the laws as their infinite aggregation (and having nothing to do with monotonous Heraclitian

³ In this work, Anna Longo writes that Meillassoux’s materialism “assumes to know the inorganic as a dead independent exteriority and thought as a dead axiomatic, but it is not able to understand life. So it is actually the separation between thought, as system of representation, and being, as represented, that Deleuze wants to challenge in order to understand how thought can be forced by real intensities to create new rules, to evolve, to change”. Here, we can find in Longo’s emphases Meillassoux’s belief in the purity of thought and its absolute distinction from pre-established pure being which renders it representative.

becoming, considered in *Time without Becoming* as a “metaphysics”; Meillassoux 2014: 26). Thus, obviously, Meillassoux is a philosopher of transcendence, while Deleuze is a philosopher of immanence. And the problem with any transcendent philosophy is that it takes an empirical distinction (between ancestral and anthropocentric for example) for a transcendental difference.

Hence, Deleuze does not need stability for the possibility of laws, because they are local (but not subjective) views of chaos. Chaos is neither fixed nor a monotonous becoming, but is an untotalizable infinity in which, for every infinite speed, there is another which is infinitely faster⁴. The fact that chaos is infinite and transcendental also dismisses Meillassoux’s accusation that Deleuze relies on chance in “Potentiality and Virtuality,” as a totality of possibilities which is just beyond our knowledge. The Deleuzian distinction between normal games and ideal games in *Logique du Sens* indicates different meanings of chance, such that one is a determination beyond our knowledge and the other is an ontological contingency (“nomadic distribution”) (Deleuze 1969: 75). This also indicates the difference between Deleuze and Meillassoux’s ideas of virtuality, which, for the former is chaotic, and for the latter successive (Longo 2014: 49). This philosophical infinite provides the untotalizability that Meillassoux searches for and apparently finds in set theory. Meillassoux’s acceptable idea of the (positive) contingency of the inorganic -which entails that the inorganic is capable of producing the heterogeneous- and his rejection of so-called Deleuzian vitalism are inconsistent, because for Deleuze, emergence *ex-nihilo* is what happens everywhere in the inorganic and the organic world.

My ultimate claim is that the Fregean notion of sense that Deleuze uses and expands in *Logique du Sens* (and which is, I believe, compatible with Markus Gabriel’s idea of fields of sense) does not fail to explain the possibility of ancestral statements: morning star and evening star were distinct before the emergence of life on earth. The objective existence of fields of sense does not depend on the existence of any subject. We can discover in a transcendental way that there is no reality which does not express or present itself, and this expression or presentation is not at all to a subject, which is exactly Deleuze’s thesis of the univocity of being. Perhaps Frege himself was thinking about intersubjectivity when he thought about the objectivity of sense, but Deleuze’s (and Gabriel’s) idea of sense has nothing to do with intersubjectivity: Logic of sense is the logic of existence. In the case of Deleuze, sense is distinct from signification, which is the result of intersubjective conventions. Of course, Deleuze’s transcendentalism entails keeping a connection with sense-perception, but also searching for a real condition within the latter which might make possible its transcendence

⁴ As mentioned, in *Time without Becoming* (26) Meillassoux charges Deleuze with believing in a monotonous and metaphysical becoming, disregarding the fact that Deleuze’s main referent in *Logique du Sens* when explaining his idea of becoming is Plato’s (rather than Heraclitus’) wonder regarding the terms less and more, and how they indicate a kind of untotalizability. Another referent in *Logique du Sens* in this regard is Alice’s becoming bigger when she becomes smaller and her becoming smaller when she becomes bigger, which is against the principle of reason as the determination of a direction (Cf. Deleuze 1969: 9-10).

in a movement towards what contingently (and really) conditions it. We can therefore think about an ontology independent from subjective accessibility, in which things make sense without receiving this sense from any subjective meaning. This objective sense can be considered as the genetic element of subjective meaning (manifestation) and intersubjective signification, and also as the meaning of an object (denotation), which is why its logic is the logic of nonsense. Subjective meaning exists because things make sense in themselves, but their making sense is radically distinct and exterior to subjective meaning and its correlates. Deleuze explains this by referring to the Stoic materialism in which sense (what the Stoics call *lekton*) is an incorporeal effect of the interaction between bodies (like time, space and void). And this effect enjoys a quasi-causality in a fatal relationship with the other effects. The interactions occur without any need for the existence of a subject and produce incorporeal effects. Meillassoux would claim that Deleuze and the Stoics conceive of the real in this way in order to make it compatible with the meaning-maker subject. He would argue that the real as absolutely distinct from subjects is senseless. Yet it can produce life and consciousness without any reason. And this is why Deleuze would argue that it is not, in fact, senseless, but nonsense- as the genetic element of sense. It can produce life and consciousness, together with an infinity of other things, without any reason. And this is its making sense: being expresses itself in the contingent production of new forms.

To conclude, I think the value of Meillassoux's efforts is not in rejecting some philosophers as correlationist or subjectalist in favor of others, or of putting an end to the era of correlation, but in revealing a developing conflict between the modern sciences and philosophy. Ray Brassier, in his *Nihil Unbound*, recognized this problem and suggested a substitution of Meillassoux's ancestral phenomena with the reality described by "the modern natural sciences *tout court*" (Brassier 2007: 59). Thus, the Meillassouxian problem would be that of the conflict between the manifest image of philosophy and the scientific image. The modern sciences discovered realms of reality which are truly human-independent and autonomous, like those of "thermonuclear fusion, and galactic expansion". However I think Deleuzian philosophy suggests that instead of rejecting one and endorsing the other in a Meillassouxian gesture, we ought to think about the interaction between the two. In this picture, what modern sciences do is to expand the scale of the reality which is manifest to us. They discover new scales of reality far smaller and larger than those afforded by our imaginatory power. In doing so, they add these new scales to our manifestation (in the Sellarsian sense) making it larger and more complicated. On the other hand, they keep opening absolute exteriority to our experience, which is not at all a characteristic of modernity (indeed we have never been modern, in this sense), but rather traceable back to the elementary forms of science throughout history. In this regard, to be an immanent philosopher amounts to not taking our knowledge of absolute exteriority as given before making sense of our worldly reality, in such a way as we might understand exteriority based on an image produced in our

representational thought. It rather amounts to conceiving of our interiority in terms of an openness to absolute exteriority.

This is not at all to say that science provides us with an empirical (or instrumental) account of reality, while philosophy with a transcendental one. Science and philosophy work together, in order to approach this absolute exteriority and to extricate us gradually from our ego-centric habits (or correlationist circles) of deriving our reality from our own repetitive sensations. Modern sciences are not theories of an absolute exteriority, but they do define a distinctive human effort to approach such an exteriority, and they profoundly affect philosophical endeavors. The modern sciences constitute a very distinctive human activity, but their distinctiveness is not in being non-empirical (or better, non-experimental) and escaping any condition of experience. Certainly, they engender a profound change in the notion of experience, but it is wrong to believe that they theorize a reality which exists in isolation. This picture may still seem correlationist to Meillassoux, but we might ask him whether an ever-expanding and self-unfolding correlation is still a correlation? Is a correlation that unceasingly modifies itself in encounter with exteriority still a correlation?

I believe that Deleuze's so-called transcendental realism can play a crucial role in the future appearances of these scientific exigencies. What modern sciences demand from philosophical endeavors is a modelization that ought not to be an *a priori* set of possibilities, but rather ought to take into account the becoming of such a set in a series of events. To put it simply, modern science needs an explanatory system that evolves together with the evolution of the area of science in question, and is heterogeneous in trying to explain the heterogeneity of that area. In short, we might no longer have to reduce a real system when we try to model it. And Deleuze's philosophy provides an essential resource for this exigency, by introducing the infinite and contingent production of the reasons of being, which, unlike the reasons of knowledge, are not the simple patterns recognizable and repeatable by ordinary users. In other words, Deleuze's post-structuralism seems to be crucial for modern science because it is a structuralism not of simple but of complicated structures; not deep but superficial structures; the ones that we see before recognizing any pattern. It indicates the messy genesis of that which structuralism takes as structure.

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