

The Immanence of the World Beyond

QUENTIN MEILLASSOUX

My philosophical project can be summarized in three theses, which I will begin by briefly formulating and then explicating.

- 1 *The absolute is thinkable only by a refusal of the principle of reason.* To put this in my own language: *speculation, understood as thought about the absolute, is possible only by not being metaphysical.*
- 2 *The challenge of a revival of speculation is irreligion.* I maintain that irreligion is possible only by being speculative – by being, therefore, thought about the absolute, and not a critique of absolutes. A symmetrical aspect of the second thesis is this: every critique of absolutes shares in an essential characteristic of modern religiosity, namely *fideism*.
- 3 Here we come to the object of our principal concern: the challenge of irreligion become speculative consists in an *eschatology of immortality*. I maintain therefore that *the possibility of immortality is only thinkable by being irreligious, and that a true philosophy of immanence attains to this not by an idea of finitude but by an ethic of immortality*. Another, more classical, way of formulating this thesis consists in affirming that philosophical irreligion is not a form of atheism, but rather the condition for an authentic access to the divine.

These are my three theses (which at this point are still rather enigmatic):

- 1 speculation is possible only insofar as it is non-metaphysical;

The Immanence of the World Beyond

- 2 irreligion is possible only by being speculative;
- 3 immortality and access to the divine, are the possible conditions of immanence – thinkable and liveable – arising only from irreligion.

The First Two Theses

My general proposal, developed in *After Finitude*,¹ is that it is possible to revive an idea of a speculative yet non-metaphysical philosophy. It is thus possible to drive a wedge between speculation and metaphysics as generally conceived. I will explain the particular meaning of these two terms within the context of my own thought.

By ‘speculative’ I mean every pretension of thought to arrive at an absolute: that is, an eternal truth independent, on this account, of the contingencies (psychological, historical, linguistic) of our relationship to the world. On the other hand, I reject the claim that such a speculative power of thought is necessarily metaphysical. In my view, speculation is not only not necessarily metaphysical, but only the refusal of all metaphysics allows thought to arrive at authentically speculative truths. Put briefly, what has been called ‘the end of metaphysics’ is the very condition of an authentic access to the absolute.

In order to understand this point I must explain that by ‘metaphysics’ I mean the *juxtaposition* (I hold to the term) of two claims: on the one hand, every metaphysics is speculative (thus in my view what Kant calls ‘transcendental metaphysics’ is not a true metaphysics). Put another way, every metaphysics claims to arrive at an absolute. But metaphysics is additionally characterized by its submission to what Leibniz calls the ‘principle of sufficient reason’. Every metaphysics lays claim to some argument as to why there is something rather than nothing: thus it is possible to ground the fact that certain entities ought necessarily to exist by virtue of what they are – their specific properties. Metaphysics, in this sense, is the pretension of proving the existence of a necessary God – what has been called since Kant the ‘ontological argument’ – which, in turn,

¹ Quentin Meillassoux, 2008, *After Finitude. An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*, London: Continuum.

Quentin Meillassoux

leads to the upholding of the necessity of natural laws in our world, or of any other kind of entity for that matter (atom, soul, society, historical process, etc.).

The definition of non-metaphysical speculation is a mirror-image of this definition of metaphysics: an absolute non-metaphysics is an absolute grounded upon the effective falsehood of the principle of reason. In other words, the project of non-metaphysical speculation would be established thus: our inability to prove why there is something rather than nothing – this impossibility is not the mark of our ignorance of the true reasons for things, but an indication of our ability to come to know that there are, effectively, no reasons for anything. I hold that the radical contingency of all things, their irrationality, is not the sign of thought's incapacity for reaching the ultimate truth of something. On the contrary, radical contingency is the very truth of all things. When we stumble upon the irrationality of all things, we do not come up against a limit to our knowledge; rather we come up against the absoluteness of our knowledge: the eternal property of things themselves consists in the fact that they can without reason become other than they are. Therefore, it is clear: the idea of non-metaphysical speculation consists in the following thesis: eternal chaos is capable, without reason, of the emergence and the abolition of the world, of destroying the laws present in nature so as to bring others into being. The irrationality of things thus discloses to us being qua being, and this being of all things consists in a chaos subordinate to no reason whatsoever. In sum, the evident stability of laws becomes, in sum, a mere appearance of necessity, capable of collapsing at any moment. The phenomenal constancy of the world is the eye of a hurricane without beginning or end – a 'hurricane' that I call *Surchaos*: eternal chaos, nestled in the heart of the manifest irrationality of all things.

In establishing this thesis, I have had to address three main problems:

- 1 What grounds and legitimises these propositions? My idea, loosely put, is that contingency is the indispensable operative of every contemporary anti-metaphysics. By valorizing the psychological, transcendental, historical, or linguistic contingency of our intellectual categories, thought is ever de-absolutized. I then try to deduce that the only thing that we can really relativize

The Immanence of the World Beyond

is precisely the driving force of every such relativization: contingency itself. Thus I try to show that contingency, and contingency alone, is absolutely necessary – that is to say, it is not relative to any factual context whatsoever. This is what I call the ‘principle of factuality’: only the facticity of things is not factual, only their contingency is necessary. If ‘facticity’ designates the unsurpassable contingency of all reality, ‘factuality’ designates the non-facticity of facticity (its absolute necessity). So a speculative philosophy grounded on such a principle of factuality will be called ‘factual’.

- 2 How can the thesis of the necessity of contingency produce a diversified discourse? – how can it produce a programme of research not content simply to repeat, with respect to everything, what the latter is without reason? What gives the principle of factuality its significance is the fact that the un-reason of things, far from cancelling out every rational necessity, allows the work of philosophical reason to be redefined. It must liberate reason from the principle of reason and give it a new task. This task stems from the fact that in order to be contingent, a being, a thing, cannot actually be anything. This means that there are no conditions whatsoever of un-reason. Therefore to say that a being, in order to be a being, should be without reason, is not to say anything. For if a being is contingent, it should fill a certain number of conditions, and the task of a redefined reason (now liberated from the principle of reason) consists in discovering them. For example, I have tried to show that one could ontologically ground the logical principle of non-contradiction by holding that if a being could not be contradictory, it is because it is contingent; therefore not already to be that which it is not, in order eventually to be able (without reason) to become that. Surchaos can bring about anything but a contradiction, under pain of generating an absolutely necessary, immutable being, a pure logical and ontological monstrosity.²
- 3 My third problem has led me to confront anew the Humean problem of the modal status of physical laws. For if I maintain that every determinate reality can emerge or be destroyed without reason, then I ought to admit that physical laws – which

² See Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, ch. 3.

Quentin Meillassoux

are themselves also determinate realities – can without reason be modified at any instant. My question to the Humean problem then is this: can one demonstrate the necessity of some laws? Can we ground our belief in this necessity of reason? My response is simply: no, one cannot, because laws are not necessary but contingent – really contingent, lacking anything that guarantees their durability. I have then run up against the problem of knowing why laws do not capriciously change at every instant, but on the contrary, remain remarkably stable, which seems highly unlikely if there is nothing to ensure their continuity. The response to this difficulty has usually consisted in showing that one cannot apply a probabilistic logic to laws themselves, but only to physical objects already subject to those laws.³ Without rehearsing in detail such analyses, we must recall the basic principle, necessary to the understanding of what follows. The belief according to which contingent laws would be incapable of the kind of stability confirmed by experience comes from the following reasoning: one poses first the existence of an immense – indeed, infinite – totality of possible worlds, moved by physical laws different from those which govern our own. Then, it is argued, if our world is contingent, there would be very little likelihood of its being renewed within time, because each time cast, the ‘dice of every possible universe’ would be cast on itself, the dazzling random effect of a different universe at every instant. Now, with respect to the laws of chance, the idea that our universe, rather than the vast range of conceivable universes, should at every instant be the unique product of such a ‘roll of the dice’, is so improbable that one ought to conclude that some physical necessity ‘rigs’ the outcome and thus guarantees the constancy of our world. Against this reasoning, I have argued in *After Finitude* that one cannot so totalize the set of possible worlds, for nothing allows one to secure it except the fact that such a totality of possibilities does in fact exist. This cannot be confirmed by experience (no one has ever seen such a totality), nor can it be confirmed by ‘pure theory’: for since Cantor we know that there is no totality of all conceivable numbers. The Cantorian transfinite means that for every infinite that exists, there is an even greater infinite, with

³ See Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, ch. 4.

The Immanence of the World Beyond

no limit to this ultimate series of infinitudes. Now, if the totality of possible cases is lacking, every random reasoning becomes meaningless. By means of such a critique of the calculation of chances applied to possible worlds (instead of being confined, as it should, to objects within our physical world), it would be legitimate to maintain that laws could be contingent and nevertheless remain stable, even in the face of every seeming probability.

Postmodernity and Fideism

This brings me to my second thesis: my concern to revive speculation stems from a desire to set in motion a new form of irreligiosity. It has become more and more clear to me that every attempt at de-absolutization – that is to say, every sceptical or critical enterprise, in the broad sense – of the rights of reason to establish absolute truths, far from pursuing a ‘residue’ of religiosity in metaphysics (that is, a secularized absolute), has on the contrary ended up in a systematic defence of the rights of belief. For to prohibit the right of access in itself amounts to a preservation of the possibility of an essentially unthinkable transcendence. Kant already said this clearly in the first Critique (at the end of the architectonic): affirming that his new metaphysics – transcendental and no longer speculative – could no longer be considered as a foundation or bedrock (*Grundfeste*) of religion, since it had forbidden to theoretical reason the possibility of proving the existence of God. He immediately added that nevertheless this new, transcendental metaphysics would henceforth become the *bulwark* (*Schutzwehr*) of religion, since criticism would just as easily prohibit, for precisely the same reason, the opposite proof of the non-existence of God.⁴ Faith, which cannot be vouched for theoretically, would simultaneously become theoretically incontestable, protected from every intrusion (other than that of practical reason, in the domain of speculative philosophy) into its own proper field of application: God and immortality. Now, this restriction of the rights of reason has gained considerable ground since Kant, since whose time the absolutory pretensions of both practical as well as theoretical reason have been disqualified, and making of

⁴ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A 849, B 877.

Quentin Meillassoux

the free belief of each person an attitude that no further immanent truth could claim to demystify. Today we have reached the point of a religiosity no longer sustained by metaphysics, but protected by a variety of contemporary anti-metaphysics, each of which, to be sure, no longer proves the truth of a specific religion (Christianity, or simply monotheism generally), but all of which demonstrate the equal legitimacy of any belief whatsoever, piety and not thought henceforth having the exclusive power to determine, with complete impunity, our relationship to the absolute.

This is what Gianni Vattimo, the leader of the line of ‘weak thought’, stated in his own way in his book *Espérer croire*.⁵ According to him, the end of metaphysics allows a decisive return of religious concern, since, metaphysics having been ended, no one can seriously argue that we can know that God does not exist. Having ‘demystified demystification’ itself, that is to say, having debunked thought’s claims to oppose an objective and hitherto ignored truth to religious illusions, postmodernity has opened the floodgates to an adherence of anyone to anything whatsoever, according to the spirit of the times or the prevailing winds of history. The return to Christian faith – determined in the first place by the ‘spirit of the age’ (affected by a desire to return to the religion of our parents and grandparents) rather than as the function this or that argument for or against such a faith – thus becomes for Vattimo a natural movement of the individual who has been freed from the claims of objective reason. In this way, postmodernity revives, in its own fashion, a fideistic relation between thought and faith, since fideism consists (after Montaigne) in limiting, and indeed annulling, the cognitive claims of reason so as to generate a vacuum in which belief can find its niche.

In contrast to this postmodern piety, the two greatest irreligious philosophers of our history – Lucretius and Spinoza – held, in clearly metaphysical terms, that human beings are capable by their thought alone of knowing that the gods whom they most frequently fear and worship (the ‘gods of the masses’) effectively do not exist, which is the condition for liberation and above all the discovery of the nature of the true gods. Hence I identify with these philosophers in attempting to revive the absoluteness of their approach,

⁵ Gianni Vattimo, 1998, *Espérer croire*, Paris: Seuil.

The Immanence of the World Beyond

opened towards a new rational understanding of the nature of the divine. But for me, against the metaphysical nature of the thought of Lucretius and Spinoza, it is also a matter of confirming the irremediable closure of the principle of reason, and of dissociating myself from the ancient dogmatism that still determined the forms of prior irreligiosities.

The Spectral Dilemma

I now come to my third thesis, which involves going through a detailed exposition of a specific problem, which I have called *the spectral dilemma*.⁶

We begin by explaining the meaning of the term *spectral*.

I call a *spectre* a death that we have not yet mourned, which haunts us to such an extent that we cannot get ourselves ‘out of limbo’, out of that state in which we are sucked into a destructive, because obsessive, memory of the disappeared. I call an *essential spectre*, or spectre *par excellence*, one whose death was of such a nature that, for essential and not solely psychological reasons, we are no longer capable of mourning: a death for which the work of mourning, the passage of time, has not sufficiently taken hold in order that one could envisage some kind of pacific relationship between the dead and the living. The deceased who exclaims the horror of his passing not only to his close friends and family, but to everyone who has heard the echo of his cry.

Essential spectres are horrendous deaths: premature and odious deaths, such as the death of an infant, or the death of parents knowing that their children are doomed to the same fate, and other similar ends of an equal degree of horror. Natural or criminal deaths, of a sort that could not be predicted either for those who suffered or by those who survive them. A death that bears no meaning, no completion, no fulfilment: just an atrocious interruption of life, such that it would be simply obscene to think that it was not experienced as such by those who suffered it.

We will call *essential grief* the achievement of mourning of essential spectres: in other words, the living and no longer morbid

⁶ See Quentin Meillassoux, 2008, ‘Spectral Dilemma, *Collapse IV*, pp. 261–75.

Quentin Meillassoux

relation of the living to those who have died horrendous deaths. Essential grief assumes the possibility of establishing a watchful link to the dead, who, when we are brought face to face with their fate, would not have us be plunged into hopeless dread (which is deadly in itself), but who, on the contrary, would actively insinuate their memory into the course of our life. To complete *essential grief* would mean to live with essential spectres, and no longer to die with them. So the question is: *is essential grief possible, and if so, on what terms?*

In the terms of the twentieth century, whose history has been dominated by such hideous deaths, can one inhabit a non-morbid relationship with these dead, who are for the most part unknown to us and yet still too close to us for our lives not to risk being secretly tormented by them? It seems at first sight that we must answer ‘no’ to this question. For it appears to be impossible to envisage essential grief if one refers to the basic option that the relationship to the dead allows us. This option simply claims that God either exists, or he doesn’t. Or, more generally, either a benevolent principle, transcending humanity, is at work in the world and beyond, carrying out justice for the dead, or such a transcendent principle does not exist. Now, it quickly appears that, irrespective of the countless possible ways in which one may frame them, neither of these options (for convenience’s sake let us call them the religious and the atheist) allow essential grief to be completed. To say that God exists, or to say that he does not: although one thinks under these two terms, they are two ways to despair in the face of spectres. In order to prove this, I will put, in the direct style of a plea for the defence, what I think are the strongest responses of each of these positions to the test of such a grief.

The religious defence might go as follows: ‘I can hope to embrace my own death, but not that of terrible deaths.’ It is the terror before the face of their death, which can never be undone, not that in the face of my approaching end, that compels me (is essential) to believe in the existence of God. I base my belief in the universality of religious feeling not on the desire that each person has for his own personal salvation, but on the desire that each person ought to have for the salvation of lives that have been shattered. It is superficial to affirm that everyone desires immortality: for this is nothing but an empirical position for the human for which there is

The Immanence of the World Beyond

no evidence, so our species is constituted by singularities that are incapable of being reduced to a general, necessarily impoverishing rule. There is no reason to rule out the achievement of a life experienced and understood as finished, and finding its meaning in this finitude alone. Immortality does not acquire its universal aspect by means of a supposedly general anthropological constant ('everyone desires immortality and so this or that belief fulfils only the same meaning required by our existence'), but by means of a distinct and more profound problem: how can we accept the appalling injustice done to some, which renders impossible a grief capable of making sense of our relation to the departed? The problem of immortality should not be conceived in terms of personal salvation, but in terms of collective justice, of possible reparation of an extreme wrong. I do not know whether it is necessary that life have a beyond in order to flourish, but I do know that some lives are entitled to begin again so as to overcome the atrocious end inflicted upon them.

To put this another way, I can be an atheist for myself and deny immortality for myself, but I will never agree to be one for the horrendous dead: because the idea that justice is completely impossible for the nameless mass of bygone spectres damages me at my inmost core, so much so that I can no longer manage to dedicate myself to the living. Certainly, it is not the living who need help but the dead. But I believe that help for the living is tenable in terms of a hope of justice for the dead. The atheist can very well deny it; for my own part, if I renounce this, I can no longer live. I must hope for something for the dead as well, or life is vain. That something is another life, another chance to live – to live otherwise than to die as they did.

And I add that my demand here is for nothing more than a truly universal equality, between all human beings irrespective of their biological condition – regardless of the colour of their skin, their sex, their size – but also of their bodily and physical state – and therefore *whether they are living or dead*, which is never anything but a biological difference without moral significance. I demand justice for all. In this sense I believe that communism has sinned through *moderation*, that its crimes and disasters are due not to an excessive conception of equality, but, on the contrary, to a woefully limited one. For in being content with an equality relevant only to the living, and by renouncing the eschatological hope of a universal

Quentin Meillassoux

equality of the living and the dead, communism began a dreadful downward spiral: past generations were abandoned to their own irrevocable annihilation, and only the present generation was able to take part in the new dawn. Thenceforth, as an additional step into criminal moderation, the ground was made fertile for the sacrifice of the present generation to future generations, who would be the only beneficiaries of the revolution to come. To make those presently living the means and the material for the happiness of future generations, and ever more to become – on top of an already technical and totalitarian vision – a kind of Prometheanism teaching an absolute inequality between people before emancipation and those afterwards: all this was, I believe, the result of an acceptance of a primordial denial of the *hubristic equality* towards every man, past, present and future. Technico-totalitarian Prometheanism, since it wants an indefinitely propagated ‘everydayness’, is not founded upon the hubris of a humanity become too arrogant and full of an illusory sense of its own omnipotence; it is, on the contrary, grounded upon *the renunciation of the hubris* of eschatological justice due to every human without exception, and it is this infinite limitation of egalitarian demands which has made communism collapse into the schema of technical ‘mastery’. This disaster thus proceeds from *the criminogenic nature of the modesty* of modern humanity, ferociously turned against the infinite and legitimate excess of universal justice. Against this, we must revive the extreme hope of eschatology in order resolutely to act – and right away – in view of an unconditional equality for all people, whose ultimate realization no longer depends on us but on an omnipotent God who guarantees ‘the soundness of our folly’.

Then the atheist responds as follows: ‘You want to hope, you say, in something for the dead. Let us then look more closely at what you are promising them. You hope for an otherworldly justice: but in what will that consist? This is a justice performed under the government of a God who, in the case of criminal deaths, has permitted the worst offences to be committed, and who, in the case of natural deaths, has himself brought death to pass. You call such a God “just” – even “good”! But what would you think of this: the promise to live eternally under the rule of this God who calls himself just and loving, while he allows men, women and children to die in the most horrible conditions – even while he could easily save

The Immanence of the World Beyond

them. What is more, he not only allows this – indeed he has directly inflicted such evils upon humans. And even this, he says, is a mark of his infinite (and so mysterious, unfathomable) love for creatures that he afflicts them in this way. To live under the reign of such a Being: isn't this a perfect definition of hell? Are you telling me that in the presence of this God, I will behold in this dazzling spectacle something of his infinitely loving attitude towards his creatures? You only intensify the nightmare that you promise: for you assume that this being will have the power to transform me spiritually in a way so radical that I will come to love him who has allowed these atrocities to happen. That is the promise of spiritual death, which is infinitely worse than carnal death: in the presence of your God, I will cease to love the Good, for he will have the power to make me love evil as if it were the Good. If God exists, the fate of the dead is therefore infinitely worse since their bodily death is intensified by their spiritual death. To this moral hell that you wish for them, I prefer nothingness, for them just as for myself, which will leave them in peace and preserve their dignity, rather than subjugate them to the Omnipotence of your terrifying Demiurge.

‘At the heart of this state of affairs lies an absolute lack of mediatization of evil. I can always try to justify an evil in the name of a greater good that results from it, in the case of the act of a finite being: if I cannot avoid war to preserve freedom, then there is war. But in the case of an all-powerful being, this mediatization fails, and every theodicy becomes perverse: shall we say that God allows the crimes of history to be committed in order to preserve human freedom? But what would we think of a politician allowing massacres, which he had the power to prevent, to be committed in the name of respect for freedoms? Shall we then say that God inflicts deadly and painful maladies on everything human, including children, in order to allow courage and goodness to be manifested in both the victim and those around him? But what would we think of a physician who, in the name of such a principle, inoculated some appalling illnesses into his patients? No, there is no theodicy possible, no possible justification of acts of your Lord: this God is morally unfathomable, he is presented to us as sheer, arbitrary violence. The surest sign of his moral monstrosity is that every consequent *imitatio dei* would inevitably lead to unprecedented perversity, along the lines of a politician authorizing massacres in the name of freedom,

Quentin Meillassoux

or a physician killing infants so as to promote the exercise of our goodness. Therefore, the very heart of your God is not love but mystery. True love draws its entire spiritual beauty from being the very opposite of mystery. This sentiment has no other truth than its simplicity, from which comes its superior difficulty: faced with a wrong, it sets out to act courageously and not cleverly to strategize according to a calculus that is beyond the common mortal man; faced with deadly illness, it sets about to heal, not to hold on to, much less to spread the scourge; faced with a massacre, it seeks to make peace, and not to authorize horror for utterly trivial reasons.

‘For my own part, I am terrified of the consequences of your religious submission to the unfathomability of God: in the name of universal justice you worship a being who manifests himself as absolute injustice. For from the very moment when you venerate the worse in the name of the better, a vicious dialectic will progressively take possession of you and will corrupt your best impulses. You will suffer a double temptation: to worship violence as justice itself, in the name of a transcendence that everyone should worship, and to transform yourself into a violent being [*être de violence*] in the fanaticism of pure force, thereby being faithful to the practices of your master; or still – and this is the direct result of this fanaticism – you will marshal perverse, sophisticated arguments in order to justify the acts of your God, and you will internalize this perversity of these arguments in yourself so as to legitimize the evil of your own actions. The love of pure violence, the perverse logic of men of action and power who justify the worst in the name of the extraordinary complexity of their supposed knowledge – this is what results from your hubristic equality. Your evil God, in concert with the imperative of the *imitatio dei*, will ultimately give rise to *Guides géniaux* and *Petits pères des peuples* who take advantage of the appalling mental gymnastics produced by 2,000 years of theological sophistry in order to unfathomably declare themselves the Rule of Love, while they are in fact tools of destruction. Moreover, because it has not been able to break fully with theology the communism which you reject has produced Orwellian inversions, in which hate was the manifestation of love, and war the true realization of peace. I will always be opposed to the limited and sober equality of the moral atheists and the politicians of emancipation who are concerned more with the consequences of their actions

The Immanence of the World Beyond

than the perversion of their just ideals for the religious subtleties of priests and their outwardly secular twins.’

Both of these two positions, one quickly notices, can be sustained only through the weakness of the other: the atheist wants to be an atheist because religion promises an appalling God who corrupts the human meaning of justice; the religious person secures his faith on the refusal of a life devastated by the desparation of terrible deaths. Each one disguises his own desperation by the avoidance displayed by the despair of the other. Thus the dilemma is either to despair of another life for the dead, or despair of a God who allows such deaths to happen.

We will call *spectral dilemma* the aporia of atheism and of religion as we have just set it out, since they are confronted with the grief of essential spectres. At the heart of such an aporetic alternative, we oscillate from the absurdity of a life without God to the mystery of a God who calls his permission and creation of extreme evil ‘love’. On the contrary, we will call the *resolution* of the spectral dilemma a position which is neither religious nor atheist, and which is able in this way to escape the double despair inherent in this alternative: give up hope in believing in justice for the dead, or hopelessly believe in a God without justice. So our question about the possibility of essential grief is reformulated thus: *under what terms can one hope to resolve this spectral dilemma?* How can we conceive a link between the living and the dead which would extricate itself from the double anguish of atheism and the religious?

In order to outline a possible response to this question, we shall proceed as follows: we must display the conditions of a solution of the dilemma, and evaluate its theoretical legitimacy as its degree of credibility.

Formal Conditions of the Resolution of the Dilemma

Let us begin by setting out the ‘formal’ conditions of a resolution of the dilemma. These conditions constitute both the share of irreducible legitimacy of the preceding two positions – atheist and religious – and the source of the aporia. Each of the two sides of this dilemma effectively shows, we think, an indispensable element of essential grief:

Quentin Meillassoux

The religious position maintains that grief is possible only if one is able to hope for something other than their death on behalf of the dead. Spectres join their side only on the day when we are able to hope to see them join our own.

For the atheist position, the existence of God is an insurmountable obstacle to the working out of such a hope, because it is unthinkable for the atheist that a just God could allow horrendous deaths, and could, moreover, demand to be loved for having done so without inflicting upon us an infinite spiritual violence.

This aporia comes from the fact that these two conditions, which seem to be equally indispensable, also, at the same time, seem to be incompatible with one another. So the resolution of this impasse can, in my view, be made only in one way: our answer to this dilemma must prove that the incompatibility between these conditions is merely apparent, and that there is still a third option, neither religious nor atheist, which is capable of bringing these two elements together in a coherent way. Put another way: *the resolution of the dilemma boils down to the intelligibility of the proposition which joins the thesis of the possible resurrection of the dead (the religious condition of the resolution) with the thesis of the non-existence of God (the atheist condition)*. These two elements can be synthesized in the following proposition: *God does not yet exist*.

The proposition *God does not yet exist* formulates what one may call the thesis of *divine non-existence*, being understood that this expression should be taken in two senses which permit its equivocity. First of all, the thesis of divine non-existence signifies *the non-existence of the religious God*, but also that of the metaphysical God, understood as actually existing as the Creator or the Principle of the world. But divine non-existence also refers to *the divine character of non-existence*. In other words, in the present reality, whatever still remains of the virtual state conceals the possibility of a God yet to come, who will be innocent of the disasters of the world and in whom one could hope for the power to grant to spectres something besides death.

The thesis of divine non-existence allows one to grasp the source of the apparent insolubility of the spectral dilemma. This apparent insolubility held that atheism and religion constitute an alternative exhaustive of all possibilities: either God exists, or he doesn't. But the two theses are actually stronger than those factual propositions:

The Immanence of the World Beyond

for they both derive their significance from the supposedly *necessary* character of either the non-existence or existence of God. To be an atheist is not only to hold that God does not exist, but also that he cannot exist; to be a believer is to have faith in the essential existence of God. So we see that, in order to set itself against such an alternative, the thesis of divine non-existence ought to wage its battle on the field of modalities: for the point is to argue that *God is possible* – not in a subjective and present sense (that is, it is possible that God actually exists now – which I do not know), but in an objective and future sense (that is, God can really come into being in the future). The challenge is to untie the atheist–religious knot between God and necessity (God must either exist or not) in order to reconnect him with the virtual (God can exist).

So the question becomes more precise: the resolution of the spectral dilemma comes down to the explanation of divine nonexistence, and at the same time to the establishment of the legitimacy of an adherence thereto.

The thesis – God does not yet exist – could be broken down according to the two poles of signification which should then be studied in turn:

- 1 What does ‘not yet’ signify in order that a god can be thought in terms of his eventuality? Such an examination amounts to thinking through the signification of a time compatible with essential grief: what is time, if it possesses the divine as one of its virtualities, and what can justify our belief in its efficacy?
- 2 What does the signifier ‘God’ actually signify, once it is posited as not yet existing – possible and future but no longer present and necessary? Such an investigation would especially require the elaboration of the elements of a discourse about the divine that is distinct from every theology based upon the idea of an eternal God. I call this discourse a ‘divinology’.

I will begin by examining the meaning of the ‘not yet’ before turning my attention to that of the divine. For the moment, I will use the term ‘God’ in the minimal sense that it should have in the framework of divine non-existence: the advent of a regime of existence which allows me to hope for something other than death for the departed.

The 'Not Yet'

First of all we must abolish a misunderstanding. To speak of a God who does not yet exist does not in any way mean to evoke a not yet fully existing but already potentially actualized God: we do not speak here of a God who exists but has not yet been fully revealed, nor a God whose intensity of existence would progress over the course of history. Whether providence concerns a God who is actual or in the process of actualization, either way it is equally incommensurable with every idea of justice, and in this sense unacceptable to the atheist. If God, in order to increase the intensity of his being must pass through the history of human disasters, then his fulfilment is synonymous with a cosmic sacrifice of our destinies that nothing could justify, apart from a new perverse form of reasoning.

First of all, the statement, 'God does not yet exist', is therefore meant to signify that God does not exist, not simply that he does not exist in any fashion. We mean this in the same way in which a hardened atheist might mean it (although by modifying the modality of the thesis in terms 'factual' and 'un-necessary'). The proposition of the non-existence of God ought in truth to be paraphrased in this way: God does not exist, *but there is no reason that this should remain so*, that his non-existence should *always* remain so.

Let us try to examine the meaning of this statement more closely, beginning with its temporal nature.

To posit that God can exist in the future does not mean, with respect to factual ontology, that the emergence of a future God is necessary. It can only be a matter of an event that is really and truly possible, but essentially contingent: hence *eternally eventual*. God can either come in the future or not: this possibility will never go away, nor can one ever be certain that this possibility will actually even be realized. Such an event, at first glance, would relate to the emergence of a world whose laws would in fact incorporate the renewal of past human bodies. Therefore it is a matter of an essentially uncontrollable event – for a man and for a God – which cannot be rendered improbable, since it concerns the emergence of physical constants and not of facts subordinated to those constants. It would be pointless to give up hope for this advent under the pretext that many other possibilities could arrive within Surchaos, with no reason to privilege the hoped-for eventuality, since this would be to

The Immanence of the World Beyond

subject it to a probabilistic logic that does not apply to the present case. The event in question is really possible, eternally contingent, forever uncontrollable and completely improbabilizable.

Therefore to hope that Surchaos might bring this event about is to hope for a possibility which may never arrive, but it will be forever impossible to say that this possibility will never come.

When an event takes place that conforms to the physical laws of a determinate world, we can say that this event was, up until the point of its occurrence, a *potentiality* of this world. But Surchaos can also give rise to events that do not conform to the physical laws of a world. I call such events *virtualities*. Virtualities can be considered, very precisely, as advents *ex nihilo*, since they proceed neither from an actually existing world, nor from its physical potentialities, nor from some totality of possible worlds – for example, from a divine understanding which would contain the sum of all possibilities. Virtualities come from a non-totality of possibles, from the untotalizable abyss of the virtualities of Surchaos. The sign there have been some advents *ex nihilo* in the past comes from the ‘irreducible facts’ among several orders of existence. So far there seem to be three of these irreducible facts: matter (reducible to what can theorized in physico-mathematical terms), life (understood more specifically as a set of terms, that is, affections, sensations, qualitative perceptions, etc., which cannot be reduced to material processes) and, finally, thought (understood as a capacity to arrive at the ‘intelligible contents’ bearers of eternity, and which as such is not reducible to any other terms).⁷ These three orders determine the existence of three worlds – matter, life, thought – which are actually coexistent, despite every evident indication that they succeed one another in time.

I believe, therefore, that there are irreducible, improbabilizable supplementations within evolution which are signs not of a transcendence but of a higher chaos. I propose, then, to think the speculative renewal as the possible advent of a *fourth world*: that of justice. Although this world is without ontological necessity, there is reason to hope in it in a way that is not simply capricious. For only this world could introduce into the future an irreducibility and a novelty as radical as that of life in relationship to matter, or thought in rela-

⁷ On the advent *ex nihilo*, cf. Quentin Meillassoux, 2007, ‘Potentiality and virtuality’, *Collapse* II, pp. 55–81.

Quentin Meillassoux

tion to life. In effect, if one grants that facticity is absolute, then the thinking being is the ultimate being, which no novelty can radically surpass, in the precise sense in which thought is defined as intellectual access to the eternal. No being – the more advanced living things, angel or god – can surpass the thinking being in the way in which thought surpasses life or life surpasses matter. If a world which surpasses our third world (thought) can still arrive, just as our third world has surpassed preceding ones, then it can only be the world of the renewal of the ultimate being to be the thinking being, but according to a regime of existence now worthy of its condition: immortality as the guarantor of universal equality.

Nevertheless, in the way we use the term, we are careful not to identify the ultimate with the absolute. The absolute and the eternal have no value in themselves, since they are identified with eternal facticity, that is, when all is said and done, with the stupid contingency of all things. But the ultimate – that is, the thinking being (of which man is one among other possible examples) – is a contingent, fragile, mortal being – at least in our world. The ultimate is a being who, aware of the absoluteness of contingency, knows his own contingency. He thereby acquires all at once both a cognitive and tragic dimension, which gives him his insurmountable worth. This is why the only world which could exceed in novelty the world of the thinking being thought would be the recasting of being according to a specific immortality: not a necessary existence – that is ontologically impossible – but an existence likely to be prolonged indefinitely. It would be a matter of a kind of non-necessary immortality in which death would certainly remain a possibility. But this would be a possibility that might never arrive, because the reinstated bodies will no longer be subject to a biological law of decay. Bodies would remain contingent (able to perish) but no longer precariously so (being forced to die according to the biological laws of their world). Death would then become what I call a *pure possibility*: a possibility not destined to be accomplished some day. A real possibility, for the fourth world itself would be able to be destroyed, and ‘immortals’ along with it – but not an insecure or hazardous possibility, for nothing would entail the abolition of this world and the perishing of its ‘inhabitants’.

Our intention then is to make the fourth world a possibility which can enhance, *in our own world*, the subjectivity of human

The Immanence of the World Beyond

beings living in our day by profoundly transforming the private lives of those who take seriously such a hypothesis. Such a possibility, posed as real and liable to have effects within oneself here and now, I call a *dense possibility*, or still a *may-be*, so as to distinguish it from a simple, formal or 'simply' theoretical possibility (in which one does not manage to believe even if one conceives it in its proper strength). As such, I think that *the most important task for philosophy – its final challenge – is not being, but 'may-being'*. For the may-be unites within itself the true heart of every ontology (the absoluteness of factual possibility) and the deepest aspirations of ethics (the universal fulfilment of justice).

Finally, it is important not to lose sight of the following point. If the fourth world can have an effect upon present existence, it can do so *only* in the case of an eschatological subject, moved by the desire for universal justice. I call such a subject a *vectorial subject* – that is to say one magnetically attracted by the vector of the emancipation to come. For in such a subject divine non-existence undoes those elements which partake of the despair of justice, or of the spectral dilemma. The whole challenge consists in that the spectral dilemma itself liberates the subject from that which more or less silently eats away at it, and from the 'visible' consequences produced by this interior erosion: arbitrary violence and or disillusionment. This aspect of the problem is decisive and will become clearer in what follows.

Divinity and Nihilism

We seek to think of a God who is not only the agent of eschatology, but also its result: a God who is no longer the first and necessary cause, but rather the last contingent effect – a God who is no longer absolute (only contingency is absolute), but who is nevertheless ultimate (the value of which is indispensable, but the advent of which is without necessity). Thus my idea of 'eschatology' is based on chaos, as it may be termed according to a word game: we have an *eschaology*.⁸ What kind of God do we have for this 'eschaology'

⁸ This neologism – *eschaology* – is coined and used by the author throughout as a technical term. [Trans.]

Quentin Meillassoux

which is no longer an ‘eschatology’ in the strict sense? – this is what must now be examined.

I said that I intended to explore the transformations of subjectivity resulting from a true adherence to a dense sense of the possible. It is a question of constituting the stages of a likely trajectory of unchaining the subject from what, according to the logic of the absurd or the transcendence, separates it from what it can be, thus corroding it of the surd sickness of spiritual misfortune inherent in both of these options: (i) the irremediable injustice of a world without God, or (ii) a God whose alleged justice manifests itself to us as an irremediable injustice.

This third way which is neither religious nor atheist but philosophical, and more precisely speculative, which finds its interest in a double movement:

(a) It is initially a question of breaking what I call, in a precise sense, *despair*. Despair is that which results from the irreducible separation of justice and being which is operative in *all* atheisms and through *every* transcendence, within the framework of a spectral dilemma. Against this effect which dominates (more or less openly) the present epoch, the task requires we overcome the spectral dilemma through the invocation of a possible reality configured through speculation on the factual, the possibility of a vocation that exceeds the possibility of the death, ‘simply theoretical’, and thus a possibility that becomes an intimate and vital hope: an effective factor of transformation and emancipation of subjectivity.

In a sense, this first movement of the emancipation of the subject resolves in its way the moral aporia undone by the postulates of Kantian practical reason, for whom the end is to make life simply livable, coherent for the subject, subordinated to universal practices in spite of the phenomenal disjunction of the moral law and the given society (the injustice everywhere presents in this world, world indifferent to the moral value of the individuals). But our way is speculative and not transcendental: it seeks to show that the moral aporia of humanity lies in illimitation – and not in the limitation – of the capacities of reason. It thus equally avoids the major Kantian dead end which claims to reconcile the idea of universal morals with the eternal existence of God, that which the atheist has shown to be an impossibility.

The surmounting of despair aims at the liberation of the power

The Immanence of the World Beyond

of action present in the subject, and thus not at the satisfaction of what he desires in his dreams. By destroying in him the idea of the irremediable absurdity of the world, the militant universalist can concentrate on the urgency of his task while aiming at the higher end which guides his action in terms, not of an inaccessible ideal, but of a possibility which is real even if it has not materialized. There is thus nothing here of a 'fatalistic argument': for the fourth world, universal justice cannot be conceived as independent of our acts and thus should not be passively awaited. Because this justice can just as well not arrive (it is a possibility and not a necessity), it thus imposes upon us an injunction to act in the present in order to hasten its approach and to make some live in its existence, in such a way as to be worthy of this hypothesis that exceeds our capacities but gives meaning to our aspiration.

(b) But the second moment of the emancipation of the subject is just as decisive; it is what I designate by the term *nihilism*.

I name 'desperate' the subject who regards the advent of universal justice as an impossibility for the living and dead (an atheistic-religious moment). But I call 'nihilistic' that subject who, regarding this justice as a thinkable and real possibility – convinced therefore by the dense speculative potency that can renew the dead – considers this sudden arrival of the future as *non-desirable*, and in truth an *appalling possibility*.

The heart of the eschatological trajectory is constituted in truth by the trial not of despair but of nihilism – a term which does not correspond, in my nomenclature, with what is usually indicated by the term, since the nihilist is, in my understanding, someone generated by the potentiality of a dense speculative renewal. The nihilist is thus a *new* figure, a subjective type who never before existed until now, who is produced by the conceptual possibility present in the hypothetical renewal. One of his chief interests, as we shall see, is to project the internal tensions inherent in certain already pre-existing options of thought. My idea here is primarily to show how speculative philosophy is not only the conceptual measurement, as it is in Hegel, which seizes our spiritual configurations exhibiting inconsistency in dialectically exceeding through an absolving recapitulation. Rather, speculative philosophy, in its factual authority, is able to generate much more: of itself it produces catastrophic configurations of existence *which would not have existed without*

Quentin Meillassoux

this philosophy, and which it is now responsible for overcoming in order to arrive at the wisdom at which it aims. Factual ethics likewise must overcome the moral catastrophes which are inherent in it, just as theoretical speculation must overcome its internal theoretical inconsistencies in order to build a unity of thought and life capable of legitimizing its ultimate coherence.

To explain this last point, I must start by making a detour through Nietzsche. As much as the first phase of the speculative subjectivization can be thought within the framework of a ‘polemical heritage’ with a practical Kantianism, so the second phase must be brought into intimacy with the Nietzschean Eternal Return. Let us see why.

The Unsurpassable Brutality of the Eternal Return

I am interested in the Eternal Return insofar as it is generally scorned by contemporary philosophers and commentators. The Eternal Return indeed seems to constitute a challenge to the readers of Nietzsche who are convicted to see in him a thinker who is analectically both anti-metaphysical and postmodern. Taken at face value, however, the Eternal Return is a classically metaphysical thesis, concerned finally with the ultimate nature of the world and its components (the ceaseless becoming of wills for power). One can summarize the Eternal Return under a rather crude formulation: all things, yourself included, return eternally to the same. One has the impression that contemporary readers of Nietzsche are given to require that one not understand the Eternal Return in terms of the simple and brutal form given by Nietzsche. Even when the thesis of Nietzsche is actually understood like a philosophy of becoming and not a postmodern criticism of every form of truth – as is done by Deleuze – one hastens to give it a more elaborate sense which emphasizes difference such that the ‘return’ is transformed into ‘becoming’ and therefore is not the return of same.

I reject all these subtle reinterpretations of Nietzsche, the most interesting interpretation of the Eternal Return is, on the contrary, that which gives it the most immediate and direct interpretation, as it has just been stated: everything returns eternally to the same, yourself included. It is often said that Nietzsche’s pronouncements

The Immanence of the World Beyond

are 'traps', so much so that it is impossible to give them a univocal meaning: the trap of the Eternal Return is thus apparently the precise fact that that here Nietzsche does not conform with his own logic, that he says simply what he wants to say and thus he leads astray all those who want to play with him. He leads them astray and tests them: because from a Nietzschean point of view it is by the incapacity to support the appalling possibility that its obvious direction causes the reader who is more susceptible to 'weakness' to hasten to discover therein a more elaborate significance. The first test that the Return imposes upon its reader consists in determining if this one is able not to skew what is said to him, to face the Eternal Return instead of vainly circumventing it.

Why is this claim interesting in itself? For at least two reasons.

The first reason is that this statement shows that Nietzsche is clear that one cannot transform a body, invent a new subjectivity, without a speculative proposition about the world. One has really to think that one returns eternally, that becoming is made in its intimate truth, in order to face the experience of the *Übermensch* [*surhomme*]. Any reading that dilutes the violence of this thesis by the use of diverse paradoxes transforms this experience, this ordeal as we have said, into a simple object of study, a matter for hermeneutics and hyper-textuality. To the contrary, one must embrace the ontological (even the strongly realist) 'rudeness' of this statement, that is to say, embrace the real possibility of an incessant recommencement of bodies – if one consents to let the Eternal Return function for what it is: an instrument of selection which reinforces the body of those who are active and destroys the body of those who are reactive. *If* I really believe that I will come back eternally according to the same path of life, then I transform myself. For Nietzsche, generally I die – because that is a thought which is unbearable for the ordinary man, who is committed to the reactive hatred of life – but sometimes, rarely, I intensify actively my existence because I embrace infinitely what I am. If, however, I do not think that things are so simple, then I will write and say learned things about life without being more affected it.

The second reason which leads me to be interested in the common version of this claim is even more interesting. This reason concerns the very concept of immanence. I believe that with the Eternal Return, Nietzsche reveals a formidable paradox of immanence, one

Quentin Meillassoux

he is undoubtedly the only one to grasp with such acuity. I think we can state this paradox as follows: immanence is not of this world. It is this thesis which I infer from Nietzsche which we can oppose to the diverse contemporary conceptions of immanence and essentially to that of Deleuze. To these conceptions we can respond by saying that ‘we are all in favour of immanence but as Nietzsche understood well, immanence is not of this world’.

Let me explain. What Nietzsche grasped via the Eternal Return is its unforgiving experience which only lets those survive who have renounced all forms of transcendence. But in what does this experience consist? Is it the case that we embrace our infinite being, our looming and unavoidable death, that is to say, our immediate phenomenal existence which is ours and which is suspended between two events – the event of our birth and the unknown but certain event of our death? Absolutely not: the experience of Eternal Return consists in embracing an existence in which death is not at all a definite interruption of our existence but a stage of our becoming which is cancelled out by our ulterior rebirth. We can say that by this, Nietzsche enjoins us to embrace eternally the recommencement of our death, but we are here in some way playing on words: death, in Eternal Return, is always cancelled out by the return of life, and it *is precisely in this that the frightening experience which it imposes upon us consists*.

In other words, *the experience of Eternal Return is not the experience of death but of immortality*, that is to say, *of life without any other*: neither the transcendent other of the believer (or the supposed Saviour) nor the ultimate nothingness of the atheist. The Eternal Return is life closed upon its own unlimited potency which has become totally incapable of extracting itself from itself in order to destroy or transcend itself. The violence which is hereby inflicted on the subject does not consist in the annihilation of the subject’s existence (which would be too beautiful), but its unforgiving repetition: and this is so because *the subject has to mourn the All-Other of life* [original italics], whether this All-Other be God or Nothingness.

There is no longer anything like the All-Other – the coat-of-arms of religiosity and transcendence. And there is no longer anything like the More, the more and always, the coat-of arms of all immanentist philosophy. If the two great accounts of immanence – Nietzsche’s

The Immanence of the World Beyond

and Spinoza's – are conceptions, not of finitude, but of immortality conceived as the endless perpetuation of existing life (or some aspect of existing life), then this is so because the only genuine meaning of the immanent [*l'ici-bàs*] consists in upholding its continuation to infinity. Only he who can bear the idea of this one and only life which is constantly recast in its 'prosaic-ness' without any hope of escaping via the transcendent [*l'au-delà*] or nothingness, experiences radical immanence.

The genuine experience of immanence is therefore not available in our immediate world. For this world which gives itself immediately to our perception is only real, but not immanent. This world in fact offers us not its All-Other (this of course would be contradictory), but the *possibility* of its All-Other, since our life is today destined to a death that is foundational of a hope for a future escape from the current forms of existence. To the contrary, the experience of immanence requires us to think a future becoming in which life is no longer open onto itself, without any hope of escaping from it for another 'place' [*lieu*] which will be incommensurable. In order to have access to genuine immanence, we have thus to think a world that is no longer our phenomenal world wedded to biological mortality. Immanence is not 'the real', together with mortality. Immanence is transcendence which has become impossible in the absence of finitude.

And once we are projected mentally in this world of immanence (mentally, because we cannot experience it immediately), we will be confronted with the nature of our desire and our will: do we want life infinitely, or do we only want life insofar as it is bordered by death, by the promise that all this – sooner or later – will end, in one way or another? Nietzsche's conviction was that human beings are very rarely able to desire life without desiring the end of life. It is wrong to say that death is that which we fear most. Much rather, what we fear most is to substitute our 'death sentence' for a sentence of perpetual imprisonment in our present life – this existence without glory that is our life in the 'here and now'. It is only via this experience that our will has access to its proper nature – love or hatred of life – and the body suffers the consequences – strengthening or destruction.

The philosophy of eternal contingency enables us to construct this Nietzschean type of experience in the framework of speculative

Quentin Meillassoux

renewal, even if the latter differs from Eternal Return in more than one respect. The main difference is that we are dealing with the real possibility of bodily recommencement which is not open to an eternal cycle of the same but to a non-defined linearity: a life open to the novelty of its recommencement and not always and evermore a life that is identical down to the smallest details. But the function of renewal, as we will see, converges with that of Eternal Return: the experience of its fundamental link to existence. As I have already indicated, he who lives according to the Eternal Return experiences the active or reactive nature of his will. The Eternal Return fragments the will of human beings and dissociates them dramatically from one another. Its function is selective. It is precisely this kind of experience which we aim for in relation to the speculative renewal, even if we do not believe less in a unique 'nature' of the will and more in a multiplicity of orientations mixed in a single will and among which we have to choose. It is a matter of transforming our present existence not with the help of a necessary 'truth' – the Nietzschean Return –but with the help of an absolute hypothesis – the fourth world.

In order to understand this last point, we have to return to the question of nihilism: with the disgust for universal justice out of which one manages to intensify the possibility of its advent. Let us understand the meaning of what is at stake. If someone announced to an unbelieving positivist who was not much concerned by justice (a kind of Monsieur Homais), that his rebirth was possible in the form of an undefined life that is not subject to the repetition of the Same, that someone would most certainly be mocked – and he would be all the more so if he were told that the present situation was a terrible one he had to overcome. For if one asks someone who is indifferent about justice what he thinks about the possible advent of a fourth world – in other words, about the renewal of bodies – he would laugh it off, but he wouldn't be terrified. Our man would see rather it as a soothing dream and would find the possibility of being anxious about such a life totally abstract or twisted. Presumably he would understand the fright involved in the Eternal Return – finding over and over again the mediocre boredom and tragedies of one's existence, but the idea of a new life which was not affected by the gravest worries of life (death, destructive sickness, etc.) would seem more like a nice fairytale.

The Immanence of the World Beyond

It is the case that the experience of renewal only has meaning for he who would have been crushed by the worry of ultimate justice and universal equality – he for whom the grief of terrible deaths would have been an experience which would have overwhelmed him with despair, to the point of depriving him of life. The mocking of the atheist vis-à-vis the hope of renewal is the product of him who hasn't experienced the spectral dilemma or who is still mired in his metaphysical belief in the necessity of natural laws. This is therefore irrelevant for our concerns here.

The subject which, however, traverses the spectral dilemma and manages to liberate himself from it, that is the only one who can seize the liberating power of factual ontology and of the as yet non-existing God. Such a subject will therefore transform his incapacity to live and to act into a sort of eschatological vectorization. He will get to know the ardour of an emancipatory orientation insofar as this orientation distinguishes itself from both cynicism and fanaticism; that is to say, he will know a violent form of hope that is linked to an authentic kind of rationality, a sort of reason emancipated from the principle of reason. However, it is to such a subject that the second test is addressed: not the test of despair, but the test of nihilism. Not the test of a dissociation between being and justice, since the link between the two has been restored, but the test of disgust with universal justice as such. It is only for such a subject that nihilism becomes a danger. Why might this be the case and in what sense?

The experience of despair – that is to say, the factual overcoming of the spectral dilemma – constitutes for the vectoral subject an experience of ardent jubilation which is very difficult not to posit as the very meaning of existence. As such, in a speculative kind of hope, we discover ourselves as the repository of an overriding aim which, like a real and cosmic eventuality, gives direction to our most generous actions. Ardour is thus the affect which dominates us and by which we are the heirs of all the emancipatory and eschatological movements of the past. What is more, we are the heirs who possess an unprecedented coherence which all these movement lacked.

Henceforth, the subject will confront a second inconsistency in his desire, a second existential *aporia*, perhaps more dangerous than the previous one, though also more difficult to conceive: it is

Quentin Meillassoux

no longer the inconsistency involved in desiring an impossible universalism – an atheist-religious inconsistency of a desperate desire – but rather the *inconsistency involved in desiring the suppression of the ardour which gave rise to ardour in the first place*. As such, ardour discovers itself to be in a process of desiring the suppression of ardour or the suppression of the escha(t)ological [*sic*] vector. For the renewal seeks the *accomplishment* of justice, hence *the end of the struggle and the vectorization towards such a justice*. In other words, the end of eschatological life which sets alight the existence of the subject after the dilemma. But what would a world (the fourth world) be like that was stripped of the escha(t)ological [*sic*] vector, if not a world of egotism and disengagement in which life would no longer find the meaning of its existence in the generous gift of itself in political or individual engagement in favour of emancipation? Many people would easily find the answer to this question – which would seem to them to be idle – but this would not be the case for the vectoral subjects who would have experienced the spectral dilemma and its overcoming in a kind of speculative hope. This experience is only available to them because they are charged with the task of experiencing the ultimate destiny of existence – once the latter has been thought outside the ordinary categories of satisfied egotism. However, the formula for this final test is as follows: how to believe that justice for the spectres is possible if this justice consists in bringing about their rebirth in a world where the most noble and most beautiful sense of existence has disappeared – the one which in our world allows us to live according to the vector of an emancipation that is still to come? If the terrible death can only be ‘repaired’ by a renaissance in a dismal world made of satisfied life without any superior directedness and without any aim other than the self-centred perpetuation of the self, then the fourth world will only be a ‘paradise’ for mediocre souls and will remain hell for those subjects dedicated to the ardour of the struggle. This is to say that the vectoral subject would no longer find in such a world a place where the brutally interrupted lives would find the means of a dignified return among men. To wish for renewal is therefore to wish for the opposite of that which we wish for (hell for the spectres, not their ‘salvation’) and to face the temptation of nihilism, that is to say, the hatred of universal justice insofar as it is accomplished. To overcome nihilism would therefore signify to

The Immanence of the World Beyond

be able to overcome our violent desire for a life entirely dedicated to the perilous, and sometimes mortal, struggle for justice. For this desire risks, when taken to the extremity of its potency, the intimate assuming of hatred into its hypothesis of victorious justice.

We get here to a kind 'inverse' relation, compared with the usual parameters of the desire for immortality: what needs to be overcome is no longer the selfish and childish desire for immortality by bravely accepting our mortal and finite being but much rather the ardent desire of a mortal struggle, a struggle bordered by death which lends all its force to the political war for what is just and true. We discover therefore that finitude and being-for-death is the ultimate temptation of the vectoral subject in which this subject risks facing its irremediable demise: this subject can once more desire death as the ultimate condition of man and thus eschew the idea of a world without vectoral politics. One could also say that the experience of nihilism consists in facing what Kojève called the end of history, that is to say, an immanent end of time. Wouldn't there be only space, like for Kojève, for disengagement and a kind of snobbism which he thought he had discovered in traditional Japan? What shall we then do – we who have so much loved that which transfixed our gaze towards a future time, when there will be no beatitude, no vision of a glorious God? What will we do when we will have become forever what the Middle Ages called a traveller – a *viator* – a man of the earth and not the blessed in heaven, a *viator* forever condemned to his living condition, a kind of prosaic immortal without any transcendence or struggle to give meaning to the undefined pursuit of his being?

To my mind, the answer to this strange crisis can only take the following form. I believe that what remains once the advent of justice has occurred is precisely what Marx had promised – and perhaps this is in truth his most extraordinary promise, even if today it is held in contempt even by his most inventive heirs: there will be *a communist life*, that is to say, *life finally without politics*. In other words, life without the balance of power, ruse, war, bloody sacrifice for the sake of a universal and also life without the unspeakable enthusiasm which proceeds from all these things in those generous souls.⁹ To love life beyond war, violence and sacrifice – and this

⁹ For Marx, political violence is inherent in class divisions and in the existence of

Quentin Meillassoux

even in a world of war, violence and sacrifice – that is what is at stake in the ultimate transformation of the eschatological subject.

Only the eschatological subject can understand nihilism and the meaning of a future mourning about politics, that is to say, the meaning of a politics operated with a view to suppressing politics, thereby rediscovering communism as the promise and experience of the end of politics, the end of vectorization, the end of eschatology and the beginning of an existence dedicated to its own proper experience. And if it is our task to work towards embracing this last world, then it is the case – as I have already indicated – that this world is posed in a way to hope that there will be a recommencement for the terrible deaths: if the fourth world were posed as unlivable and sinister because a-political and peaceful, then we would not hope for anything new or good for these deaths, destined to return in a world that has become disengaged and stripped of any meaning. All human beings – and not only those who suffer a terrible death – have therefore to participate in thought and in action in the universal community of the fourth world. *All must in the final instance want to return*: the desire for immortality whose basic characteristics we initially refuse (as an anthropological *fact*) is founded in this instance upon the universal law, in its post-nihilist constitution.

In order better to convey the meaning of this thesis, we have to consider the distinction between three types of human pain and misfortune: misery, disquiet and suffering. I call ‘misery’ the quasi-animal pains of man (‘quasi’ in this sense that man always humanizes everything in him including the most biological): hunger, illness, violent death and all that concerns the immediate and radical reach of the body. I call ‘disquiet’ all the pains limited to those human beings who are materially free from these obstacles and in any case sufficiently so in order to experience in all plenitude the throes of love, friendship and creation. Finally, I call ‘suffering’ the concrete pain experienced by concrete human beings, oscillating

a state in charge of the interests of the dominant class. Without rejecting this conception of politics, I am giving it a more general meaning linked to the antagonist nature of the egalitarian universal. On the communist abolition of politics, see the famous conclusion of the second chapter of *The Communist Manifesto*: ‘When, in the course of development, class distinctions have disappeared ... public power will lose its political character.’

The Immanence of the World Beyond

incessantly between misery and disquiet, and above all facing the radical inequality between those who have the means to struggle against misery – in short, the privileged classes – and those who do not cease to suffer this inequality – the exploited, the miserable. Each and every miserable person has access to a fundamental suffering which summarizes the consciousness of this inequality and which is humiliation – the suffering by which we know that we are excluded from the torments of disquiet and reduced to the sufferings of misery. Humiliation is neither of the order of disquiet nor of the order of misery, but their articulation in a world which encompasses both: the painful consciousness of belittlement of the self to the pains which are not dignified of our nature of thinking beings.

On my account, a politics of emancipation aims to fight in a fully egalitarian manner against all forms of misery and humiliation. However, *a politics of emancipation does not seek the happiness of people but rather seeks universal disquiet*. In other words, a life emancipated from misery is not necessarily a happy life because it has to be embraced with its own proper part of negativity, whether we call that part distrust, death instinct, mediocrity, torment, etc. To embrace the possibility of an emancipated life dedicated to love, friendship and thought is to embrace the full possibility of betrayal in love, poor and sordid human relationships, inventive sterility, etc. The fourth world is nothing other than the affirmation of the real possibility of emancipation so conceived, yet at the same time uplifted to a life that has become undefined and therefore dedicated to the risks of extreme disquiet. The infinite possibility of a mediocrity whose death is no longer an escape route, only insofar as this would be voluntary: for if death were to remain desirable even in this ultimate, hoped-for world, it would be only as a possibility of a lucid suicide, unique to a life that is incapable of embracing infinitely its essential disquiet. We have to hope that all human beings are offered sufficient material conditions in order to experience a life that is given its most interesting and most disquieting possibilities. According to the alternative of an inventive life or a suicide without return, to face the final disquiet is the speculative version of the ordeal of Eternal Return.

However, I can have at present this experience of life by exploring the nature of my desire met by learning to act accordingly. Experience is a matter which is first of all between the 'I' and the

Quentin Meillassoux

'I', an examination which I conduct of the essence of my will: what is it exactly that I want, justice or a struggle with a view to justice? But this essence influences the nature of my actions insofar as it keeps me from lapsing into the reactive practice of liberating struggles. This 'spiritual exercise' seems to me to be an essential part of every militant who is engaged in his or her struggles. Two types of militants can in fact be quasi-indistinguishable, and this in-distinction is one of the sources of the historical catastrophes which have characterized the history of militancy: those militants who fight in virtue of the love of fighting and those who do not love fighting with all its cruel aspects but who nonetheless fight in virtue of love for justice. Certain militants portray their existence as made up of sacrifice, but in truth they do not sacrifice anything at all: they are nihilists who love the war, ruse and violence which are intrinsic to political struggle. The others do not love it, but they do not flee this existence if it is necessary.

Frequently mixed in the same struggle, there are militants who – without ever exploring the question (under the pretext of facing other urgent matters) – have very different relations to politics: some love politics because politics is a milieu of struggle and they love struggle. Others, and here I choose my words carefully, do not love politics – they'd prefer spending their time differently, but they practise politics because it is necessary in order to respond to the iniquity and urgency of the situation. These are of course archetypes, models more than individuals: in reality our wills are mixed and hardly ever pure. But I suggest that it is important to stress something else in between these two types of volition, in order not to revel in war-making, in controlling warfare and in preserving one's advantages by faking it – in short, not to become a bureaucrat who loves his files, a party secretary who adores administration, a leader who loves purges, an agent who worships intelligence, etc. In summary, the issue is not to become a militant who in the struggle for justice only likes the intrinsically negative benefits of social confrontation, that is to say, the sacralized right to hate and to destroy the enemy by managing never to complete this task.

There is therefore a relation to politics which the militant has to clarify for himself and which has to accompany and determine his most concrete actions. An emancipatory politics is a politics that seeks its own proper abolition in the accomplishment of the end

The Immanence of the World Beyond

that is sought, in a manner that renders useless the violence and ruse which inevitably accompany the trajectory. But here one must be careful: it would be ruinous to believe that politics could by itself achieve this abolition – that the end of politics could be a politics. For this is obviously wrong: a world without politics is beyond the reach of our actions because it does not belong to our world. To deny this and to affirm – as was the case in the Soviet Union – that politics has no place left because it has dissolved itself in the accomplishment of Socialism is in truth to conduct a totalitarian politics that prohibits any politics of opposition.

Two things need therefore to be said about politics: the suppression of politics is the finality of a politics of emancipation because politics seeks justice and not politics itself. But the finality of politics – the ‘other-politics’ cannot be the *product* of a politics, except that of a totalitarian fantasy. The end of politics is that which proceeds from an ontological uprising that is independent of our action, an uprising whose hypothesis contributes at present to the shaping of the subjectivity of the vectoral militant. The end of politics is the finality of politics, but the end of politics is not a politics.

In summary, militants must love life and know that life is not entirely in politics – that life itself seeks to accomplish itself elsewhere than in politics: in love, friendship, art, thinking. But militants also know that in this world there are no subjects worth this name who are not ‘vectorized’ by the desire of universal equality whose form in our world can only be political. Militants ardently seek to be ‘vectorized’ – because they know that universal justice is really possible – and they know that they are ready to live without vectorization – for life and not for war – if the renewal occurs. Militants preserve the hope that the spectres could live in the future a life that is worth our humanity, whose violence and escha(t)ology is not an essential part. Their desire can operate towards forging their ultimate coherence and give meaning to an existence that is dedicated to accomplishing our nature.

The articulation of these two experiences – despair and nihilism – allows us therefore to give a precise definition of immanence: *immanence is a deceptive immortality*. In this manner, we have not as yet obtained a full clarification of the meaning which we ascribe to the word ‘God’ in the statement: ‘God does not as yet exist’, but we have begun to understand an essential aspect of it. The deifica-

Quentin Meillassoux

tion of humanity can in fact be understood as a trajectory which in the present world enables the vectoral subject to overcome the double experience of dilemma and of nihilism in order to turn himself into a 'bridge' between the third and the fourth world. To be deified is to turn oneself into a demon: a *metaxu*, an intermediary, a living passage between the thinking of this world and the justice of the ultimate world. To turn oneself into a human being who is neither only 'here' (world 3) nor already 'there' (world 4) but who is *already between here and there* – this in-between for which the English language has a beautiful word: yonder. To turn oneself and the universal people into a yonder self and a yonder people, between here and now, that is the coming task of eschaological becoming.

*Translated by Peter M. Candler Jr, Adrian Pabst and
Aaron Riches.*