DOCUMENT

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Founded on Nothing

In this interview originally conducted for the Turkish journal Owl: Philosophical Writings, New Materialisms, New Realisms, Kagan Kahveci and Sercan Çalci talk with Quentin Meillassoux about the nature of his speculative materialism, its relation to other figures in the history of philosophy, and its practical and ethical consequences.

Kağan Kahveci: One of the fundamental concerns of your work is the capacities of thought; you ask what exactly thought can do, and you claim that thought is capable of grasping the absolute. And the form in which you defend this thesis makes possible an original reactivation of materialism which you call 'speculative materialism'. For speculative materialism, things, objects, processes, and even natural laws are contingent, and it is this contingency that can be known as an absolute. That 'contingency and contingency alone is necessary' is, you claim, an eternal truth, and you demonstrate this truth philosophically in *After Finitude*.[2] Now, when we look at the map of existing materialisms from this perspective, most 'classic' materialisms seem metaphysical and most 'new' materialisms seem like naturalisms or modes of what you call 'subjectalist hyperphysics'. So what are the requirements for a philosophy to be materialist, and why do you think most materialisms, old or new, fall short of these requirements?

Quentin Meillassoux: I believe that materialism, as the heir of ancient atomism, never really succeeded in reconstituting itself during modernity. Modernity quickly came to be dominated by the correlation between thought (in the broad sense, comprising intellection, sensibility, and life) and being, a correlation against which no materialist philosopher ever presented any satisfying argument. What I call Correlation is the alternative between the two possible forms of this supposedly necessary link between being and thought: either it encloses the mind in its opening to the world, so that the in-itself—the absolute—necessarily escapes it (what I call correlationism); or it identifies the thought-being correlation with the absolute itself, so that the absolute finds itself subjectivated in various ways (what I call subjectalism).

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This is the philosophical alternative from which materialism has never been able to extract itself. Thus, the materialism of the eighteenth century, in its most interesting guise—that of Maupertuis and Diderot—absolutises the thought-being correlation by identifying itself with hylozooist vitalism. The chemical (or so-called 'vulgar') or dialectical materialists (such as Ludwig Büchner or Lenin) do not provide any convincing rebuttal to transcendental

1. *Baykus: Felsefe Yazilari, Yeni Materyalizmler, Yeni Realizmler, Sayi* 3/11 (2021).

2. Q. Meillassoux, *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*, tr. R. Brassier (London and New York: Continuum, 2008).

or empirio-criticist correlationism. As for naturalism—which has many points in common with vulgar materialism—it seems very weak to me, in particular because it generally comes down to what I call a 'theorism': it bases itself not on science, but on the latest theory to come out of a particular science (Darwinism, behaviourism, cognitive science, etc.) and draws from it a set of truths which are supposed to definitively refute any form of idealism or religiosity. Until those theories collapse in favour of new theories that are supposedly just as definitive.

To all of these forms which I deem unsatisfying (vitalism, scientism, naturalism, etc.) I oppose a materialism which attempts to take seriously the arguments of Correlation, offers a precise refutation of them, and provides a basis for the possibility of thinking a non-anthropomorphic matter—a matter from which thought, spirit, sensation, life, are entirely absent. As you say, I do this by way of a theory of absolute contingency which not only refuses belief in the necessity of any scientific theory in particular, but even the necessity of the laws of nature. Which—paradoxically—I think allows me to furnish a more rigorous foundation for the possibility of a general mathematised experimental science (independently of the successive theories to which it gives rise). I believe in the perennial nature of the (hypothetico-deductive and experimental) sciences, but not that of scientific theories. Theories are a product of their time, in so far as they are always open to refutation, although according to an epistemic process which itself remains contingent: to say that any theory can be superseded is not to predict that every theory will in fact be superseded in future—that would be to believe once more in the existence of a necessary law.

Sercan Çalcı: One of the questions that we constantly return to is whether the founding concepts of your thought such as 'absolute', 'contingency', and the 'absolute possibility' of being otherwise convey an emphasis on ontological difference or not. Do you have in mind a principle of Difference that would bracket the historical and political sovereignty of Identity in order to establish the field of action of contingency, which is one of the many thematic areas of your research in *After Finitude*?

QM: That's a complex question. As for ontological difference, to say it quite brutally, I'm not really sure that the philosophical thinking of being qua being, in the tradition that goes from Aristotle to Heidegger, has ever really addressed what I mean by 'being'. For me, being means *that* something *is* and not *that which* something *is*. For example *that there is* an ashtray on my table, and not *what* this ashtray may be. The distinction may seem rather classical—traditional and perhaps banal—but, surprisingly, it isn't at all. Because what Aristotle understands by 'being', as does Heidegger, is the *mode of being* of beings. For both of these thinkers, being is always already diffracted into multiple modes of being—and this is why being is said in many senses. For Aristotle, the mode of being of *ousia*, for example, is not the mode of being of relation or quantity, and for Heidegger the mode of being of Dasein—existence—is not the mode of being of the thing—subsistence. But *that there is* substance, accident, Dasein, or subsistent things—rather than not at all—is a question they never really confront, despite all impressions to the contrary in Heidegger. Their thinking of being remains fundamentally a thinking of modes of being. Now, for me, *the question of being is not the question of modes of being*: because the question of modes of being is a part of that which the being is—what I call the 'determinity' of the being—its empirical properties or its essence. What this ashtray on my table *is*, is at once its empirical qualities (it's circular, made of silver-coloured metal, etc.), its essence (the object of its definition: an artefact whose function is to collect ash), and its mode of being (for Aristotle *ousia*, for Heidegger subsistence, perhaps something else for other philosophers).

For me, to think being, then, is to think that there is *that* being rather than not, but also that *there is being* rather than not—whatever mode might be attributed to it. *To address being is to address the 'there is', not modes of being*, and to ask in virtue of what there is this being, or even to wonder whether the more general question 'Why is there some being rather than nothing?' is a genuine question or a pseudo-problem. Here, once again, it seems we are on familiar ground, all-too-familiar in fact—but again, this is not the case, or not entirely. Firstly, let me insist once again on the fact that this question is by no means continuous with that of modes of being—it is an ontological question, whereas the question of modes of being is still an ontic question. And then, the understanding of this question that we get in

Leibniz—to whom it is generally attributed, at least in the philosophical sphere—is lacking, since Leibniz confines it to the Creation, so that it comes down to asking why God created something rather than nothing. But even if God had created nothing, there would still have been something—namely, God. The ontological question, then, is only really touched upon—or almost—in a priori proofs of the existence of God (because a posteriori proofs suppose the existence of a world whose order proves the prior existence of a powerful and wise Creator). It's only there that, albeit implicitly, the possibility is envisaged that all reality may be contingent and may collapse into Nothingness. But even then, the question of being is lacking, since metaphysics grasped it in the form of an argument that Kant considers the fallacious argument par excellence, the ontological argument, according to which God, being perfect, must necessarily exist.

The culmination of the question of being lies in grasping that there must be something and not nothing because it is necessary that there are contingent beings

In acceding to the absoluteness of contingency, then, I have tried to reactivate this question of the 'there is'—while disqualifying the ontological argument which demonstrates the existence of a being by way of *what* it is (infinitely perfect). In the latter argument, it is still the mode of being that presides over the 'there is': the mode of being of infinite perfection proves the necessary existence of a being characterised as such. On the contrary, I maintain that every being is contingent, and therefore that no being can be posited as necessary as a function of its determinity: it doesn't matter what is, *what* it is doesn't guarantee *that* it is. Everything that belongs to the determinity of the being is contingent, including the fact that there are beings that have this or that mode of being (existent, subsistent, infinite, etc.). The culmination of the question of being, then, for me, following an argument that I can't set out in full here, lies in grasping that there must be something and not nothing because it is necessary that there are contingent beings—it is absolutely necessary that there are non-necessary beings and nothing but. In other words, the contingency that there is this being rather than another allows us to grasp the necessity of there being contingent beings rather than nothing. This is the fundamental articulation of all ontology, once being qua 'there is' is freed from being qua mode of being.

Ontological difference in the Heideggerian sense is therefore not the correct level at which to think the articulation between being and beings. Because the ontological difference between being and beings in Heidegger (before the Turn, but it could be shown that this remains true afterwards too) designates only the difference between the being and its mode of being—whereas the fundamental ontological question is the relation between the 'there is' and determinity. If I want to think about difference or identity at this fundamental level, then, I should by no means do so in the confused terms that come out of the tradition of which Heidegger is one of the last representatives: a tradition that has effaced the 'there is' in favour of modes of being—that has erased the being of the being (*that* it is) in favour of the being (*what* it is, which includes its mode of being as well as its empirical properties, since both are equally contingent). Now, within the framework of this new ontology, will I have to address the question of identity and difference? Once I change terrain like this, there is nothing to oblige me to, and I will only do so if the problem of being as posed in my own terms requires me to do so. Since your last question returns to this point, I'll come back to it there.

As for the political aspect of things, it lies in the general disqualification, following from the ontology of contingency, of any political position that remains attached to an unfathomable, religious transcendence—because nothing is any longer in principle unintelligible if contingency itself becomes the first principle of rational intelligibility—and of any historicity posited as destinal or necessary, whether Hegelian or Heideggerian. We must also be wary of the fact that universal contingency implies that it is not up to the philosopher to guide our understanding of concrete political situations, but the militant. The philosopher deals only with absolute necessity—even if it's the absolute necessity of the contingency of things; he leaves it to other activities of thought to address the various domains of contingent things—art, politics, science, etc. In this sense I am trying to develop a speculative philosophy in

which the absolute is no longer 'intrusive', where it no longer encroaches, by way of pseudo-knowledge, on the prerogatives of other fields of thought and action.

KK: The concepts of speculation and of the absolute are fundamental to your materialism. And we know that in the history of philosophy, these concepts are identified with Hegel. No doubt, your understanding of speculation and the absolute is very different from Hegel's; you say that Hegel's idealism remains a metaphysical speculation, whereas your materialism is a non-metaphysical speculation. On the other hand, you express your admiration for Hegel at various points, even portraying him as one of your two masters, along with Marx. In my opinion, one aspect of the master and disciple relation between yourself and Hegel can be seen in the manner in which you do philosophy. For example, in *After Finitude*, you claim that Hegel reveals an absolute by reflecting on the truth of Kant's move to de-absolutise thought; in the same manner, you yourself reveal an absolute by reflecting on the truth of the de-absolutising move in post-Kantian philosophies, for example in Heidegger and Wittgenstein. Many other examples could be given to show how you are as skilled as your master in tracing the movement of thoughts and arguments in the history of philosophy and in drawing conclusions from them. Of course, you would not follow Hegel in describing these movements of thoughts as dialectical, and yet the similarity in the way you do philosophy is striking. On the other hand, there is a great difference in terms of the content of your thought, especially when it comes to your views on the absolute. We might say that the reason for this is the difference in the way you think about contingency. For you, contingency and contingency alone is necessary, while for Hegel, contingency is a necessity, but only as an irrational moment through which the infinite must pass. One of the things that allow you to think contingency in a very different and unprecedented, radical way is Cantor's mathematics and the new concept of the transfinite. How would you express the difference between yourself and your master Hegel in terms of your understandings of infinity and rationality?

QM: For me, Hegel belongs to the current of 'subjectalism', that is to say the absolutisation of the being-thought correlation. Hegel endorses the Kantian impossibility of the subject's exiting from itself so as to know the thing-in-itself, but he does so while also maintaining that this impossibility belongs to the thing itself. Because for him there is no thing-in-itself that exists independently of the Subject, and this knowledge itself is a knowledge that leads consciousness (that moment of the separation of subject and object) to cease to be consciousness, to become, progressively, Spirit—self-knowledge as absolute. No doubt this is one of the most powerful forms of the thinking of the absolute within the conditions of modernity, even if Hegel is far from being the only subjectalist—Berkeley, Diderot, and, in a certain sense, Nietzsche and Deleuze, are also subjectalists. But my relation to Hegel goes beyond a mere theoretical corrective to his work: his thinking of history was important to me when I was young, as was my passion for other great dialecticians such as Marx and Guy Debord. In a certain way, it was Hegel who allowed me to think my relation to the epoch inaugurated in the 1980s and the end of Marxism, in analogy to his relation to the French Revolution: the enthusiasm of the beginning, the fall into Terror, the abandonment of the hopes placed in the emancipatory power of the Revolution, the suffering of consciousness confronted by a world that no longer responds to any of its universal expectations. He gave me the determination to find other paths, as strange as they may be, to re-engage with the radical universalism of the young Marx, without giving up any of the exigency of the demands that have driven emancipatory struggles, but with the will to fight just as hard against the effects of violence and oppression that emerge out of the intrinsic logic of these struggles themselves. And for me, this began with a rigorous refoundation of materialism, off the beaten tracks of dialectics—whether Hegelian or Marxist.

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SÇ: Your emphasis on the concept of the Outside or the Great Outdoors has a special place in *After Finitude*. In contrast to the modern philosophical

tradition, where the correlational circle closes off any tunnel to the outdoors, is there any connection between the concepts of the Outside in thinkers such as Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze and your conception of the Great Outdoors? As we know, Foucault found his Outside by excavating the historical structures that determine who and what we are, starting both from language—the discursive field—and the field of practical action—the non-discursive field. Deleuze, on the other hand, tried to pave the way to the Outside by following the schizoid unconscious investments in social desire and nomadic forces, always seeking a breath of fresh air. Ultimately, both thinkers tried to think the Outside while freeing it from an inner-outer dialectic, and to think it in its irreducibility to the here-and-now. We see your itinerary of thinking, on the road to the Great Outdoors, as also being a quest for a non-dogmatic Absolute. Despite the fact that your critique of correlationism sometimes takes the aforementioned thinkers to task in some manner, can it be said that *After Finitude* is in an implicit alliance with the idea of the Outside that these thinkers are seeking?

QM: I won't talk about Foucault here, because his fundamental problematic, it seems to me, is an analysis of knowledge-power, not the constitution of an ontology. A Foucauldian ontology, if such a thing were to exist—which in itself is already a problematic thesis—would require a reconstruction that would be entirely hypothetical, in order to 'compare' it to my own approach.

As for Deleuze, things are much clearer. In *Cinema 1*, he writes that '[t]he only resemblance between Bergson and Heidegger—and it is a considerable one—lies here: both base the specificity of time on a conception of the open'.[3] Now, these are the two principal versions of the Open that I oppose—and since they are ultimately the only truly powerful versions of this concept, we might say that the 'Great Outdoors' is for me a way of naming the project of escaping from the Open—escaping the 'prison of the Open'. We have a first correlationist version of the Open: that of Heidegger, for whom being is the correlate of the opening of Dasein in the direction of the being of the phenomenon. Dasein is mortal, the correlation Dasein-being is of the order of a historial arche-fact that has no foundation—all of these are attributes of Correlation in its correlationist form, which by deploying the facticity (in a non-Heideggerian sense) of Correlation, protect it from any metaphysical absolutisation. As for the Bergsonian Open, it is quite obviously subjectal: it is inseparable from the creative power of becoming, itself thought by way of the duration which is the very weave of the mind. It designates the Correlation thought-becoming in a sense that this time is absolutised. Still, as always since the constitution of the 'steel ring' of Correlation, we find two versions that stand in apparent opposition but which I see as essentially complementary: the Open is either correlationist or subjectal.

The materialist is one who feels themselves to be imprisoned in the Open

So I would describe materialism in the modern epoch as follows: *the materialist is one who feels themselves to be imprisoned in the Open*. Who wishes to escape from one or the other of those apparently unbreakable bonds that ties subjectivity to being or to becoming, to reach and to think the blind spot of modernity that is *dead matter*, and to finally break with the permanent anthropomorphism that makes us see the real solely through the prism of our own psyche—whatever form it might take. The Great Outdoors is what stands outside of the walls of the 'invisible prison' of the Open—a prison so invisible that, on the contrary, it seems like the infinite liberatory expansion of the mind investing a world which is, however, in the end, only ever its world (like a huge garden arranged according to its desires, simulating the wilderness, and thus protecting it from the harshest nature, the nature that owes it nothing and has no need of it to persist).

KK: In *After Finitude*, you establish the absolute scope of logic, according to which the principle of contradiction is not only the principle of thinkability but also of possibility. So for your materialist ontology, everything that is contradictory is impossible, and everything that is not contradictory is absolutely possible. From this perspective, you demonstrate that a necessary (metaphysical) god is contradictory and is impossible. However, you say that a virtual god is possible and that we can hope for it without contradiction. Hence, establishing theoretically the

3. G. Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, tr. H. Tomlinson and B. Habberjam (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1997), 219n15.

absolute scope of logic gives you the opportunity to present an immanent form of hope for our practical lives. We know that you also try to establish the absolute scope of mathematics. And I would like to ask, what could be the consequences of establishing the absolute scope of mathematics for our practical lives? When I asked myself this question, I wondered whether you could derive from it political principles regarding the current climate crisis. Because the natural sciences can demonstrate mathematically that the climate crisis is caused by human action. Regardless of whether this is the case or not, what would you say about the practical consequences of establishing the absolute scope of mathematics?

QM: First of all, to be clear about this, I don't at all claim that God doesn't exist because that would be contradictory. My thinking is not founded on the logical principle of noncontradiction, but on the ontological principle of factuality—of the sole necessity of the facticity of every thing. It is in virtue of this principle—which I try to demonstrate cannot be destituted by an antimetaphysics, because it is at the root of every destitution of metaphysics—that I recuse the existence of an eternal and necessary God. However, a contingent god, I think, remains possible. And to this extent I remain faithful to materialism: Epicurus states that even if the 'gods of the crowd', bearers of superstition, do not exist, atomic gods produced by chance, by the clinamen, do indeed exist, to whom one should not pray, but take as models of wisdom. As I have written: materialism is not an atheism, because it doesn't consist in denying the gods, but in materialising them. There are many differences between speculative materialism and ancient materialism, but on the question of the divine, I explicitly situate myself in the wake of the latter.

How might the absolutisation of mathematics affect our existence? This thesis is not meant to have some influence on our lives in itself—but a philosophy bases its potential ethics on a certain relation to the world. Even if, for example, the transcendental forms of time and space, in so far as they yield an account of a priori mathematical or physical knowledge, are not supposed to change our existence, for Kant they make thinkable, within the framework of his system, the deployment of the transcendental into the moral sphere, that of practical reason.

In the same way, there are consequences of mathematical absoluteness that are connected, albeit indirectly, with our engagement in existence. For I try to unknot the essential compatibility that exists between the most rigorous experimental sciences and the most irrational religiosity. This alliance is characteristic of our epoch, where religions are not at all called into question by the advances of science, whereas the project of Enlightenment was indeed to fight against superstition (a code-word for the Christian religion) via the idea of scientific progress. The present situation is made possible by a correlationist interpretation of science according to which its sole object is a 'phenomenal' sphere that only has meaning 'for us', whereas what exists outside of our relation to the world can retain—in a hypothetical way, and therefore open to faith—its transcendent and potentially unfathomable existence. To absolutise the scope of mathematics, and therefore of the mathematicised natural sciences, makes this alliance impossible. Science becomes once again the ally of a true immanence of thought and existence—it commits us once more to seeking an absolute sense for our lives, but this time an irreligious one.

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SÇ: In *After Finitude*, you say that the division into 'for us' and 'in itself' forms the backbone of the correlational circle. Here, a context opens up that raises once again your relationship with Deleuze, who tries to overcome this division in his theory of sense in *Logic of Sense*. While developing an ontology of the event that moves towards impersonal singularities and pre-individual processes, Deleuze seems to be in search of a new territory between what is 'for us' and what is 'in itself'. For example, consider his expression 'fourth person singular'. Again, we find a portrait of Deleuze who mentions 'animal schemas' in his texts on Kant. Don't you think Deleuze offered a way out of the correlational circle by discovering this territory that the notion of difference in itself implies?

QM: Generally speaking, all the objections that have been made to me concerning the fact that other philosophies than mine are anti-correlationist have neglected the fact that I am just as opposed to subjectalism as I am to correlationism—the two modern and recurrent alternatives of the 'Correlationist era'. Because usually, as an alternative model to correlationism, they present a subjectalism. So, Deleuze's thought is not correlationist, but in fact typically subjectal. This is demonstrated clearly enough in this fine passage almost at the end of *What is Philosophy?*:

> Of course, plants and rocks do not possess a nervous system. But, if nerve connections and cerebral integrations presuppose a brainforce as faculty of feeling coexistent with the tissues, it is reasonable to suppose also a faculty of feeling that coexists with embryonic tissues and that appears in the Species as a collective brain [...] Chemical affinities and physical causalities themselves refer to primary forces capable of preserving their long chains by contracting their elements and by making them resonate: no causality is intelligible without this subjective instance. Not every organism has a brain, and not all life is organic, but everywhere there are forces that constitute microbrains, or an inorganic life of things.[4]

What is characteristic of the Correlation in which we continue to be imprisoned is that we never quite manage once and for all to separate subjectivity from being. All critiques of the (humanist, metaphysical, transcendent, etc.) Subject have not liberated us from subjectivity (in the form of Reason, instinct, will to power, desire, etc.). Speculative materialism consists, on the contrary, in the thesis that *the absolute non-subjective can and must be thought*—because it is that in which all thought is held. And it is therefore in relation to this absolute non-subjective, grasped for what it is—the immense material dead-being that spreads out to the most distant galaxies—that we must orient our existences.

KK: Just as there are creatures that can live without oxygen, there are also those that can think without concepts; and these creatures are in the majority. But a thought which, clinging to the rope of concepts, can descend into those times when there was no thought is something peculiar to humans. Here, concepts ultimately serve as a means to glimpse the absolute which is independent of thought. You speak of this absolute as hyperchaotic time and, through your concepts and demonstrations, you guide us toward seeing this hyperchaos, and you call this way of seeing 'dianoetic intuition'. I guess you would define dianoetic intuition differently, but for sure this conception of intuition is different from Kant's sensible intuition. With dianoetic intuition we can imagine the depths of hyperchaotic time as layers which correspond to different types of realities. I wonder whether some kind of 'aesthetic experience' accompanies this dianoetic intuition of hyperchaotic time. According to Kant, the mathematical sublime arises from our inability to comprehend enormous dimensions in space as a totality. Now, thanks to dianoetic intuition we can reach a hyperchaotic time, we can imagine enormous depths in it, and the heterogenous layers we can imagine cannot constitute a totality. I can imagine that, in the past, there were different space-times, different laws of nature, and hence different realities; and I can imagine this variety for the future too. The fact that we can imagine this depth of hyperchaotic time, even though we do not experience it in person, creates a joyful elevation in me. Of course, that's just my own experience. But I wonder how you would consider such an aesthetic side of your materialist speculation.

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QM: It's impossible, strictly speaking, to have a sensible or imaginative intuition of Hyperchaos. For example, I would say that it makes sense to think that the number of possibilities that Hyperchaos could engender exceeds all determinate infinities, and can only be approached via the Cantorian transfinite, which is an unlimited succession of ever larger cardinals, with no end in sight. Although I talk about

4. G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, tr. H. Tomlinson and G. Burchill (London and New York: Verso, 1994), 213 [emphasis QM's].

intellectual intuition, I do so to emphasise that we do indeed in a sense have direct access to the eternal contingency that strikes every entity subject with the power of this Chaos. Because any fact, whether perceived or thought, is given to us not only with its qualities—a winter evening, a snowy pathway lit by a half-moon—but also with the fact, which surrounds it like a perpetual ravine, that it is founded on nothing. You can explain all the elements of such a scene via a complex of causes and natural laws—but you can't explain those laws and causes via one cause and one ultimate law. At any given moment, everything is given as lacking any reason to exist, even if this nothingness of any ultimate Reason is masked by 'secondary reasons', the causes and laws that surround it as relative principles of explanation.

Intellectual intuition is therefore the direct grasping of the failure of metaphysical discourse and religious belief to account for the non-sense and the non-necessity of every thing. This is why I say intuition: it is a direct, nondiscursive grasp (noetic, not dianoetic) of the without-reason that surrounds every last shred of reality. In this sense, I see Hyperchaos as a sort of borderless gulf that sometimes 'falls' into itself, to the point of making that which produced it collapse, in favour of other realities, perhaps extraordinarily other (life within matter, thought within life). It is an unlimited force of engenderment not via infinite perfection like the metaphysical God, but via the tripping into itself of an unparalleled Void, each spasm of which can give rise to an hitherto unexampled world. It is a (chaotic) *ex nihilo* eruption that is not a (divine) Creation ex nihilo, but its radical opposite—it is the Eternal, not Transcendence.

SÇ: In a striking passage in *After Finitude,* you claim that 'there is nothing beneath or beyond the manifest gratuitousness of the given', in the context of the absolute absence of reason as well as the *lacunary* nature of the given. From this point of view, we want to think about a possible dialogue between yourself and Louis Althusser, who gained intellectual momentum from the possibilities of an encounter with the material itself outside of both Origin and Telos. Considering Althusser's equations about the necessity of contingency, and his remarks on the clinamen in Epicurus and Lucretius, do you find some thematic and problematic convergences with Althusser, and what is the reason for your silence about Althusser in general?

Not only is there no finality orienting material processes, there is no foundation to guarantee the continuation of laws

QM: It's always difficult to give the reasons why one hasn't spoken about another author. It doesn't necessarily mean they don't interest you, but simply that they do not constitute a necessary object of discussion for the progress of your investigation. I don't talk about Marx or Debord either, who matter to me so much—because I have not yet arrived at the point where it seems necessary to bring them up. And maybe I never will.

As for Althusser's theory of the encounter, as you say, it draws upon the heritage of Epicurean and Lucretian atomism and their theory of the clinamen. Now, the clinamen is a form of *chance*, in the sense that I use this word: it can produce events without cause (the declination of atoms in free fall), but only by submitting to laws that it cannot change (the infinite nature of the void, the unbreakability of atoms, the immutability of their various forms, given once and for all, smooth, hooked, etc.). I call contingency that which can destroy, without reason, the very laws of a universe—and this projects me into a mode of thought that radicalises the materialist thinking of the without-reason. Not only is there no finality orienting material processes (as the atomists wished) but moreover there is no foundation to guarantee the continuation of laws. It is this passage from chance to contingency that makes my materialism profoundly different to the materialism of the late Althusser.

KK: You say contingency, and contingency alone, is necessary. According to you, there is no necessary reason why things are as they are and not otherwise. One of the direct consequences of this is that human existence is also contingent. You have distinguished the concept of contingency from the concept of chance by way of the transfinite. So human being is neither necessary nor aleatory. In the history of philosophy, evaluating human existence as necessary or aleatory has led to different opinions about its value and meaning. So, since speculative materialism reveals that human being is absolutely

contingent, how does human value and meaning appear from this perspective?

We are capable of not understanding the ultimate reason. It is to this common 'stupor' that we owe our higher dignity

QM: The fundamental point is that the human being is a thinking being—a being capable of knowledge. The decisive issue in the consideration of beings is the factual (non-necessary) existence of thought in them—this time in the strict sense, as intellect, power of knowledge. There is no necessary reason why humans as a biological species should be capable of thought, nor why they should be the only example of the thinking being. Other living species, in the future of the evolution of species, or on bodies other than the Earth, may in future, or may already, also think, and on the contrary humans may evolve toward a non-thinking state. All of that is possible, yet deprived of all necessity. However, the fact is that there is thought, and that is borne by humanity. But what is thought? Thought, in my view, is the *capacity* to grasp contingency as ultimate: the capacity, then, available to each of us, to *not* understand what might be the ultimate reason of things and of laws. The good news of speculative materialism is that it turns this apparent incapacity into an astonishing capacity to understand that things and laws ultimately have no reason to be as they are. This is our capacity to *question* the reason for every reality before discovering the absence of any supreme reason.

Hyperchaos may well produce thinking beings that are more intelligent, more powerful, more effective, than humans: but it will not produce any being capable of thinking beyond the absolute that it itself is. Hence the egalitarian sense of all politics: what makes us equal, beyond our talents and our conditions, is that we are capable of *not* understanding the ultimate reasons. It is to this common 'stupor' that we owe our higher dignity. And I would add that, since the absolute reveals to us that everything is accidental, we must accord the same dignity to those who, among us, have been accidentally dispossessed of this faculty—by some chance accident of birth, or some sickness or injury in the course of their existence. We are all shot through with the same power of the universal which is the thinking of unreason—and this power, even when deactivated in some of us, still endows them with an essential importance to our eyes, because, able as we are, we are potentially disabled. We think the absolute, and by virtue of this, we are all ultimate and fragile—valuable, and worthy of care.

SÇ: Our last question is related to the distinction you made between chaotic and mathematical absolutes. The set of conditions that you present as the principle of unreason attempt to combine the impossibility of a necessary being with the necessity of the contingency of the being. As we can clearly see in *After Finitude*, the introduction of this principle brings about the problematisation of the Principle of Sufficient Reason and seeks to derive new possibilities from Hyperchaos. However, we see that you do not apply the same criticism and problematisation to the principle of identity. Doesn't the introduction of the principle of unreason require a questioning of the principle of identity? Does all this have something to do with the transition from the chaotic absolute to the mathematical absolute?

QM: If I don't critique the principle of identity, any more than I do the principle of noncontradiction, it's not because of the absolutisation of mathematics that I am trying to achieve, but because of the absolutisation of contingency from which I set out—and which is the very meaning of the principle of factuality. If *this* is also *not-this*—breaking with the principle of identity—then everything is necessary since it reveals itself to be originally anything whatsoever. A thing that infringes its identity with itself can no longer change or perish, since it already is that which it is not (that which is outside its identity) for all eternity: its not-being is identical with its being. Ontologised contradiction—as demonstrated in the Hegelian dialectic—is the guarantee of a necessary being, incapable of modifying itself because it is always-already its other. The same goes for the principle of identity: if that which is such-and-such deviates from being such-and-such, then determination—that which delimits every thing as what it is—is broken, and everything is already what it is not. In truth, metaphysics culminates in the contestation of the principles of identity and

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noncontradiction—once again, it was Hegel who taught me this.

I would also remark that the critiques that have been made of the principle of identity are often mistaken. What are we critiquing when we critique this principle philosophically? For example, the identity of a substance beyond the modification of accidents—one could then say that there is no substance, that all is becoming, etc.—or the spiritual identity of a nation, of a people, of a religion, in space and time. But for such critiques to be legitimate and even for them to make any sense at all, they must not concern so much identity as such, but only identity applied to a certain mode of being—substance, nation, spirit, etc. Now, for an ontology that believes only in becomings or events, identity may very well be concerned with ephemeral accidents and fleeting events. If we deny that the event was what it was, or if—refusing to apply the verb 'to be' here—we deny that what has befallen a nation, a people, a community, has really happened to it, we thereby annihilate the force of a revolution, of a shaking-up, of a precariousness, by saying that this happened and also did not happen.

I operate a destitution of the Principle of Sufficient Reason, because this principle, the principle of metaphysical reason, is the enemy of authentic, speculative reason: nothing has a necessary reason to be, to be what it is—and it is from this that all true necessity proceeds. But I do not operate a destitution of the principles of logic—even if I critically assess their ontological import—because I do not operate a destitution of reason itself. This distinguishes my work, on one hand, from all metaphysics, and on the other, from the Heideggerian destitution of metaphysics (which attacks not only the Principle of Sufficient Reason, but the principle of identity and that of noncontradiction), in so far as the latter, claiming to exempt itself from reason, was also deeply compatible—and this is a vast question yet to be fully explored—with the radical anti-universalism that was national socialism. We therefore find ourselves on the razor's edge: refusing the Principle of Sufficient Reason, but without abandoning reason. And this, in my terms, is what differentiates the speculative from the metaphysical.