

Speculative Realism

A One-Day Workshop
1–7pm, Friday 27 April 2007
Lecture Hall, Ben Pimlott Building
Goldsmiths, University of London
New Cross, London SE14 6NW

**Participants: Ray Brassier (Middlesex), Iain Hamilton Grant (UWE),
Graham Harman (American University in Cairo),
Quentin Meillassoux (Ecole Normale Supérieure)**



Contemporary 'continental' philosophy often prides itself on having overcome the age-old metaphysical battles between realism and idealism. Subject-object dualism, whose repudiation has turned into a conditioned reflex of contemporary theory, has supposedly been destroyed by the critique of representation and supplanted by various ways of thinking the fundamental correlation between thought and world.

But perhaps this anti-representational (or 'correlationist') consensus – which exceeds philosophy proper and thrives in many domains of the humanities and the social sciences – hides a deeper and more insidious idealism. Is realism really so 'naïve'? And is the widespread dismissal of representation and objectivity the radical, critical stance it so often claims to be?

This workshop will bring together four philosophers whose work, although shaped by different concerns, questions some of the basic tenets of a 'continental' orthodoxy while eschewing the reactionary prejudices of common-sense. Speculative realism is not a doctrine but the umbrella term for a variety of research programmes committed to upholding the autonomy of reality, whether in the name of transcendental physicalism, object-oriented philosophy, or abstract materialism, against the depredations of anthropocentrism.

Schedule	
Chair: Alberto Toscano (Sociology, Goldsmiths)	
1-1.15	Welcome
1.15-2.30	Ray Brassier
2.30-3.45	Iain Hamilton Grant
3.45-4.15	Break
4.15-5.30	Graham Harman
5.30-7.00	Quentin Meillassoux
7.00-8.00	Drinks

for further information, and advance excerpts of speakers' work see <http://www.goldsmiths.ac.uk/csisp/>
THIS EVENT IS FREE, BUT PLEASE REGISTER BEFOREHAND BY EMAILING a.toscano@gold.ac.uk

Speculative Realism

Ray Brassier, Iain Hamilton Grant,
Graham Harman, Quentin Meillassoux

'Speculative Realism: A One-Day Workshop' took place on 27 April 2007 at Goldsmiths, University of London, under the auspices of the Centre for the Study of Invention and Social Process, co-sponsored by COLLAPSE. Rather than announcing the advent of a new theoretical 'doctrine' or 'school', the event conjoined four ambitious philosophical projects – all of which boldly problematise the subjectivistic and anthropocentric foundations of much of 'continental philosophy' while differing significantly in their respective strategies for superseding them. It is precisely this uniqueness of each participant that allowed a fruitful discussion to emerge. Alongside the articulation of various challenges to certain idealistic premises, a determination of the obstacles that any contemporary realism must surmount was equally in effect. Accordingly, some of the key issues under scrutiny included the status of science and epistemology in contemporary philosophy, the ontological constitution of thought, and the nature of subject-independent objects.

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However, as workshop moderator and co-organiser Alberto Toscano indicated, a common feature of the work presented was the implication that from a genuine interrogation of the continental tradition necessarily ensues a repudiation of the orthodoxies symptomatic of that tradition's conceptual exhaustion (the most visible of which being the seemingly endless deluge of insipid secondary literature and the 'X-ian' identity of its authors), thus rendering the task of doing philosophy 'in one's own name' essential once again. 'Speculative Realism', then, forces contemporary philosophy to make a decision, but it is not so much one concerning idealism or realism. Rather, at stake here is the possibility of a future for audacious and original philosophical thought as a discourse on the nature of reality – or, as one might otherwise call it: philosophy itself.

PRESENTATION BY RAY BRASSIER

Rather than reading a paper, I'm just going to make some general remarks about what I take to be the really significant points of convergence and divergence between Iain, Graham, Quentin, and myself. The fundamental thing we seem to share is obviously a willingness to re-interrogate or to open up a whole set of philosophical problems that were taken to have been definitively settled by Kant, certainly, at least, by those working within the continental tradition. This is why, as I'm sure everyone knows, the term 'realist' in continental philosophy is usually taken to be some kind of insult – only someone who really hasn't understood Kant could ever want to rehabilitate something like metaphysical realism, or any form of realism which does not depend upon some kind of transcendental guarantor, whether that guarantor is subjectively instantiated by pure apperception, or construed in terms of linguistic practices,

or a communicational consensus, etc. Much of the mainstream of nineteenth and twentieth century post-Kantian philosophy is about simply redefining, generalising, specifying, these transcendental structures or conditions of cognitive legitimation. And in a way, it doesn't really matter whether you claim to have replaced the subject and the object with some form of communicational consensus or being-in-the-world or any variant of the latter on these issues: The transcendental function has been variously encoded in different versions of post-Kantian continental philosophy. But the thing that seems to be assumed within this tradition, the thing that actually Graham's work first brought out to me, is the notion that whatever structure there is in the world has to be transcendently imposed or generated or guaranteed, which is to say that objectivity can only be a function of synthesis. And it's striking that in post-Kantian philosophy the difference between Kant and Hegel seems to be that where Kant will localise the synthesising function in something like pure apperception or wholly on the side of the subject, Hegel and the various forms of objective idealism will say that reality itself is self-synthesising, that there is a kind of principle of synthesis encoded in objective reality itself. So that, famously, in Hegel's objective idealism, the relational synthesis which Kant takes to be constitutive of objectivity is simply transplanted from its localisation in the subject and construed rather as the relation between subject and object, which Hegel recodes as the 'self-relating negativity' that yields the structure of reality. So the question is: If you refuse to say that synthesis – the synthesis which produces objective structure – is anchored in a subject, does this mean that

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you have to idealise the real by attributing to it this capacity for self-relation? A capacity for self-synthesis whereby a continuum of relation itself yields the type of discontinuity that gives rise to discrete objects? In other words, is there a principle of intelligibility encoded in physical reality?

This is absolutely the key issue, I think, in Iain's book on Schelling.¹ And according to Iain's reconstruction, Schelling proposes an alternative variant of objective idealism, one wherein structure and objectivity are intrinsic to nature, but the ideal structures that are intrinsic to or inherent in physical reality are no longer construed in terms of a dialectic of opposition and contradiction. In Iain's brilliant reconstruction of Schellingianism, what you get is something like a 'transcendental physics', a physics of the All, where ideas are differential dynamisms, attractors immanent to and inherent in material reality. So, nature is self-organising. And the ideal structure of nature produces the structure of thinking. But if cognition is a result, a product – if it's every bit as conditioned as any other natural phenomenon – the question then becomes whether there's any reason to suppose that thought can limn or grasp the ultimate structure of reality at any given moment, any specific historical juncture. Because the key thing, if you're committed to a transcendental realism, of which Iain provides a powerful reconstruction in his book, is that it is the structure of material reality that generates the structure of thinking. But this means that one must discount any appeal to intellectual intuition, which is to say, the idea that thinking can simply transcend its own material,

1. Iain Hamilton Grant, *Philosophies of Nature After Schelling* (London: Continuum, 2006).

neurobiological conditions of organisation and effectuation and grasp the noumenal structure of reality as it is in itself. The problem is this: If the structure of reality produces the structure of thinking, then the challenge is to avoid both transcendentalism and a kind of pragmatism which would say that evolutionary history simply guarantees the congruence between representation and reality as a function of adaptational necessity, so that only creatures that have a cognitive apparatus that is appropriate to their kind of biophysical environment will be able to survive. And this is a claim that fuels much of naturalised epistemology, but one that I think is metaphysically problematic, because there is no reason to suppose that evolutionary adaptation would favour exhaustively accurate beliefs about the world. There's no reason to suppose that evolution would infallibly provide human organisms with a cognitive apparatus that can accurately track the salient features or the deep structure of reality. So in other words, there seems to be a kind of incompatibility between any pragmatic, adaptationist rationale for cognitive functioning, and scientific realism, which says that the physical structures of reality, as articulated by the natural sciences, can't simply be explained in terms of their usefulness as viable survival strategies. And the force of Iain's book is to try to propose what he calls a 'transcendental naturalism' – which claims that you can explain the emergence of the structure of ideation from the ideal structure of physical reality, so that ideation would be capable of tracking the ideal dynamisms, the transcendental dynamisms, that underlie merely empirical or merely somatic reality.

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An important distinction in Iain's book is between the Aristotelian-Kantian reduction of materiality to somatic or corporeal reality – the idea that to be material means to be some sort of body with a set of perceptible properties – and the transcendental materialism that Iain ascribes to Schelling, where the real material structures are the abstract differential dynamisms that generate and produce bodies, organisms, and spatio-temporal objects, but can never be reduced to them. But here's one consequence of this: if the structure of ideation is a function of the ideal structure of material self-organisation, then the process is ongoing – and Iain emphasises this – so it's simply not the case that biological history has reached some sort of apex in human consciousness. And if the process is still ongoing and will keep going, then not only is there more to know about the structure of *reality* than we currently know just now; there's also more to know about the structure of *ideation* than we currently know. And I think this presents a quandary for someone who's committed to a version of speculative realism: transcendental physicalism insists that there are real conditions of ideation but that these conditions have an ideal structure. The question then is: can the specific conceptual details of these ideal physical structures be satisfactorily identified using the currently available resources of conceptual ideation? What does this mean? It means using either the available registers of mathematical formalisation available to contemporary science; *or* – if we are thinking in terms of transcendental philosophy – a set of suitably generic conceptual categories. But then, can we be sure that any of the abstract conceptual categories in terms of which we propose to reconstruct these ideal structures



Ray Brassier

are applicable? Can we be sure that these self-organising features of material reality can be linguistically encoded and encapsulated? In other words, are the resources of natural language sufficient to successfully articulate the transcendental dynamisms that fuel material processes? Or do we need to discover more about the machinery and structure of ideation before we can confidently specify the physical structure of nature? So, as regards the characterisation of ideas as ‘phase space attractors’, the question is whether that could ever satisfactorily characterise the underlying dynamisms of physical nature. More importantly, with regard to the category of ‘dynamism’, which, as Iain shows, goes back to Plato and Aristotle: Is it enough simply to

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supplant a somatic or Aristotelian metaphysics, which equates material reality with constituted bodies, products, organisms, and objects with a metaphysics of dynamisms as the real, underlying motors of self-organisation, or ultimate generators of material structure?

So, I guess what I'm asking is: what is the status of dynamism in speculative physics? Is it truly adequate to physical infrastructures? Or might it not be contaminated by certain folk-physical prejudices? I agree with Iain about re-inscribing the machinery of ideation within the physical realm, and about the need for a transcendental naturalisation of epistemology, but wonder whether that re-inscription provides a warrant for what he calls 'speculative physics'. What is the relationship between the dynamic structure of the idea and the mathematical register deployed for its formalisation? So my question to Iain then is really about the status of epistemology within transcendental materialism: Although the advantages of the latter vis-à-vis the pragmatic variants of naturalised epistemology are fairly evident, I think there's an issue here about what articulates ideation and the mathematical resources of ideation that have been crucial in ridding us of this parochial Aristotelian model of physical reality. It was the mathematisation of nature that definitively ruined and shredded the medieval Book of the World. And the question is, can we rehabilitate a form of transcendental or speculative materialism or realism that would also explain the success of mathematical formalisation in supplanting the old, pre-Galilean models of physics and metaphysics?

One final point, concerning the nature of dynamism, and this is a general point related to process philosophy:

If you privilege productivity, if these ideal generative dynamisms that structure and constitute material reality can be characterised in terms of the primacy of production over product, then the question is, how do we account for the interruptions of the process? How do we account for discontinuity in the continuum of production? And while I have no doubt that it's possible to do so, I think it's a significant problem for any process philosophy that wants to defend or prosecute a form of ontological monism based on something like 'pure productivity', 'pure becoming', 'duration', or whatever one chooses to call it. Because then it seems that you always have to introduce or posit some sort of conceptual contrary, some principle of deceleration, interruption, disintensification or whatever, in order to account for the upsurges of stability and continuity and consistency within this otherwise untrammelled flux of becoming and pure process. So even if one then goes on to reintegrate it into the former as a mere moment, one still has to explain why there is anything but pure process or why the processual flux is ever momentarily stabilized. It's striking that you see this in Bergson: the idea that you need something to explain what interrupts the process, what produces or introduces discontinuity into the flux of becoming.

And I think Graham's contribution lies precisely in this key area. The idea is that if you begin with some form of preliminary methodological dualism of production and product or, in its classic Bergsonian articulation, something like duration and space, then you need to explain what interrupts the continuum – how duration ever externalises itself or coagulates into something like a spatial fixity or

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stasis. And Graham gets around this problem by simply having a metaphysics of objects, which in a way removes the question of synthesis altogether. What's striking about Graham's account is that you don't need to explain how objects are synthesised, because you simply take objects as nested within one another. You have this kind of infinite nesting of objects within objects within objects ... Every relation between objects itself unfolds within another object. So Graham turns the question around by showing how the problem consists in showing how discontinuous, autonomous objects can ever enter into relation with one another – his answer is that they do so on the inside of another object. In other words, every relation is itself another object. So what you have then is a kind of egalitarian objective univocity, a kind of ontology of pure objectivity: there are nothing but objects, objects nested within one another, and the really significant metaphysical challenge is explaining their interaction.

But I have two questions vis-à-vis Graham's project: First, Graham explains the interaction between objects in terms of their sensual properties, *i.e.*, no object ever exhausts the ultimate reality of another object. It engages or interacts with it on the basis of a set of sensual or perceptible properties, and it is these that provide the basis for the reciprocal interaction between objects. And my question is: what is the criterion for distinguishing sensible from non-sensible properties for any given object? Is it possible to provide such a criterion without giving it some sort of epistemological slant or formulation? In other words, in order to interact with one another, it seems that objects need to 'know' something about one another. The fire must 'know'

that the cotton is not rock; the rock must ‘know’ that the ice is not water. Whatever kind of interaction objects have, the fact that their interface is possible on the basis of this recognition of something like sensual properties, which are capable of locking together and causing the interaction – well, I think the question is whether it is possible to explain how objects discriminate between the sensual or perceptible and the imperceptible properties of any other object. And this ties into a second question, which is about the status of the distinction between real and imaginary objects for Graham, because, for Graham, it makes no sense to ask whether something is real: everything is real, everything is objective, so nothing is more real than anything else. He provides us with an absolutely egalitarian, flat ontology of objects. But the danger then is – and Graham and I have spoken about this before – that this would simply license too much or result in too liberal a construal of objectivity. For instance, what would be the distinction between a hobbit and a quark here? This is a very serious metaphysical question! And Graham maintains that the properties of the hobbit or any other kind of fictitious, contrived, artificially generated example would be purely imaginary, and of course one can contrive and generate imaginary qualities for imaginary objects. But how do we make the distinction, given that we know that imaginary objects or fictitious entities such as the Virgin Mary or Yahweh or phlogiston seem perfectly capable of producing real effects – it’s perfectly possible for these things to generate real effects in so far as people believe in them and do things in the world on the basis of their belief in them. If we say that this is a misdescription, and that there’s actually a real

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object underlying the imaginary object, and it is this real object that causes things to happen, then the question is: on what basis do we make this distinction if not by invoking some form of epistemological criterion that distinguishes between real and imaginary properties or objects?

In other words, my question to Graham is: Is it possible to prosecute an ontology of objects without explaining *how it is that we are able to do so*; *i.e.* how we seem to have to *know* something about objects? This is not to reintroduce the Kantian primacy of the subject, but just to say that even objects seem to have to know certain things about one another in order to interact, just as we seem to have to know something simply in order to be able to describe and identify objects. And Graham is clear that the epistemological relation, which Kantianism took to be absolutely primary and fundamental – *i.e.*, the subject-object relationship – is merely a relation between objects just like any other. It has no kind of epistemological or transcendental primacy, so that explaining how we're able to know the laws of mechanics is an interesting question, but it's not really fundamentally different in kind from explaining how fire is able to burn cotton, or how a marble is able to interact with a table. But I think I want to problematise this issue further – my conviction is that it's not so clear, and that philosophy should do more than simply generate a formal metaphysics of objects; my conviction is that describing or reconstructing the structure of interaction between objects does not exhaust the task of philosophy.

And finally, I'm just going to say a few things about Quentin and how I situate myself vis-à-vis his work. My key reservation concerns the status of intellectual intuition.

Quentin defends the claim that mathematical ideation, mathematical intellection, has a grasp of things-in-themselves. It grasps the intelligible structure of reality. He has an extremely interesting hypothesis about why it's precisely the meaninglessness or the insignificance of mathematical inscription that allows you to grasp what he calls the 'absolute contingency' of reality. But he explicitly wants to rehabilitate the Cartesian project, where mathematical ideation accurately describes the objective structure of reality as it is in itself, against the Kantian one, which would limit the scope of scientific cognition to the phenomenal realm. My question is very simple: Is it possible to abstract ideation from the physical reality which it grasps or apprehends, given what we know since Darwin, *i.e.*, that the capacity for mathematical ideation which underwrites the objectivity of scientific cognition is the result of a long process of evolutionary development? And the question here again is: Can one concede that ideation, even the most sophisticated form of abstract conceptual ideation as it's deployed in mathematical science, simply supervenes on a set of fundamental neurobiological processes? Can one grant this without reducing cognition and ideation to pragmatic expediency – *i.e.*, the claim that we represent the world in the way we do because evolution has guaranteed this congruence between mind and world (a claim which I think provides an extremely feeble warrant for scientific realism)? In other words, can one reject pragmatism, and naturalist pragmatism in particular, without ascribing some kind of mysterious transcendence to thinking; without saying that thinking, and specifically scientific cognition, is this mysterious kind of capacity that human beings have

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either stumbled upon or had bestowed upon them by some mysterious sort of process, and which it's impossible to try to understand in more rudimentary terms? And I think that arguably *the* most significant philosophical development of the twentieth century is the emergence of a science of cognition; that is, the idea that the process of cognition can be re-integrated into the realm of objective phenomena studied by the empirical sciences. In other words, there's a circle here, and a circle which, I think, is too quickly disqualified as vicious by transcendental philosophy. Husserl tried to disqualify psychologism on the grounds that if you reduce ideation to a set of psychological processes, then you remove the dimension of necessity, of logico-mathematical validity, which is the guarantor for the cognitive authority of the natural sciences. In other words, you reduce scientific discourse to a discourse like any other discourse, simply a way of speaking, and you basically turn into Richard Rorty.

So, as I see it, the key challenge for speculative realism is: Can one be a realist about the sorts of entities and processes postulated by the sciences without having to shore up that commitment to realism with some sort of pragmatism on the one hand, or transcendentalism on the other? Can one be a naturalist without turning into Richard Rorty, and can one maintain that what science says is true without becoming a Husserlian or something of that ilk? And I think this is a really interesting question; I think this is where some kind of communication is needed between the speculative audacity which is a characteristic of so-called 'continental philosophy' and the really admirable level of engagement with the empirical sciences which is a feature

of the most interesting work being done specifically in the kind of Anglo-American philosophy of mind that engages directly with, or that sees its project as continuous with, cognitive science. So, can one be a transcendental realist without idealising ideation, but without reducing it to a set of pragmatic functions either?

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IAIN HAMILTON GRANT: This is fascinating, Ray, not least because I've never heard anyone talk about my work before! But several things you mentioned brought to mind certain features which I think are perhaps necessary to any speculative project. One of them is a certain commitment to a variety of realism, and the question is, which realism? And my question is: Is it possible that there is a realism which is in some sense eliminativist? Because if so, then there are all sorts of ontological problems with that. If not, then, if nothing can be eliminated, then we have a situation where it no longer makes sense to ask, 'What is the difference between a hobbit and a quark?', or for that matter, between Rorty and Husserl! Actually, is there one? Or rather what are the differences? There are several differences between these entities, but to use a difference as a disqualification for their being 'real' or not is simply to beg the question about realism, fundamentally. And for that reason, it seems to me that a non-eliminative realism is committed to becoming a form of idealism, in which case we merely extend realism to the Ideas: In which case we no longer have the problem of the separativity, the subtraction, of ideation from nature, which you were suggesting might be a problem; nor do we have the reducibility to a simple state of affairs whose

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mere existence guarantees an equilibrium reached between the forces of nature and this highly evolved product or what have you – what you’ve described as ‘pragmatism’. So really my question to you is – and this is also in the light of what reading I’ve done of your book,² really – what are the grounds on which it would become possible for any realist to say, ‘ x or class x or category x cannot and does not enjoy being’?

RB: Well, the traditional way, although it may be completely implausible, is to say that to be real is to make a difference. Anything that makes a difference is real. And of course, then you have to say, ‘Well, it has to be a *real* difference, so what do you mean by *real* difference?’ And one traditional response to this is that anything that has effects, anything that produces effects, must be real, no matter how else it might be qualified. And this is the key question for Graham, who refuses any distinction between the real and the imaginary, so that it doesn’t make sense to ask if anything is more real than anything else. I can see why, because it seems that the difficulties attendant upon trying to articulate a difference between what is real and what isn’t just seem insuperable. But it seems to me that if you’re willing to grant that we know more about the world than we used to – which I know some people are not willing to grant, but which I’m kind of desperately wedded to – then it seems that you want to say that what happens when we discover something real about the world is that we discover the real causal mechanism, we discover what is *actually* making the difference – so it’s

2. Ray Brassier, *Nihil Unbound: Enlightenment and Extinction* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

not the Virgin Mary who's making the difference, it's a complicated set of processes for which the Virgin Mary is some sort of figurative shorthand. In other words, I'm not simply saying there is no such thing as the Virgin Mary, because clearly there is, in the same sense simply in which there are such things as hobbits or unicorns: the sense in which all these things have made a difference to *our* world, at least. But the claim would be that this is a kind of folk-language, a kind of linguistic shorthand to describe something else, something that is inapparent, and whose proper description would invoke complex configurations of psychological, as well as socio-historical, processes. In other words, this stuff happens, everyone knows it: why is it that people's apparently false beliefs can have real consequences in the world? The answer would be because we can account for how things can happen even when we ourselves as agents of that happening are deluded about the causally salient factors. There is a way of describing what the salient mechanisms are that produce what's happening. And I think the question of scientific realism is: What are the salient mechanisms that make a difference in the world, that produce difference? In the history of science, phlogiston, calorific fluid, etc. – these things were thought to be viable explanatory categories, and when we dispensed with them, when we said, 'No, that's not an adequate explanation for heat, etc.', we realized we were misconstruing or misdescribing the relevant factors or mechanisms. My conviction – and I think it's a necessary conviction if you want to be a transcendental realist – my conviction would be that we can always misdescribe the structure of reality, but that doesn't mean that there isn't a kind of underlying, deep structure,

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even if there's always going to be something unsatisfactory or superficial about the mechanisms that we describe. For instance, when Newtonian physics was supplanted by Einsteinian physics – did Einstein ‘falsify’ Newton? Well, not really, he just showed that his physics had only a limited domain of applicability. And it seems to me that that's the dynamic, the cognitive dynamic that underlies science. It's not that we discover that what we knew was false, but rather that it was limited. This is what it means to find out more about the world, that there's much more going on, and that it turns out to be more complicated, and that we need to forge new resources in order to be able to adequately describe or identify these complex processes. So, in a way, the distinction then wouldn't be between what's real and what isn't real, but between degrees, I suppose – possibly between degrees of adequation. And I think it's possible to describe what adequation would be, what it means for thought to be adequate to its object, without resorting to a Kantian framework. But I'm still groping at this. I really haven't got anything worked out, so these are just kind of intuitions.

GRAHAM HARMAN: Ray also mentioned a few things about my work that I can respond to. First I want to say, though, in your response to Iain you mentioned defining the real as that which has effects, and I would encourage you to stay away from that definition, because then it seems like you're defining the real by something outside the real. So it's not the real in its own right, but something outside of it – potential or something. We can argue about this, but this is why I shy away from that definition, just as I shy away

from the definition ‘reality means resistance’, which you see in Heidegger and Max Scheler and others. That might be a way we measure reality, but that can’t be reality in itself, because *something* is resisting. The resistance itself is at best a way of *knowing* the reality.

The last thing you asked about my work was whether I think that this theory of relations between objects exhausts philosophy, and at this point I’m not in a position to say yes or no – but that’s definitely my project, that’s what I’m trying to say. And just in the last week in London I’ve decided what I’m going to do for the second half of this next book, which is go through every one of the metaphysical problems that Kant throws out and try to rehabilitate every one of them – such as, ‘is there a smallest possible unit of substance, or does the division go on forever?’, ‘is there freedom or no freedom?’ It would be fun to try to rehabilitate all these problems in terms of objects and the relations between them. I was struggling with how to organise that metaphysical part of the manuscript, but I think this is the way to do it, since Kant is the one who destroyed all these problems, according to everyone. Why not just go right in his face and try to bring them all back? Who knows if it will work or not, but it should be fun.

The hobbit and the quark, I think, was the second point, and that’s actually easier to deal with than the first. I’m a Latourian on this point. For Latour, every kind of object is real, and you simply judge an actor by how many allies it has, and what sorts of ... – I almost said ‘effects’, I’m contradicting myself – how well it resists tests of strength that are made against it. Clearly a hobbit has to be a real object in some sense, because I can ask ‘What is a hobbit?’, ‘What

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does a hobbit do?', 'How does it behave?', and this will never be completely reducible to all the things that Tolkien says in all of his novels, because you can imagine new scenarios. You can ask, 'Could a hobbit fit in a Lovecraft story?', 'Could a hobbit fit in a Proust novel?' I would say no. Now why is that? It's never been tried, so why is it that when I mention these possibilities we immediately reject them? It's because you have a sense of what the hobbit is beyond all of the things that have been said about hobbits in films and novels that we already know. So I'd say a hobbit is real. Okay, of course you don't want to say a hobbit is as real as a quark – why not? Or to take an even sharper example, you don't want to say that five hundred imaginary crowns are the same as five hundred real crowns. And the way I would deal with that problem is as follows: The traditional pre-Kantian solution was to say there isn't really anything different in the two. God creates the five hundred real crowns, being becomes a real predicate in the real ones that wasn't there in the imaginary ones. And then Kant says it's not a real predicate, it has to do with our position, namely their relation to us. But why not say that the five hundred real crowns and the five hundred imaginary crowns do not have the same qualities in the first place? They differ in essence, not just existence. That's my solution, and it's not fully worked out yet. The shiny gold lustre of the real coins is not the same as that of the imaginary coins, because somehow qualities are borrowed from the parts of a thing, I would say, and the five hundred real crowns have real parts, the five hundred imaginary crowns do not. So that's the direction I would go in, to answer that: to say that everything is real, and that the qualities of things are not

universals. The qualities of things come from individual parts. And then you have to explain what universals are, which is another problem I haven't even touched yet – how do you explain what 'red' means?

The first question you asked was the hardest. Objects interact on the basis of essential properties. In order to interact, objects need to know something of one another. I'm not sure if this answer will satisfy you, but what I say is that objects do not interact with each other directly, but simply somehow allude to each other, and what they're coming in contact with are qualities of each other, that somehow allude to the things. And I think you see this in metaphor, and this is the example I used in *Guerrilla Metaphysics*³: The example Max Black uses was 'man is a wolf', which is a different metaphor from 'wolf is a man', it has a completely different effect. When you've got 'man is a wolf' in Black's example you have some sort of elusive human thing there that's being orbited by wolf qualities that are transformed in a human direction. But somehow those qualities allow you access to the human underneath that wolf-man thing, whatever it is. So, things do interact but they interact only on the interior of another object where one of them is merely sensible, or an intentional, object, and you're trying to point at a real object in that way.

I don't want to hog the time here, but I was going to answer Iain's rhetorical question about whether there's a difference between Husserl and Rorty. I think there is a difference, and the difference is that the key to Husserl is the intentional objects. Husserl *is* speaking of the phenomenal

3. Graham Harman, *Guerrilla Metaphysics: Phenomenology and the Carpentry of Things* (Chicago: Open Court, 2005).

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realm, but he's also speaking of a phenomenal realm broken up into objects that are never fully exemplified by our specific perceptions of them – I think that's his great discovery. These are different from real objects that withdraw and hide as in Heidegger and in various realists. In Husserl what you have are objects that are already there yet somehow covered over with too much detail, so you have to eidetically vary them and circle the thing from many different directions and finally, asymptotically perhaps, get at what the thing is by looking at it from all the different possible angles. And you certainly don't see that in any of the empiricists. Objects are merely arbitrary bundles imposed by us on sense data, for empiricists. Whereas I think the object is really there, organising the qualities, and Merleau-Ponty actually does a nice job on this. I'm not the greatest fan of Merleau-Ponty, but he does a nice job arguing that the black of a pen is not the same as the black of a coat – there's a connotation to the blackness that is different in each case, because the quality is somehow impregnated with the object to which it belongs. So ... I will let our visitor from Paris take the reins now.

QUENTIN MEILLASSOUX: Thank you, Graham. I would say the following about formalisation, mathematics, in relation to the world: I don't want to demonstrate that there is a necessary relation between mathematics and reality. My problem is a problem of *possibility*. In *After Finitude*,⁴ the problem that I encounter is that of explaining the possibility

4. Quentin Meillassoux, *Après la finitude: Essai sur la nécessité de la contingence* (Paris: Seuil, 2006), translated into English by Ray Brassier as *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency* (Continuum: London, forthcoming 2008).

of science, physics, being able to describe a world without humans. For a transcendental philosopher, for what I call ‘correlationism’, this makes no sense – it is an absurd question to ask, ‘What would the world be if there were no humans?’ ‘What would the world be like if we didn’t exist?’ – This is an absurd question, *the* absurd question, I think, for every Kantian or post-Kantian philosophy. But the problem is that sciences are supposed precisely to explain what the world is like even if there are no humans. What is the world before humanity? What could the world be after humanity? So, my problem is just a problem of possibility. What distinguishes scientific description is its mathematics. So, the problem that I encounter is to explain how mathematics might possibly be able to describe this world. Of course this description may be deficient, it may be that there is far more in the world than mathematics is able to describe. But at least we must explain the possibility that the theory – a theory which may be refuted in the future – a physical theory, might be able to describe the world. That is the fact I want to explain. I don’t feel that contemporary theories are necessarily true – maybe they are false, but maybe they are true; this ‘maybe’ must be explained. So, it is really a modest position. I just want to explain the possibility of mathematical explanation. For I think this possibility is a condition of an explanation of science itself. By which I mean: how it is possible that mathematics could be able to describe the world, even a world without humans. This is the problem of science.

About Rorty and Husserl, I would say this. I think that every time a Rortian speaks and argues, he always has the following position. He always says that, ‘Your discourse is

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a contingent discourse, a discourse among other possible discourses'. And he will say that about mathematics. So, I will say he has this sort of primitive theme in his mind: Maybe there could be some non-human organism, some extra-terrestrial, that would be able to have a radically different relation to the world – a different perception, different conceptual apparatus, etc. So all discourses are historically or maybe biologically contingent. So I would say that contingency is the ground of every relativist theory. What we have in common with every human or non-human discourse is that we think we are able to be Rortian – even an extra-terrestrial can be Rortian. And imagine an extra-terrestrial which was Rortian – what would he say? He would say the same as the terrestrial Rortian, he would say, 'Maybe all discourses are contingent, maybe there could be other possible discourses, *etc.*'. So contingency is a common property of all relativisms of all times, on all planets. That's why I made contingency the real ground, the universal and eternal ground, of every relativism in the universe – I'm sure of that. So, if there is a certain sure ground of every discourse, which would be accepted by every Rortian – human or non-human – I would say it would be contingency. So, my problem is very simple: are we able to derive, to deduce, from this eternal ground – which, according to me, is contingency – the capacity of mathematics to possibly be able to describe a world without humanity? I have the ground, I have the problem. Between them what I try to show is, if contingency is eternally true, maybe there are determinations of contingency itself. Maybe to be contingent, you must be *a* or *b* or *x*. Because you can't be just anything if you want to

be contingent. My hypothesis is that to be contingent you must not be contradictory, because if you are contradictory you are everything and you can't change. So if I can derive, deduce – but I don't yet do this in *After Finitude* – if I could derive from contingency a condition which explains the possibility of mathematics describing a world without humanity, okay, bingo. I didn't do that in *After Finitude*. But I think it's possible. And in that case, you know, we would be sure to be immune from Rortian refutation, because Rortian refutation is always grounded on contingency; and on the other hand, we would have explained what must be explained to understand the capacity of sciences to possibly describe a world without us.

RB: Okay. It's a question of scientificity here: whether mathematical formalisation or mathematical science can and should be the privileged paradigm of scientificity. Because there's another issue here, which is that lots of what we know about the world before and after humans is not mathematical knowledge. Lots of biology and geology is not mathematically formalised. And yet surely we want to say that we know that dinosaurs existed, and that we know quite a lot about the morphology of brontosaurus. I mean, I know the question of dating is crucial here, but it's not just that we know that the accretion of the earth happened 4.5 billion years ago because we have a mathematical way of determining the date, but that we know much more. We know about the processes involved, which are geological, physical, chemical processes, just as we know an incredible amount about the pre-human world, about pre-human flora and fauna. And surely it's important

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to be able to defend the reality of the claim that brontosaurus had such and such a property. There's very little that is mathematical about what we know about brontosaurus. And my worry is that if you turn mathematisation into the criterion of scientificity, you accidentally or unwittingly compromise the authority of all sorts of non-mathematical knowledge, which surely we want to say is objective: geology, biology, etc. And this can be turned around, because lots of people will say – an idealist will say – certainly mathematics is the only reliable guarantor of objectivity, the irrefutable canon of objective validity, and they will use that to discount biology and all sorts of other things. And this position has been used to disqualify lots of other areas of knowledge which are deemed not to be scientific just because they haven't been formalised. So I wonder, is it possible to loosen or weaken the criterion of scientificity in order to guarantee the same degree of insuperable objective validity to biological, geological, and even zoological discourse, without saying that science is purely about a set of stipulative conventions and criteria of legitimation? And I think this is a really profound epistemological problem, and that's why I want to refuse the idea that Kant definitively resolved the epistemological problematic. Kant gave a bad answer, it's not a satisfactory answer, because of what we know about the contingency of thought and consciousness. We know that thought and consciousness are not ineliminable features of reality, and that reality would have many of the same characteristics even if thought were not there. As Steven Jay Gould said, if the dinosaurs hadn't been wiped out by whatever wiped them out, they would have carried on, evolution would have

followed some other trajectory, in which consciousness and all those characteristics and peculiar cognitive prowesses exhibited by sentient creatures would simply never have come into existence, and yet reality would have been the way it is. So I want to generalise, I want to be able to say that we can describe a non-human world, or the inhuman world, without mathematics. Because if you cast doubts upon the objectivity of these non-mathematical discourses, then it seems a very ... well, it's a concession that I'm not willing to make, because it simply seems to open the door to all sorts of obscurantism, which I think really need to be exterminated.

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PRESENTATION BY IAIN HAMILTON GRANT

The basic thing I want to talk about is the philosophical problem of nature, and I think this is a springboard for speculation – not opportunistically, but necessarily. I think that if philosophy of nature is followed consistently it entails that speculation becomes necessary, as the only means not of assessing the *access* that we have, but of the *production* of thought.

I'll start from two things that I think everyone would accept and see if we can work outwards from there. I think that, unless you're some kind of convinced dualist, it's absolutely necessary that we accept that there's something prior to thinking, and that there are several layers of dependency amongst what is prior to thinking. It's not just one thing, it's an entire complex series of events. Now we could articulate that by means of some form of causation. We could try to establish, as it were, a direct line between the event we're trying to analyse, the event we're trying to account for in naturalistic terms, and all the causes that might have contributed toward its production, and so on. Such a task is inexhaustible in principle, not merely in fact. It's inexhaustible in principle because the conditions that support the event that's produced also support the production of other events. So if we accept that there are naturalistic grounds for the production of thought, then we have to accept that the naturalistic grounds for the production of thought are not themselves evident in thought except in so far as thought is regarded as part of nature.

So that's the starting point, and I take this to be Schelling's central contribution to philosophy. Schelling, of course, is known as a transition engine. He was a sort

of facilitator, a go-between, for philosophical history. He sits between Fichte – who we all equally understand because, after all, Fichte talks about ethics – and Hegel – who no one understood but who everyone would like to. Schelling had neither of these benefits nor deficits, and in consequence, no one could understand him nor wished to! However, Schelling also produced this monumental series of works on the philosophy of nature, this extraordinary series of overtly speculative works – and when I say that, there's partially a descriptive element here. It's like a genre of writing, at one level. That is to say, the commitment to getting it down as it's coming out, is not merely that of a poet under inspiration – it's also an ideational requirement, really. If the thought as it's happening is to have any impact whatsoever on the world in which it's happening, then it's absolutely necessary that it be got down. So if you look at Schelling's output, it's hideous, it's absolutely frightening. No wonder people hated his guts: he was writing six books a year – and that's not counting essays and journals edited and so on. It was frightening – he turned out more than a novelist. So there's this extraordinary record of production of works on the philosophy of nature. And to distinguish the philosophy of nature as Schelling propounds it or explicates it successively, again and again – and not always in the same way or according to central shared principles – it's convenient to call it 'speculative physics', as indeed he did in the journal he edited under that name, the *Journal of Speculative Physics*. I don't know about you, but the very idea of combining those two things seems an absolute recipe for heaven on Earth. This is building particle accelerators that cost billions, that bankrupt countries, sinking great

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tunnels into the centre of mountains in order to capture sunlight from aeons ago, starlight from aeons ago – this is speculative physics. So the combination isn't at all strange to us at one level, but at another level it's strange to see it coming out of a philosopher's works.

So those really are the two things. Speculative physics: what is entailed, on the one hand, vis-à-vis the nature of philosophy; and on the other, what it entails for the nature of thought. Those are the two areas I'm particularly interested in. And the reason I think these are significant – beyond the fact that they happen to interest me, which isn't significant – the reason I think these are interesting at all is that they present us with an idealism which is wholly and utterly different. And to illustrate this I'm going to cite, paradoxically, Bernard Bosanquet. I'm very concerned to show that idealism, as it were, doesn't look like we think it does. I'm very concerned that we see and acknowledge this to be the case, because the speculative tools that it has built into it are immense. This is from a book that Bosanquet wrote called *Logic, or the Morphology of Knowledge*. It's a book on logic. One question is, why are the idealists so fascinated by logic? Why are they all experimenters in logic? Why do we get vast tomes, repeatedly, from idealists on logic? There are many possible answers to this, and I'll come to one of them later. But this is what Bosanquet has to say at the very conclusion of his book. Upon starting it out he has two epigrams, one from Hegel, from the *Science of Logic*, the other from Darwin, from *The Origin of Species*, and his avowed aim is to bring these two things together. I won't use the phrase 'evolutionary epistemology', although obviously there's a certain kinship between these strategies

– but there is certainly something about knowledge that entails that it is evolutionary, if it is knowledge of nature. This is what he has to say:

In knowledge, the universe reveals itself in a special shape which reposes on its own nature as a whole and is *pro tanto* proof against contradiction. The detail that the universe presents in the form of cognition is true *of* the universe, although falling within it, because the universe *qua* object of cognition, in its self-maintenance against self-contradiction, in that form, shows that it must take the detailed shape it does and no other. And to know it is to endow it with that form, making the given more and more of itself.⁵

Now this has got a lot in it, but the two things to pull out of it are: 1) the fact that there is, again, this nature that precedes the production of logic – and incidentally, in the quote from the *Science of Logic*, is Hegel talking about, you know, how evolution is significant if and only if we can account for the production of the syllogism in evolutionary terms, which is fair enough, really: a true philosopher, there. But this is not Bosanquet's project. He thinks that the universe is actually manifesting logical laws and their expression is largely indifferent. What we will find is that nature does behave in this way. So there's this *prius*, this 'firstness', preceding, as it were, the production of the laws of logic in so far as they are *overt* laws of logic and are articulated by ourselves or some variant thereof. 'To know it is to endow it with that form', Bosanquet says; and that form is the form it necessarily has in so far as it is the universe, manifesting itself and maintaining itself against

5. B. Bosanquet, *Logic, or the Morphology of Knowledge* (Oxford: OUP, 1911), Vol. II, 322.

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self-contradiction. There is a reality to the law of non-contradiction. It's not merely a formal thing, it derives from natural history. There is a production of non-contradiction which takes place constantly throughout the production of nature. The productivity of these logical constants can be measured in terms of existence. Beings are everywhere the fruit of the stated mechanism. It would be one and the same thing if we discovered any other law of nature. All that's happening here, all that Bosanquet is suggesting, is that the grounds for our being able to have a law of non-contradiction are supplied, as they are for all thought or all systems of thought, *not* from the ether, *not* from some non-physical cause, but from nature.

Now if we accept that, it seems to me that idealism is committed to a realism about all things, a realism that applies equally to nature and to the Idea. And in general terms I think this is true, I think this is what all idealism in fact does: it approximates, more or less. If you look at Plato, who is often regarded as the very archetype of the 'two-worlds' metaphysician, what does he say? He says fundamentally that becoming is caused by the Idea which it can never be but can only approximate. This is a physics, this is fundamentally a physics. The Idea is a content-free point that denies accessibility, that determines, as it were, the chaos around it to be chaos around it. Why? Because the chaos around it cannot be what it is, because it is the only self-identical thing there is. There are several Ideas of course, so it's not just one, despite certain splits toward the end of the *Republic*.

Okay, so I think basically there are grounds to assume that idealism is realism about nature coupled with realism



Iain Hamilton Grant

about an Idea. In terms of the situation in which we find ourselves today, my question really is: does this or does this not, as it seemed to at the turn of the nineteenth century, provide an exit from the strictures of Kantianism? Clearly, I think it does, and it does so by denying that interiority plays any role whatsoever. The Idea is external to the thought that has it, the thought is external to the thinker that has it, the thinker is external to the nature that produces both the thinker and the thought and the Idea. There are a series of exteriorities between thinker, thought, Idea, the various strata of the nature necessary to produce that event – necessary but not sufficient, it should be stressed. So you can't say that this and only this nature could produce that

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event, but we can say that it's necessary. I've said a little about why, and that's a huge problem actually. It's simply that the problem of ground, naturalistically understood, presents us with a tremendous series of problems. If it is the case that the Idea is exterior to the thinking, the thinking is exterior to the thinker, and the thinker is exterior to the nature that produced it, then, inevitably, we no longer have a series of interiorities within which it's possible for anyone to recognise themselves in the production of their thoughts. It's simply a banal accident that we know what it feels like to have thoughts. That is not particularly significant. What's significant is the thought. The thought is the product, and of course there are events taking place that surround that thought. It's very difficult to imagine, as I said, that what's necessary for the production of a particular event in nature is sufficient for the production of *that* and only that event. In other words, we have no reason whatsoever to assume that our perception of our own interiority guarantees that that interiority is somehow reproduced in reality. It just isn't: that the Ideas are separate from the thinker that thinks them, the thinker that thinks them is separate from the thinking that he or she thinks, and the separateness of the thinker from the nature that *necessarily* produced it isn't sufficient *on its own* to produce it, seems to me to guarantee that.

So that's idealism. What does idealism therefore offer speculation? Why does it make it necessary? There are two reasons why, and I'm really going to concentrate on one – and this is part of an answer to one of the questions that Ray asked earlier concerning, 'how do you arrest the process of production, as it were?', 'how does the product intervene,

as it were, in a process of production such that in some sense the process of production has an outcome?', because without that surely it isn't a process of production. So is this a dualism of principles or is there something else going on there? I'll begin this with a re-articulation of what Schelling did to Kant. This is brutal. If thought had an anatomy, and if a thinker were to have done this to an anatomy, then the owner of that anatomy would be completely dismembered. In other words, this is Schelling being the Furies chasing after Orestes in the forest. He rends Kant to shreds. He takes the *a priori* and the *a posteriori* and totally inverts their purpose. The *a priori* is intended to guarantee that prior to the production of any thought, there are certain laws in place of that thought that entail that that thought and only that thought can be legitimate within the sphere it's being thought. Schelling turns it around and says, 'No this is not *a priori*, this is a *prius*. It's firstness'. *A posteriori*, Kant wants to claim, is a matter of almost total indifference. Any science that studies, for example, as chemistry does, 'mere' sensible *a posteriori* evidences, is basically mistaking the product for the law that produced it, and is therefore pointless, not really a science but a cataloguing exercise – something, incidentally, that both Hegel and Darwin complain about in the epigrams in Bosanquet's book, this 'cataloguing exercise'. The *posterius* and the *prius* for Schelling – far from representing this divide between what is *a priori* true for all knowledge, for all knowing, and what is *a posteriori* going to be given, that *a priori* once granted – is to say that this is simply a firstness and secondness that belongs to a generative program. The firstness is firstness not merely by the nature of thought but by the nature of what it is that

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thought is. In other words, it's not an internal problem of thought that there is firstness – apriority, if you like – it's rather a problem of nature that there is a problem, that there is a question or an apriority. The *a priori* is nature. Unless there were a nature there would be no thinking, I think we can agree. If there were no nature there would be no thinking. The *prius* of thinking is necessarily nature. But the *prius* never goes, is never a *prius*, unless there's a *posterius* for it to be *prius* to. In consequence, the product and the productivity, the *posterius* and the *prius*, are two co-present and constant elements in the articulation of process. It's simple. It's a formal nugget at one level, but at another level, it's actually the way in which firstness and secondness – time, in other words, or its production – becomes particular, becomes particular entities, becomes particular thoughts, whatever kind of entities are produced down the line. All we have is sequencing, and the sequence is *prius* and *posterius*. But a *posterius* can never, no matter what it is, capture the sum total of the causes of its production. This applies to physical entities, it applies to mountains: Imagine a mountain trying to contain within itself and catalogue, lay out, merely to lay out and catalogue, all the elements that went into its production. '4.5 billion years. By God, that's a long life', says the mountain. 'How much further have we got to go? Only another 10 billion years, till we get back to the point where I catalogue all the events that are necessary to my production', and so on. It's as important to the production of physical entities, such as is commonly understood, as it is to thought. What is it that happens when thought pretends to chase its own tail? – the Ourobours diagram from the front of the Macmillan edition of Kemp

Smith's translation of Kant's first *Critique*. What is it that happens when thought tries to catch its own tail, tries to trap its own conditions of production in its product? First of all, it can't happen, because, as for the mountain, the conditions of the production of the thought are simply far too extensive for it to be in principle possible for a thought to recover them. So there's a necessary asymmetry, if you like, between thought and what precedes it, and it's this asymmetry which means that thought is always different from what precedes it and always at the same time requires what precedes it as its necessary ground – necessary but not sufficient. So there we have a process of generation that's understood as one then the next, that is demonstrated, if you like, by the incapacity of thought or mountains, by the lithic or the noetic, to go back and to recover its conditions of production. It's simply not doable.

So that is the beginning of a problem, the beginning of a naturalistic interpretation, a speculative physical interpretation, of the question of ground, of the problem of ground, which, it seems to me, is a problem that we're all addressing. Several consequences flow from it which it seems to me are worth explicating, not in so far as they relate necessarily to this project but in so far as they relate, I think, to speculation in general. I would like to make certain claims, in other words: I would like to make the claim that speculation is entailed by natural productivity. We don't have, in other words, the comfort zone of an interiority which really masks an impossible reflex. We don't have that comfort zone to slip back into, and to say to ourselves, 'Ah, look, we have recovered the totality of the conditions under which thought is possible, and *only* possible'. We don't have

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that comfort zone, that interiority, and that's one reason why speculation's entailed ... It also means something very bizarre epistemically at a quite mundane level, at the level of reference. What is it that happens when we have thoughts about things? Two things happen: there are things and there are thoughts. What's the basis of their relation? Well, the thought that specifically occurs at that point is the means by which they are related, and that if there is no other body of reference, are we talking about a world? No, the world's talking. Now, the question therefore becomes: If the world talks, if the world is articulate, and if, that is, nature thinks – and however many strata we want to place in between the agent and its product is fine by me, well, there ought to be loads ... however many strata we want to place between the agent and its product, between the thinker and the thought is fine – but it seems to me that if nature thinks, then it follows that nature thinks just as nature 'mountains' or nature 'rivers' or nature 'planetises', or what have you. These things are the same to all intents and purposes. In other words, there are new products every time there are thoughts, which creates the problem of ground. And as I see it, the problem as it presents itself through these lenses, seems to me to focus on a single question: Are there one or many grounds? If there is one ground for example, the law of non-contradiction, such as Bosanquet espouses, being a fruit of nature – if there is one ground, then all of the fruits of nature can be related to that ground. Necessarily? Certainly. But sufficiently, no. If there is more than one ground, if there is ground every time there is event, then that becomes a question of what job it is that the ground is doing. Is the ground a *prius* or a *posterius*? And as a product,

an entity, it must be *posterius*. So the reformulation of the question of ground, it seems to me, is the means by which we can guarantee a consistent speculation concerning the origins of thought as much of as the origins of stones. And that's where I'll stop and open it up ...

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ALBERTO TOSCANO: What's not entirely clear to me when we talk about realism is the particular relationship being proposed between thought, consciousness, cognition, and various other terms. Because on one level, this Schellingian idea that nature thinks in the same sense that nature planetises or blossoms or does whatever – that seems to give thought a kind of substantiality and materiality of sorts, although it's not entirely clear how one would define it. On the other hand, for instance, when Ray was speaking about a science of cognition, one of the things that's very striking in a lot of work being done on these issues is precisely a tendency towards something like a substrate-independent or matter-independent notion of thought, whereby indeed thought would be something that is perfectly compatible with a kind of inhuman horizon, inasmuch as it's not by any means necessarily individuated over human beings or intellects and so on. So in a sense it would be sort of radical anti-Kantianism that would also involve avoiding anchoring thought in any form of subjectivity. And so, I suppose, one of the issues is not just the question about a realist epistemology or epistemology's relationship to realism, but it's also a question about whether speculative realism is also a realism about thought. And if it's a realism about thought, does it necessarily depend on thinking of thought as something

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that has a substantiality and materiality? Another possible option would be to be a formalist about thought. I'm thinking, for instance, of the Churchlands. There's a point in one of the debates where they say, 'Well, if thought is to some extent or another understandable as a type of formalism' – you know, they talk about pattern activation vectors, etc. – 'then why can't thought be instantiated over a social collectivity or a network of computers or indeed whatever other assemblage or entity you might find?' And this seems to me very important vis-à-vis science, because if we start talking about science and realism and then act as if scientific discoveries take place in the sense of individuated human thought, it seems that the entire process of the generation of scientific statements is completely misrepresented. Because it seems to say that whatever statements are being produced about quarks or about galaxies and so on, involve the capacity of a single human scientist to think about the cosmos – which seems a totally farcical scenario about how science operates. It seems like a false epistemological scenario. So I was wondering – I mean, obviously these are a broad set of questions – but vis-à-vis this kind of Schellingian line, what is the status of the reality of thought? Is it some form of substance?

IHG: I'd like to start from one of the points you make, because in the terms in which you put it I think the interesting point is this: If this is true, if there is an unrelated *prius* and *posterius* in the production of thought, and if this has the effect of making the thought particular to its conditions of production but incapable of reflexively recovering those conditions, then we are condemned to a complete

particularity that would seem, on the face of it, to deny the prospect of collective work. So it certainly would make, for example, subatomic physics impossible. There would be no prospect whatsoever of collective work. So I'd like to start from an almost sociological point of view. I mean, it seems to me that clearly there is sufficient consistency across a range of individuals in laboratories and so on and so forth, to generate the sort of work that was done in early sociology. It seems there is, obviously, consistency. Theory itself, the very idea that there are theories, is dependent on some kind of consistency being reached that makes it irrelevant what the conditions of the production of thought are.

AT: In the individual?

IHG: In the individual, yeah. So the question is how this happens. And it seems to me that this is why the idealists are fascinated by logic. If it is true that we have nothing to go on other than the thoughts being produced, then the demand that the relations between thought, things, and so on be formalised becomes an imperative. It's the only way this could possibly happen. This is something I was thinking about while reading what you had to say, Quentin, on formalism, on mathematics, and about the *signe dépourvu du sens*. This seems to me to be necessary if there is going to be any kind of communication between sciences such that a programme becomes possible. However, what does that mean? It means, in effect, that there must be produced a series of reproducible patterns. The whole question ceases

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to be, therefore, a question of the conditions of production and starts being a question of the kinds of products required. The fact that they are available could of course then be used to trigger a rekindling of the transcendental. To some extent, the criterion of utility attaching to maintaining a scientifically realist epistemology, as it were, gives the game away here. We can't recover the conditions of its production such that it's possible for us to say, 'Well we know this because ...', and so on. We might be able to do this in one particular case, but there will always be others, other cases that produce other thoughts, and that's why it becomes necessarily a question of ground once again. Is there one ground for all patterns, or are there several grounds for several patterns? In other words, how malleable are logics? How many possible formalisations are there? That seems to me the question that nature poses to thought.

ALI ALIZADEH: One word which is not being mentioned so often here is 'cognition'. You talk about consciousness and you want to talk about the difference between the ideal and nature, but how far would it take us away from Kantianism and transcendental philosophy altogether if we tried to abolish completely the synthetic unity of apperception? That's kind of what Ray mentioned as well. There is the difference between thought and thinker, as you said, and the difference between thought and Idea, but the problem is the implicit evolutionary theory here. And if you go for an evolutionary theory the move from nature to thought and from cognition to thought has to be gradual, it has to be linear, but we cannot really trace these trajectories all the way back from humans, who think self-consciously,

to all the forms of inorganic life from which we emerged. But we do know that the difference between cognition and thought is disjunctive. It's a difference in quality. So that's the problem: Kant was not interested in finding the totality of the conditions of the production of thought, he was interested in finding the conditions of the possibility of cognition, whereas you're just interested in the former.

IHG: So Kant was also interested in necessary but not sufficient conditions also, as it were, in that regard: not the conditions of the production of this thought here and now but rather the necessary conditions if there is thought, the form it must take, and so on. Yeah, I agree, and I don't think, as it were, that there is no attraction to the transcendental. I don't think that the idea that Kant was just gloriously wrong and how we laughed when we look back and we think, 'Oh God, the eighteenth century, they were so dumb!' It's not really that. There is such a powerful attraction to the domain of the transcendental, the domain that is anchored by – not that anchors, and this is crucial – but is anchored *by* the transcendental unity of apperception. There is an attraction there, because it presupposes a domain, the one domain in all being, where everything can be ruled by what Freud called 'the omnipotence of thought', where it's sufficient for me to think to be able to determine what goes on. So I think, yeah, that aspect of Kantianism, that reason why Kantianism, or the transcendental apparatus in Kantianism, has become so embedded in our philosophical practice, is because of its powerful attractiveness – a domain wherein it's possible for thought to legislate for itself, not for others, not for anything outside itself, and not

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to be legislated to by anything outside itself. The problem is, it's impossible. There must be something that produces this, this must come from somewhere, unless of course it's parachuted in from Venus. It could be a Venusian Richard Rorty, I suppose, who legislates what we think. Thought comes from somewhere, and the somewhere it comes from is nature. To that extent, it's no longer going to be possible to consider that the transcendental unity of apperception is responsible for the transcendental. Rather, the transcendental is responsible for the unity of apperception. So, regard that as a product rather than the producer of the field. It's not the autonomous judge, it's rather the heteronomous satellite of the transcendental, if you like, turned around on the basis of a naturalism about how thought got here at all. And we simply have to give up the illusion that the domain of thinking that we call reflection is coextensive with the domain of thinking *tout court*, as it were. So, I think – although abrupt and hideous – that's what's necessary.

AT: Can I just follow up on that briefly? On what grounds, in the step beyond the critique of Kantianism, does one want to make the argument that the conditions, let's say, of the *genesis* of thought, however defined, are relevant to the *conditions of possibility* of thought? For instance, if you have a kind of substrate-independent notion of what are the formal or formalisable conditions for thinking, however defined, then whether it's arrived at by a particular genetic lineage, or whether it's artificially produced, etc., the argument would be that ... well, isn't it the case that if the Kantian project at its core remains persuasive, then in a sense whether it's evolutionary or machinic or whatever other genetic process

is to some extent irrelevant? ... I mean, wouldn't that be the reply, to say that it seems to beg the question to say that somehow genesis is necessary to understand the immanent conditions of the possibility of thought? Unless obviously you totally pluralise thought in a way in which the thinking of the Venusian and our thinking are only the same thinking by convention rather than by a set of formal conditions.

IHG: Yes, one thing the transcendental entails, epistemically and metaphysically, is that it gives us license to be able to think a finitude of possible types of knowledge. If we don't have that, if we don't have the transcendental to rely on, then either we find some other mechanism that does the job without entailing that this finitude is active fundamentally in a subject or we just haven't got it.

AT: So there's no closure to whatever we might understand by thought?

IHG: No, no, no ... But I think that must be the case if we hold that time is to some extent involved in the production of nature. I put it that way around. I don't say that if we hold that, you know, neo-Darwinism is the correct account of genetic transfer, then, etc. ... I don't put it that way around. If there is time involved in the production of nature, then that time is the reason why the particular aspect of nature that happens to think, as it were, is what it is. It's necessary that it is, but its sufficiency is always in question. And what are the mechanisms by which it can be assessed? Well, inevitably, third-party ones. It can't be done by reflection.

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There is the possibility of a morphology of thought, as it were, where we look at the patterns. This is the suggestion that Whitehead made years ago, and there are interesting suggestions in contemporary logical formalisms – for example, Graham Priest. There’s a thing he’s working on, a thing called ‘dialetheism’, which is basically a logic that makes self-contradictory propositions coherent elements of a formal system.⁶ He says that two properties are contradictory – one is closure, the other is transcendence – and neither of them can be reduced, one to the other, and both are operative. This is a system which is entirely inconsistent but generates consistent systems. So the question of patterns might become more important. But then we don’t have to ask the questions, or we’re not tempted in the same ways, to ask the questions about ‘what is the horizon of the possibility of these patterns’, because the horizon of nature is possibilizing them – you know, nature is the reason.

GRAHAM HARMAN: I’ll save some bits for my comments later, but Ray already alluded to a principle of ‘retardation’ in your book: so you have a primal flux or becoming that’s pre-individual in some way, and retardation is what makes it crystallise into individual things such as rivers and mountains. Now, of course, we’ve seen this in other philosophers, where it’s the human that’s the retarding principle. So, for example, in Bergson, if not for humans time would go like that [*snaps fingers*]. And for the early Levinas: if it weren’t for the human subject, being would be an *apeiron*. It would be a rumbling *il y a*, and it’s only the human that

6. G. Priest, *Beyond the Limits of Thought* (2nd edition, Oxford: Clarendon, 2002).

breaks it into parts. But obviously you don't want to do that because you're a realist. So it can't be the human who does all the work. So how exactly is this retardation – I know it's a tough question – but what are some of the ideas you have about how the flux can be retarded to give rise to individual shapes?

IHG: It generally happens that when asked questions of this nature, the answer will strike me in about three days' time! But this in a sense illustrates the answer that I'm going to give now, which is, it seems to me, that if there is production there is product and vice versa, and there is no production if there is no product. And instead, therefore, of thinking of the question of how there is this substrate where the mobile is static, where it acquires form, we think about, you know, this is the conjunction of product-production, as the kernel of all possible production. Then, to some extent, the question disappears. Now I know that doesn't answer the question, so it's a solution that evidently I haven't thought through.

PETER HALLWARD: This is a way of going back to Alberto's question, but you said at one point that nature talks, or nature thinks, and I just wanted to know what that means, exactly. What does that add to our understanding of linguistics or the symbolic or the semiotic or, you know, conventional accounts of how language works, by saying that it's nature that's doing the speaking? How does that sharpen or inflect a research agenda in a way that people who work on linguistics, for example, might understand?

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IHG: Two things, I suppose. One is, if we're talking about purely symbolic language, then clearly the answer to that question belongs to the answer I made to Alberto concerning patterns, concerning shared languages, a shared symbolism. But that is possible only on condition that the symbolism has no reference. The alternative would be that there is a way of accounting for the production of linguistic units in terms of referential signs. So you need to place the cart before the horse to some extent in so far as you're asking: Given that signs have this property of reference, how is it they get there; was it the natural production of reference, and so on? And this suggests that reference is an essential property of signs. But the principle I take Schelling to be espousing – and of course the possibilities for error are immense, not least because Schelling and consistency were only sometimes bedfellows – is quite simply that if, when it comes down to it, there is a process, a necessary process of nature, culminating in a particular product, and there's no alternative to that view, unless we accept some form of dualism, then what we can accept as being produced in this way exists by virtue of it. The ground is provided by nature. The production of anything else has to be simply accounted for in terms of abstract languages. So the abstract elements of it have their ground, as Bosanquet suggests, in nature. The question is, how many possible formalisms are there? How many possible abstract languages are there? – not really how this particular abstract language can be used to make, as it were, referential sense of a body of natural language, and how speakers use it. So I think the question may be the wrong way around, and that's how I would respond. Although one of the things which interests me,

which I think is not just interesting but imperative, is to find ways of conjoining philosophical work with all the sciences. If idealism becomes an operating principle of any sort whatsoever, if it is true, there's nothing which can be ruled out *a priori*. And all the sciences become imperative, in the form of this idealism, and no-one can do all of the sciences. Therefore it becomes a cooperative labour. Therefore the question that Alberto's raising, and which I think you're raising just now, becomes imperative. But we can't, I think, do that so long as we do it through lenses that presuppose exactly what's being explained, as it were. That's a disappointing answer, I'm sorry ...

DUSTIN MCWHERTER: I have a question that also kind of follows up on Alberto's question about the ontological status of thought, but also a question about how this plays out in your book. In the *System of Transcendental Idealism*, Schelling has an explicitly epistemological agenda, and it seems to me that that's elided a bit in your book, despite the brilliance with which that work is otherwise interpreted and explicated. So, how would you handle Schelling's epistemological agenda in the *System of Transcendental Idealism*? And furthermore, it seems as though, in that reading of the *System of Transcendental Idealism*, you construe ideation as simply a regional phenomenon in nature: Nature becomes an object to itself through organisms that can think. So it's merely regional; thought's not everywhere. But at other times it seems as though you're speaking of Ideas in the Platonic sense, as things that exist independently of thinkers – and I think this is a reflection of an inconsistency in Schelling's philosophical trajectory. So, those are

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my two questions: what about the epistemological agenda of the *System of Transcendental Idealism*? And, is there a kind of oscillation in your book between the regionality of ideation and a kind of universality?

IHG: To take the second question first, it's fascinating, I suspect my answer to this would have been different a few months ago. But I think that what's going on is effectively that thought isn't everywhere all at once, but there are thoughts, wherever, at various times, and there's no region for which we can rule out thought occurring prospectively at any particular point. However, it remains true that thought does happen at such and such locations. That's the bridge, as it were, between the nature of thought and the thinking doing it – which is the inversion that Schelling explicitly undertakes in the epistemological work that he does in *System of Transcendental Idealism* – but it's an inversion premised precisely on the unrecoverability of the conditions of genesis of thought. So, he says, for example, 'the lamp of knowledge points only forwards'. This lovely line provoked a great deal of consideration on my part, and I thought – well, actually this is definitely true. And there is no prospect, really, of it being otherwise. Even the reflexive recovery of the conditions of production of the thought that is pointing only forwards would entail a lapse of time. Whatever comes after it would be a second, with the lamp shining in one direction rather than another as its *prius*, but that gives determinacy at the same time as it denies the possibility of recovery. And so it's the question of determinacy which I think is core to the epistemological project that Schelling pursues. This is the vexed question

of the presumed identity between nature-philosophy on the one hand and the transcendental philosophy on the other. This is why, I think, Schelling says at the outset of the *System of Transcendental Idealism* that it's necessary to consider this as an adjunct, to consider it to be simply true that there's always a double series involved in thinking about thought, because it tends to be that they're closely related, I take it, in time, although I'm not sure. I'm not satisfied with that answer. I mean, it seems phenomenologically apt, but whether it's got any basis in the principles he offers for a consistent priority and posteriority, I don't know, or the *prius* ... there are ways it can be worked out, perhaps. But the final thing, therefore, is the question of identity, which comes back to the question of the Ideas, and why the Ideas might be one and at the same time many, and yet the thinking of them may be potentially everywhere, and so on. This is really the core of the problem. Is Schelling a Platonist, a neo-Platonist, or some form of hyper-Platonist? So long as the 'Good beyond being', as it were, is not taken as being the entire anchor to the system of Ideas, which structure is then reproduced here on Earth. Schelling's conception of identity seems to me to go a long way towards explaining the possible relations between Idea and thought. He actually makes this explicit in *Presentation of My System* and *Further Presentation of My System*. On the one hand there are Ideas which are identical. *They* are identical; but not to the things they are ideas *of*. They're not ideas *of* anything – they're Ideas, and their identity is their being as Idea, fullstop. And that means that everything which is not them is in chaos, in flux, and so on. So the means by which to relate the Idea to the thinking is the concept. The concept

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is a partial grasp of the Idea, or a finite and differentiating grasp of an infinite identity. That's his description of it, which seems to me to do quite a better job than the 'double series' claim. In other words, if the proto-phenomenology of the double series is an explanation of an epistemology, it seems to me not as good as the neo-Platonic exposition by way of the difference between concepts and Idea in the later work. But what we have not got to deal with is an absolute identity of thought here and being there, in this hideous symmetrical way in which Hegel will pretend, and which bad readers of Parmenides always maintain.

NOORTJE MARRES: This is a partly related but somewhat more general question, regarding realism as an epistemic question, a question of knowledge and of thought. Because listening to your talk, and also Ray's, made me think of other kinds of undoings of Kant in the twentieth century, because that's obviously taken many forms and has been launched on many different occasions. And one of them, I thought, had to do precisely with undoing the primacy of the epistemic. There you get arguments concerning realism as a question that must be taken out of the realm of epistemology if it is to be addressed pertinently, and this shift can take various forms. It can be a shift to historic ontology or a shift to ethics or embodied experience, with various consequences for the type of realism, obviously, that results. But I'm curious how, on the basis of the types of arguments you have presented now, what your position is on this question. Should it be preserved as an epistemic question, or is your mode of arguing actually moving along with this ontologising and making ethical of the question of realism?

IHG: I'm certainly ontologising, certainly *not* ethicising. I think one of the badges by means of which Kantianism is maintained, the reason why it remains a problem despite the various attempts to undo it, is because, all too often, the Good assumes authority over being, and it becomes possible to say things like, 'The universe ought to be...', and this statement is assumed to have philosophical significance. In fact, Fichte says just that. He started with an identity, a realism about, 'Here I am, what do I know about myself? Well, all this accidental stuff, plus I'm free, dammit! ... and I'm gonna show it!' And that's the basis of Fichte's realism. He goes to great lengths to demonstrate this, but fundamentally, what he reserves the right thereby to do is to call realism the view that – and here I'm going to cite a passage from Kant – desire consists in being the cause, 'through one's presentations, of the actuality of the objects of those presentations'. It occurs in two places: in the *Critique of Practical Reason* and the *Critique of Judgement*.⁷ What that means is that it's simply enough to will or desire it in order that it be, because being is secondary to acting. And that, it seems to me, is simply not true. It's transcendently adequate only on certain conditions, and those conditions are that the remit of realism is maintained solely within the transcendental field, *i.e.*, solely within the field of possible reflection, so that I can always say, 'Oh well, I know I got run over by a bus, and I know that looks like the revenge of the not-I, but in fact I willed it thus!', which is what Nietzsche said, in effect. So I think there can be no liberality at that level, and realism can't be regionalised, as it were, nor said to be realism if it is dependent

7. *Ak.V* 9n. and *Ak.V* 177n., respectively.

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on the willed suppression of some external condition. An ethical realism is precisely not a realism, in the same way that a political realism is not a realism. In the same way, in fact – and I know this is contentious, but it seems to me a point that needs to be made – a *critical* materialism is *not* a materialism. Fundamentally, it's a materialism oriented, driven, steered, designed, by critique. In other words, it's a theory of matter held by people with some use for certain bits of it and none for others. How is it possible for critical materialism to think that there can be a difference between what *matters* and crude *matter*, you know, things like plants? So I think that there can't be any liberality at that level, that would be my answer. And the very fact that such positions are perpetuated is the reason why this needs to be done again.

GH: I can guess what you think of Marxist materialism.

IHG: Love it! No, it's simply wrong. The idea that it's possible to invoke a diminished realm, as it were, for matter and to condemn whatever does not fulfil the economic, teleological purposes of certain types of agents to a sphere of 'merely crude matter', where it has absolutely no effects whatsoever, where it's left to one side of the philosophical and the political problem, seems to me a recipe for disaster. If you're trying to do politics, if you're trying to work out, 'we need to do *x*, how are we going to do *x*, we need a strategy', and so on. What's the first thing you do? You take account of the environment, and so on. What's the first thing critical materialism does? 'I want a theory of matter,

what am I going to do? I know, I'll ignore half of it'. That's just not good metaphysics, fundamentally. It's not a good way of approaching reality, it seems to me.

PH: But what about cases where you *do* will something to be true, though, or to be the case? I mean, just banally, holding a promise, making a commitment. There are cases in which something comes to be because you will it so, and politics would be completely disarmed if you lost that.

IHG: There's the Spinozist response to that: what I think of as my freedom is my incapacity to explain the cause of the event that I'm trying to describe. I move my arm because I will it so, or do I just not know the causes of my arm moving? That's the Spinozist answer ...

PH: And like I said, that disarms, well, that *is* the disarming of politics.

IHG: Yeah, yeah it is. I think ... fundamentally it seems to be a question about consistency of effects, at one level. It's possible that a series of actions can be maintained despite having, let's say, punctual conditions of production. So there seems to be a consistency of events, and they're all tending in one direction. I want to raise my arm because I want the bus to stop. So I stick my arm out and the bus stops – a triumph for transcendentalism! I have achieved the stopping of the bus by means of my will alone. Let's say that happens. It really does seem to be about a question of

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consistency, and the problem from the perspective I come from is how to explain the consistency, and I do acknowledge that's a problem. But do we explain it any more by saying that it's an act of will? I don't think so. I think the reason we move our arms is because we have arms to move, first and foremost, and because there are certain contours of the world that make that a possible gesture and a significant gesture: naturalistically possible and socially practical. It has outcomes. But the question of whether we should hold ontology ransom to political expediency seems to precisely re-present the problem of transcendentalism, in so far as the latter concerns 'what are the spheres of my legitimate autonomy, over what can I legislate?'

AA: Action and will do not only belong to the practical realm of philosophy. They go back to Descartes, in a sense, because will and action are the very necessary elements of thinking itself. Without willing to think there is no thought – so before it becomes the practical element, it's epistemic.

IHG: Again, this is a solution, I think, that's often tried. Let's say we've accepted the point that in order to think I have to will it, yes? And let's say I'm not thinking yet, but I will to think. I will to think, and then comes the thought. How can I will to think prior to the thought that I will to think being there? I can't. So the idea that there is a will that thinks thought for me makes sense if and only if that will is outside of me, is nothing to do with me. So it's not *my* will that causes the thought to occur. If we call it 'will' that presumably serves some additional ontology,

some additional metaphysics – Let’s say the Fichtean one, which does subsume epistemology, the theoretical under the practical. Let’s say that’s the aim. Then it begins to make sense to do that, but only given those caveats. Fundamentally, however, I don’t think it’s true that my thinking is caused by my will. Would that it were! For God’s sake, then practical problems like writing papers late at night would disappear!

AA: But you don’t have any criteria for the intensity of the receptivity of sense data here – that is, whether or not I’m aware of the intensity of what I’m receiving, reinforcing that data, and that I’m not just receiving it in a kind of semi-unconscious state ...

IHG: Yeah, put it in the form of a question: What is the impetus to thought? Where does thought come from? If you can answer that question, then we can say what the source of the thought is. And the necessary answer, I would contend, is that it comes from nature.

CECILE MALASPINA: And where does nature come from?

IHG: What’s the ground of the ground? – absolutely. Why is there this nature rather than another, and so on? That’s the principle of sufficient reason, that’s the problem of ground. That’s why I think it’s an important question.

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RAY BRASSIER: Obviously you claim that so-called transcendental metaphysics says that you can't be compromised by any concessions to folk-psychological superstitions. I wonder, then, what's the status of categories like 'production'? What happens to the conceptual register that you use – that Schelling used – to articulate this kind of transcendental philosophy? Given that transcendental philosophy, or even a nascent speculative materialism, is carried out using the semantic resources of natural language, doesn't there need to be a kind of dialogue between the critical and eliminative dimension of a properly scientific psychology which systematically undermines the viability of these folk-psychological categories, and the project of a transcendental metaphysics? In other words, this is why I think the relationship between ontology and epistemology can't be straightforwardly adjudicated from either side. For instance, imagine a Schellingianism informed by the Churchlands: recasting the categories of speculative metaphysics using the resources of dynamic vector activation patterns. So, doesn't this requirement for a dialogue with eliminativism mean that you have to kind of stipulate a revisability in terms of even the most fundamental conceptual categories you use, such as productivity or production?

IHG: Okay, let's start with the question about the Churchlands. It's not hard, actually, to make the Churchlands into Schellingians. In fact, at the end of Patricia Churchland's *Neurophilosophy* – the biggest manifesto ever written – she says, 'So it is that the brain investigates the brain [...] and is changed forever by the knowledge',⁸ which seems to me

8. P. S. Churchland, *Neurophilosophy. Toward a Unified Science of the Mind-Brain* (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 1990), 482.

perfectly Schellingian. There's an absolute symmetry there between what she's arguing and what Schelling discusses in his own epistemology. How do you anchor the knowing of things, as an extra product, in the being of those things that you want to know? So there's a new entity in being. That's the way of addressing the problem. So I don't think, philosophically, metaphysically, that there's a problem there. I do think, however, that there's a point when the epistemic demand makes demands on ontology that ontology can't meet, when we have to ask, 'is this a correct epistemological approach?' But that's the way around to do it, I suspect. So, for example, this is the method of eliminativism: I'm investigating an object, call it a car, and this car, it is alleged, drives by itself. Now my job is to explain how it is that the car drives, and at the end of the explanation it should be clear. The false explanations have been gotten rid of and a good explanation put in their place. So, let's say all those criteria have been satisfied, let's say that is achieved. What has the theory achieved at the epistemic level? It's managed to produce exactly that explanation. What's achieved ontologically? It's managed to commit itself to an ontology which requires that things that do not exist exist in order that they be eliminated. So it's ontologically inconsistent but epistemologically necessary. I can see its virtue, or I can see its requirement epistemologically. But the question must be put, I think, the other way around: If we work out what the ontology demands, then that provides a means of working out answers to the differences between good and bad explanations, whatever they might be. My suspicion is that otherwise we find ourselves backed into an unsustainable metaphysics of not-being. You called it a 'dialogue

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between the critical and the ontological' – but that's exactly what Kant maintains metaphysics should be replaced with, a critical dialogue where fundamentally Reason will have the ultimate say. So I think it really is a one or the other question, at that level. The question becomes, how do we think about the problem of epistemological rectitude without invoking, as it were, the transcendental categories?

PRESENTATION BY GRAHAM HARMAN

Firstly, I'd like to thank Ray Brassier for conceiving of this event and organising it. This all started for me about a year ago, when Ray came back from Paris and he strongly recommended that I read Meillassoux's book, *Après la finitude*, which you should all definitely read. And from there I got into Iain's work, and from reading these works, there are definite points in common, which I've had plenty of opportunity to enjoy over the past year.

'Speculative Realism', first of all, is a very apt title, because realism, of course, is very out of fashion in philosophy. And I think one of the reasons it's out of fashion is that it's considered boring. Realism is the philosophy of the boring people who smack down the imaginative ones and force them to take account of the facts. G.E. Moore supposedly held up his hand and said: here it is, external objects exist. Yes, but that hardly exhausts the field of reality! And as yesterday's Lovecraft conference⁹ title indicated, realism is always in some sense *weird*. Realism is about the strangeness in reality that is not projected onto reality by us. It is already there by dint of being real. And so it's a kind of realism without common sense. If you look at the work of all four of us, there's not much common sense in any of it. The conclusions are very strange in all four cases. In Ray's case you have a reductive eliminativism, and you end his book with the husks of burnt-out stars and the meaninglessness of everything. That's not something you usually get in G.E. Moore and those sorts of realists!

9. A one-day conference, 'Weird Realism: Lovecraft and Theory', held under the auspices of Goldsmiths Centre for Cultural Studies on 26 April 2007.

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In Iain's book you have a pre-individual dynamic flux that somehow meets with retardations and becomes encrusted into rivers and mountains. In my work you get objects infinitely withdrawing from each other into vacuums and only barely managing to communicate across some sort of qualitative bridge. And of course in Quentin's philosophy you get no causal necessity whatsoever. Everything's pure contingency. These are not the sorts of notions one usually associates with realism. Metaphysics is usually thought to be concerned with wild, speculative sorts of ideas, and speculation is usually not considered a form of realism. You hear 'speculative idealism', not 'speculative realism'. Another obvious common link is a kind of anti-Copernicanism. Kant is still the dominant philosopher of our time. Kant's shadow is over everyone, and many of the attempts to get beyond Kant don't get beyond Kant at all. I think Heidegger is a good example of this. Heidegger's a great example of the 'correlationist', in Meillassoux's sense.¹⁰ Obviously, we all think of Kant as a great philosopher. But that doesn't mean he's not a problem. It doesn't mean that Kant is the right inspiration for us, and in fact, I hold that the Kantian alternatives are now more or less exhausted.

One of the things I did to prepare for this conference is to put each of our names on an index card, and I was shuffling them around on my table in Cairo, trying to group us together in different ways. And you can come up with different combinations in this way, various differences between us despite the shared similarities. I came up with some interesting ones; but if you were going to say what distinguished each of us, I think it's fair to say – and they

10. For 'correlationism' see *COLLAPSE* Vol. II (March 2007).

can contradict me if I'm wrong – that Ray is really the only reductionist or eliminativist, Iain is the only dynamist, I'm the only phenomenologist, and Quentin is the only one opposed to causality *tout court* – there's no chance of any necessary relations between anything in his vision of the world. And you can also see different influences in each case. In Ray's case, I think: Badiou and Laruelle. Those are the two chapters that seem most central to me in his manuscript. And cognitive science, of course. In Iain's case: German Idealism, Deleuze, Bergson, and his own reading of Plato. In my case: Husserl and Heidegger, with a bit of Leibniz and a bit of Latour. And in the case of Meillassoux: Badiou, of course, but also, I see a lot of similarities between him and David Hume in many ways; not only the clarity of his writing style, but even some of the arguments, seem Humean in inspiration.

Before I comment on the work of the other three on the panel, maybe I should give a quick summary of my own work. It all started for me with Heidegger. I don't think I was ever quite an orthodox Heideggerian, but I certainly loved Heidegger very much. And early on in my graduate studies, I was focusing on the tool-analysis, the way things hide behind their facades as we use them. And it occurred to me at a certain point fairly early that all of Heidegger boils down to this. There's really just one fundamental opposition that keeps recurring, whether he's talking about being or tools or Dasein or anything else: a constant, monotonous reversal between the hiddenness of things and their visible presence-at-hand. And it started as just a reading of Heidegger, and there wasn't really any metaphysical inclination whatsoever at that point.

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What first started doing it for me was when I was writing an article on Levinas a couple years after that, and trying to piece together Levinas's theory of how the human subject breaks up the unity of being and hypostatizes it into individual things. And this struck me as so inherently preposterous. I'd never really thought of it that clearly before, but the more you think about it, why should it be that the human subject breaks the world up into parts? This actually has a precursor in the pre-Socratics; it was Anaxagoras, for whom *nous* makes the *apeiron* rotate very quickly, and it starts breaking up into fragments, and so it's mind's fault that the world has parts, and each of the parts contains all the others and mirrors all the others. But you see that in Levinas, too. And I realised I was opposed to that, but I didn't quite have the language to start defining why that was so. Then, for my dissertation – which is now *Tool-Being*,¹¹ the book – if you look closely at Heidegger's tool-analysis, what he's explicitly saying there is that the floor you're using now, the air you are breathing now, the bodily organs you are using now, tend to remain invisible because you're simply using them. You're not staring at them, you're not creating theories about them. Fine, it's a great concept, arguably one of the great insights of twentieth century philosophy. The equipment tends to remain invisible as long as it's functioning solely as equipment – fine. But that can sound like the old reversal between theory and practice. One of the great things about playing with an idea in your mind for a long time is that you become bored with it after a few years. That's why I think we often make progress, because

11. Graham Harman, *Tool-Being: Heidegger and the Metaphysics of Objects* (Chicago: Open Court, 2002).

we have a great idea, then we become bored with it and see its shortcomings – and that’s what happened to me. I started realising: this is not going to be anything more than ‘practice comes before theory’, and ‘praxis breaks down when the hammer fails’. It also occurred to me that praxis does not get at the reality of the object any more than theory does – that was the next step. Yes, by staring at this chair I don’t exhaust its being, but by sitting in it I also don’t exhaust it. There are so many deep layers to the reality of that chair that the human act of sitting is never going to exhaust. Even if humans created the chair, even if only humans see it as a chair, there will still be, I’d say, an infinite number of qualities in the chair itself that cannot be exhausted by any seeing or by any counting. So now I had both theory and practice over here, both on this side. On the other side, the causal relations seem to be happening in the depths. But the problem with causal relations is, you really can’t say that inanimate objects exhaust each other either, and this doesn’t even really get into the whole panpsychism debate. Fire does not have to be conscious to turn cotton into a caricature. (I always use fire and cotton because that’s the great example from Islamic philosophy, which I’ve read a lot of since moving to Cairo.) The cotton has a scent, a colour, numerous other attributes we can speak of, and they’re irrelevant to the fire in those senses. And so, it became clear to me that as soon as you move away from the idea that the world is a homogeneous unit, as Levinas or Anaxagoras think, then you have a world with many parts. And as soon as you have a world with many parts, they’re going to interact. And if they interact they’re going to have the same relationship of caricature to each other

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that we have. And reading Whitehead at about the same time really cemented that idea, that you cannot privilege the human relationship to the world of over any other kind of relation. Whitehead's still the best source for that, I think, even better than Leibniz, because for Whitehead it can happen at all different levels and sizes. With Leibniz there's always a privileged caste of substances that are natural, and you can't talk about an international corporation having relations with real things. But for Whitehead you can, and for Latour you also can. So Whitehead was one key, and another key was Zubiri, Xavier Zubiri, a Basque ontologist who studied with Heidegger and Ortega y Gasset, who's not as well known as Whitehead, of course, but who I think

is a pivotal twentieth-century thinker. Because his idea is that the essence of the thing is never adequately expressible in terms of any relations or any interactions with it, and so that's where the kind of vacuum-sealed objects withdrawing from all relations came into my work, from Zubiri.

And then what I did in *Tool-Being* was that I more or less showed how a lot of things – Heideggerian concepts such as time and space and referential contexture, and all these things – boiled down to the tool-analysis; that was Chapter 1. In Chapter 2, I took that and used it as a weapon against all the things commentators usually say about Heidegger. In Chapter 3, I simply tried to turn in a more speculative direction. And I can make this short, because the real speculative problem that arises from this immediately is that if you have objects that are incapable of contact, why does anything ever happen? Given that it is in the nature of things to withdraw from all relations, you have a real problem with causation. One thing can't touch another, in any sense at all. And this immediately got me thinking about occasionalism in the history of philosophy, of course, where, before the French you had the Arabs – in Iraq you had the Ash'arite school of theology. And of course this fits a lot more easily in Islam than it does in Christianity, which never had any real occasionalists in the pre-modern period, because for the Muslims, in that period at least, if God sends an innocent man to hell, so be it. God is all-powerful. It doesn't create a paradox of free will, as it did for many Christians. So you see that first in the Arabs. It's not only a threat to God if other entities are creators, in the sense of creating the whole universe – obviously there has to be only one entity that can do

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that – but things like creating furniture and brewing coffee would also somehow denigrate God’s power, if individual agents were able to do this themselves. And so God is there to explain all actions, recreating everything constantly. And although the theology seems a bit outrageous to us now, it’s a very profound metaphysical idea, the idea that things cannot relate, inherently, that things-in-themselves are totally sealed off from each other. We see this come back in the seventeenth century in Europe of course, and historians of seventeenth-century philosophy are often extremely finicky about who they allow to be called an occasionalist: just Malebranche, Cordemoy, and maybe a couple of other French names. I see no reason not to expand it to include Descartes, and I would also say Spinoza, and Leibniz, and definitely Berkeley. I take the name occasionalism in a very, very broad sense: any time that individual entities do not have causal power you’re giving in to a kind of occasionalism. And then Hume is the important final step. Skepticism in many ways is simply an upside-down occasionalism, and it’s no accident that Hume was a great fan of Malebranche. Hume owned Malebranche’s books, marked them copiously, and here you have a hardcore theist and there an unrepentant atheist. The connection between them is the fact that in both cases you have the problem of things being unable to relate directly, and the difference of course is that for the occasionalists, in the classical sense, you have independent things in the world that are apart from each other from the start and the question is how they relate. In a sense, with Hume you already have their relations. We’re already born into a world where there are habits. Things are linked in my mind already, and the question is only

whether they have any existence outside it. So Hume starts with relations, whereas Malebranche starts with substances. I think in both cases the solution is incorrect, because in both cases they're privileging one magical super-entity that is able to create relations where others cannot. So for the occasionalists: 'No one else can do it? Oh, God can do it'. For Hume, my mind does it, my mind creates objects ('bundles') through customary conjunction, creates links.

So, the question is how we can have a form of indirect causation that does not use God as the solution – which would lead us back into the discredited old forms of theological philosophy – and which equally does not use my mind as the solution, which would lead us ultimately to idealism, as Hume eventually did lead us. How do we have a realist version of occasional causation, without laying everything on God? And I coined the term 'vicarious causation'¹² just because whenever I mentioned occasional causation people always laughed – that was the first reaction, and I realised it was hopeless to keep this term for myself! It's too associated with doctrines that have been refuted by undergraduates for the past three hundred years, so I had to invent this new term. So I speak of a vicarious theory of causation; but where does this causation happen? That was a mystery to me for a long time, and the mechanics of it are still a mystery to me. The *Collapse* article is about as far as I've gotten; I've gotten only a little bit further than that. But I got the answer from Husserl, of all people, because what we have in Husserl is a second kind of object. Neither Heidegger nor Husserl are really realists, I would say. They both focused too much on human access to the world over

12. See *COLLAPSE* Vol. II, 171-205.

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the world itself. But in Heidegger we have these tool-beings, these objects; they're real objects, they withdraw from us, they do things in the world outside of our access to them. What you have in Husserl – which is often confused with Heidegger's own discovery – are the intentional objects. If you read the whole first half of the *Logical Investigations*, after he's done refuting psychologism, his real enemy is British empiricism, and what he is up against is the notion that what we encounter are qualities, and that somehow the qualities are bundled together by us. Somehow the objects are not given for British empiricism. What's given are qualities, and those qualities are fused together by the human subject. That's what the entire phenomenological tradition most opposes, I would say, because in Husserl you have intentional objects. You have this table, which I'm only seeing the top surface of, I'm not seeing the front of, as these people [*indicates audience*] are. I'm not seeing the bottom of it. I could circle around it, crawl beneath it and look up at it. All of these changing perceptions, though, do not lead me to think I'm seeing a different object. I think I'm only seeing different aspects of the same object. This table is not hidden from me like the tool-being of the table, like the real table would be. It's here. I look at it, I see the table. I'm not seeing all aspects of it at once, but I am seeing the table, not just scattered qualities. Furthermore, this table is not the same as the real table in the world, doing its own independent work, because the one I think I see might not exist – hallucinations do occur. And so intentional objects are not the same as real objects, despite what Husserlians always tell me. There was a big fight in Iceland last year with the 'Husserlian mafia' – they tried to tell me that intentional

objects are the same as the tools, because they want to say that Husserl discovered everything that Heidegger did eight years earlier. It's not true!

One other point about Husserl: Husserl made another bizarre discovery that no one ever talks about, which is that one object contains others: namely, consciousness. My intentional relationship with the table for Husserl can be viewed as a unit, the relation itself as a whole. Why? Because I can talk about this relation, I can retroactively think about it, I can have other people analyse it for me – because, that is, other phenomenologists can analyse my relationship to the table – and none of those analyses ever exhaust the relation, which is enough to make it an object. That's the definition of the object: not a solid, hard thing, but a thing that has a unified reality that is not exhausted by any relation to it, so that the intention as a whole is one thing. But then within that intention, notice there are two things contained. There's the table and there's I myself, both contained within the intention. And there's an asymmetry here because this table is simply phenomenal; I myself, however, am real. And you can reverse it: if the table's actually encountering me, which might not happen then in that case, when you look at the relation asymmetrically in the other direction, the table is the real object in that case and I am the phenomenal object being reduced by the table to a caricature of myself. I know it sounds strange. But I generalise from there to say causal relations always occur on the inside of a third entity. It's not just something that's true of human consciousness and phenomenology. Containment is what a relationship *is*. 'Relationship' means: a real object meeting a sensual or intentional object on the inside of a

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third real object. And there are incredible problems trying to work out exactly how this happens. There are paradoxes that arise, and I started putting together the puzzle pieces in *Collapse II* in that article ‘On Vicarious Causation’. And that’s where the project is today. So I hope that gives some idea of what I’m doing so I can better situate it with respect to the other three, who I think are a very good match for what I’m doing. I think Ray chose exquisitely in this case.

I’ll start with Ray since he went first. What is always refreshing for me in dealing with Ray and conversing with Ray is his knowledge of and sympathy for the empirical sciences, which is extremely rare in our discipline. Especially in the case of cognitive science, because, probably like most of you, I grew up in an environment where the name of the Churchlands was always spoken with a wince and a sneer. I don’t know the work of the Churchlands nearly as well as Ray does. I just picked up Metzinger and am looking forward to reading that, but I don’t know these things that well. So that’s extremely refreshing. Ray, like the rest of us, does not want to see the human subject privileged in its relation to the world. The idea that our relation to the world is special could be eliminated, that it is a kind of folk-psychology, perhaps, I agree with him on all that, definitely. The two ways in which we may differ ... Ray is something of a reductionist, because you heard his objections to me earlier about the hobbits, and he’s mentioned the tooth fairy to me before. These are good objections. Are they really as real as solid physical objects? I’ll address that one first. The point is well-taken, and this is a flaw in the Latourian position, I think – the position from which I come. Since I diverged from Heidegger, Latour was one of the first life

preservers I grabbed on to, since he treats all objects on an equal footing, and I like that part of him. But I think there is a problem. You have to be able to explain reduction, and the way he does it is from the principle of “irreduction”, which is to say, yes, anything can be reduced to anything else, as long as you do the work to show how it’s related. Now this puts too much of the power in the hands of the human scientist, I think. Isn’t it necessarily the case that some things just *are* inherently reducible to other things? I think that’s probably true, and so I wouldn’t want to go the ‘irreduction’ route. I think there’s got to be a better way to solve this problem.

Ray is also opposed to the ontological difference, which is something I’ve retained as a Heideggerian. I don’t use that term, but for me the ontological difference is the difference between the thing itself and its relation to anything else. Now, I think Ray’s rejection of the ontological difference goes hand in hand with his reductivism, because, for Ray, you wouldn’t need anything hiding behind anything else, right? You see certain things as symptoms or epiphenomena of other things, which are in fact real. Then you get to that real level, and then you try to reach something that’s different from where you started. Now, what I would ask Ray is, how do you avoid what I would call, not naïve realism or speculative realism, but ‘*disappointing* realism’ – my term for Kripke, whom I like very much. Kripke is my favourite analytic philosopher by far. He explodes so much of analytic philosophy, and turns it into metaphysics, by simply saying that Russell and Frege are wrong. A name does not refer to all the qualities we know about a thing, because I can learn that some of the qualities

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I thought I knew about you were false and yet I'm still pointing at the same person. So there is something there that I *stipulate* to be you that is deeper than the qualities somehow. And he even criticises Strawson and Searle, who give us the watered down 'cluster theory': 'well, you only have to be right about *most* of the qualities you knew about the person'. But does that mean 51 percent of them, or a group of the most important? And so I follow Kripke in his critical portions, that you have to be pointing at something deeper that is essential and the same, that is not reducible to surface qualities. But the reason I call it 'disappointing realism' is because it ends up being the physical structure of things, for Kripke, that is real about them. So what's real about gold is that it has seventy-nine protons. I find that very disappointing. What's real about each of you is that you had to have the two parents that you had – which, first of all, is genetically false, right? You could get the same DNA, by some outlandish chance, through two different parents. And it just doesn't quite seem like it's my essence, somehow, to have come from those two parents. So, yes, I would like to know if you are committed to such a reductionism. For me, it's easy to escape that problem because I have all these different levels, Latour has all these different levels, and even if we have a problem in showing how things reduce, the reductionist position has the more profound problem of explaining what that final level is that endows something with reality. Is it just the physical structure or is it something more? If it's not a physical structure then you could be in some kind of weird idealism, where you have, I don't know, brain-states floating around ... Pan-psychism seems to be coming back in fashion among some of these

people. Even rocks and tomatoes have some primitive form of intentionality. So I'd like to know what Ray ends up with as his final stage once eliminativism has succeeded. That would be my question to him.

I'll go on next to Iain – I'm going in the order of the programme. I was cheering him on the whole way as I was reading his book. I am completely sympathetic to the idea that metaphysics and physics are the same, because one of the problems with physics now is that it's not metaphysical *enough*, I would say. It doesn't ever really raise the question, for me, of what causation is, for example. It argues about whether causation is statistical or whether it's retroactively caused by the observer, but it never really gets into the nuts and bolts of what happens when one thing touches another. I think it needs to become more metaphysical, and in 'On Vicarious Causation' I suggest that this is how philosophy can get out of the ghetto. We've been so terrified by the sciences for the past two hundred and twenty years. We find ourselves in this ghetto of human discourse and language and power – probably because we're afraid of stepping onto the level of nature. We're afraid that we don't have the resources, but I think we do. I think in Iain's book you can see there are tools for this that we already have. I'm also very sympathetic to his idea that inversions of Platonism are completely useless, because they keep you trapped in the same two-world theory. So, Nietzsche – great, he flips it over – but then you still have the same opposition between appearance and Platonic Ideas. Another thing I love about Iain's book is that it finally made sense of the *Timaeus* for me. There was a great fad for the *Timaeus* in the 1990s due to Derrida's *chora* essay and, even worse,

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through John Sallis, which really turned me off! So I never really understood it. Three years ago I had to teach the *Timaeus* because I had to take over the class for someone at the last minute, and I wished he had ordered any other dialogue than the *Timaeus*. But finally, after reading Iain's book, it's starting to become real to me: *Timaeus* is the site of a one-world physics, a physics of the Idea in Plato – it's wonderful. Your critique of Kant, I like that, and you cite Badiou as saying we need to overturn Kant, not Plato. I agree with that. I also completely agree with the idea that life-philosophy is always an alibi. Life-philosophy is an alibi for refusing to deal with the inorganic. Why do people like David Farrell Krell always go straight to life and never talk about rocks? What's so sexy about life? You see, it's an alibi, and it's a way to stay close to the human while claiming that you're going deeper than that somehow. Iain also leans toward anti-eliminativism, as I do in my own temperament, which makes us different from Ray, to some extent. And finally, I think, another thing that unites us, maybe more than the other two panelists, is that we are more ambivalent towards Badiou, I've noticed, although we both respect him. You criticise Badiou for giving us only this alternative of 'number and animal', and say that this is not a real alternative. You point out that it fails to capture the geological and other things, and I would tend to agree with that. And I also miss a philosophy of nature in Badiou. For me, the problem is – as I said in my review of Meillassoux's book in *Philosophy Today*,¹³ – is the inconsistent multiple in Badiou really multiple? It doesn't really seem

13. Graham Harman, 'Quentin Meillassoux: A New French Philosopher', *Philosophy Today*, Volume 51, no. 1, Spring 2007: 104-117.

to do anything other than haunt our current count, our current situation. But the proper multiple would actually need to interact apart from the subject. It doesn't seem to me that it does so in Badiou, and that's why I would not call myself a Badiouian, though *Being and Event* is a fantastic work of speculative philosophy, the best one I can think of since *Being and Time*. I really appreciate the ambition of it and many of his strategies for attacking certain things.

So those are some of the things we agree on. There's really just one central disagreement between me and Iain, and it's a huge one, and it leads into a disagreement about the history of philosophy. The big difference is that Iain is against what he calls "somatism" and I'm totally in favour of it. For him, philosophy is not about the bodies, it's about a deeper force prior to the bodies from which the bodies emerge. For me it's nothing but objects, there is no pre-individual dynamic flux that surges up into various specific individuals. And I suspect there's some influence of Deleuze here, in this position. The objects themselves don't seem to have the power to interact, it all happens at a deeper level. Now, that leads to a big disagreement about the history of philosophy, because he sees Aristotle as being on the same side as Kant. He sees Aristotelian substance as being on the same side as the Kantian phenomenon, which I wouldn't agree with. There are times when Aristotle refers to substance as equivalent to the *logos*, but I think there are more places where he says the real can never be adequately expressed in a *logos*. So I would never go so far as to say that an Aristotelian chair is the same as my perception of a chair for Kant. I would say Aristotle's one of the good guys if you're a realist. He traditionally has

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been seen that way, so Iain's making a radical move by saying Aristotle's actually on Kant's side, and Plato's one of us – counterintuitive, but interesting. I would say we need to retain Aristotle on our team. I would say the Aristotelian forms are not mathematical formalisations. They are substantial forms, and substantial forms can hide from the *logos*. In fact they do hide, because the *logos*, I would say, never adequately exhausts them. And I would also oppose Iain and defend product over productivity, which I know is very unfashionable. In recent decades the avant garde has always been about process and not product. I would defend product over process, because I think much of process is lost when the product is created, and you don't need to know the process. Much information is lost. Yes, it's true that causation is productive. This is DeLanda, actually, not Iain, but Iain might have said something like this. Causation is productive because there's always more in the effect than there was in the cause. It's also true that there is less in the effect than there was in the cause, because I think many things about the cause are eliminated from the product. Different processes can yield the same object. But my question to Iain would be: Why not just have objects all the way down? Why do we need to have a unified dynamic nature? And notice he talks about geology, but he never, unlike Latour, talks about technological objects – oil rigs and things like that – because the different kinds of objects are less important for Iain than the deeper natural forces that all objects stem from.

Now, on to Meillassoux. There are so many things to admire about Meillassoux's book. Stylistically, it's very clear and economical. You never feel that he's wasting your

time. Something Ray said over coffee either last night or this morning is that analytic philosophers would be shocked if they read this. They would say ‘This isn’t the French philosophy we heard about’, because he’s actually making rational arguments, step by step deductive arguments, which analytic philosophers pride themselves on doing, as opposed to those from the continental tradition. At first the argument about causation using the Cantorian transfinite was less convincing to me than the others in the book. But I’ve been thinking about this more for the past few weeks, and it’s growing on me. So are there other ways to use the transfinite to solve other problems like this, such as the bogeyman of the infinite regress? Could you talk about a transfinite regress instead? I’m not sure how you would do that, but I’ve been toying with these ideas. You can certainly do it in the other direction: the universe is getting bigger and bigger and bigger. However big the universe is defined there must be a bigger universe, and physics seems inclined to support this lately.

Disagreements? The main disagreement here is obvious as well, which is: causation is the key for me, and for Meillassoux causation disappears. In some ways he leads us to a more chaotic universe than Hume does, because as Meillassoux himself says, Hume really doubts whether I can *know* that there’s a causal relationship between things, whereas Meillassoux *knows* that it’s absolutely contingent, the way things happen. He absolutely *knows* that there’s no causal necessity between things. And that might be a brand new gesture. I don’t know anyone else who has done this. He’s doubting the Principle of Sufficient Reason while keeping the concept of non-contradiction, and he’s

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thereby doubting necessity. But he actually goes further than this, and he doesn't talk about this much explicitly, but in my view, since he is saying that everything is *absolutely* contingent, what he's really doubting is that there's any relationality at all. Everything's absolutely cut off from everything else, because if one thing could be connected to another or could influence another thing, then he wouldn't have absolute contingency anymore. He would sometimes have relations between things and sometimes not. So it seems to me that absolute contingency entails no relations at all between anything, and this is why I have called Meillassoux a hyper-occasionalist, because he doesn't even have a God to save us from this problem. And unlike Hume, he does believe there's an ancestral world outside of us that exists, and it's totally outside of our minds, and we seem to have no access to that either, because that would require a relationship between me and what's outside of me, and that also seems impossible. So maybe I can know *a priori* that there's an ancestral world, and I may also have these qualities in my mind that are somehow linked in my mind, but – according to my reading of his system – there's really no hope of linking these things. It seems to me that in his system nothing touches anything else at all, not even partially, so in that way we're very close in our positions. The difference is that I try to find some solution so things can relate through the back door somehow, and he doesn't do this. And this leads to several other related problems.

So my first question to Meillassoux is: Does a thing touch its own qualities? He may disagree with my assessment that he's saying that nothing relates to anything else or touches anything else, but if he accepts that reading of his system,

the question will come up as to whether a thing can even touch its own qualities. What is the relation of a thing to its own qualities? Within the mind, things do seem to relate, because there are many things in my mind at once, so there already is a kind of relationship. This is the criticism I made of Hume – you’re starting with a relation. I see different splotches and colours and shapes around the room, and they are somehow related, because they’re all in my mind at once. Also, if it’s true, then there would be no relation between my perception of the world and the world itself. So that even if we know through his brilliant argument at the beginning of the book that there must be an ancestral realm outside of knowledge, what’s the bridge between those two? How does my knowledge have any correspondence at all with what’s out there? Correspondence seems impossible and so does unveiling, on Meillassoux’s model. How does my mind relate to the world? And finally, what are the things outside the mind? Because if it’s true that there’s a problem, for Meillassoux, of linking a thing to its qualities, this means you have nothing but disconnected qualities outside the mind. And that doesn’t make any sense to me, because, as I mentioned earlier about Merleau-Ponty, the black is already impregnated with the thing of which it is the blackness. So there are already these bridges in perception, and I would say, then, in causation as well. So, my question or objection to Meillassoux – and again, he might disagree with this reading completely – is that he’s dealing only with necessity and contingency. Isn’t there a middle ground, and isn’t that middle ground a relation or interface? Because when two things relate, when you talk about a relationship, well, that’s not absolute contingency, because they are

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affecting each other, right? And necessity implies almost a lack of separation between them, since it implies a kind of seamless mechanical whole in which an action already contains its effects. What a relation really consists of is two things that are somehow partly autonomous yet still manage to influence each other. And so my question is: Is there any possibility of interface in Meillassoux's system? Can one thing influence another without there being a necessary relationship between them? And finally, my real objection to him is that he hasn't published his system yet, because I'd love to stay up the next three nights and read it! That would be great reading. He says he's got multiple volumes coming, six or seven hundred pages. I would be delighted to read this right now, so please hurry! Alright, now I'll listen to the responses from my fellow panelists.

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RAY BRASSIER: I take your point absolutely about the unfeasibility of reductionism. I think you're right. There are two problems: inter-theoretic reduction is often intractable, but even intra-theoretic reduction, even within a single theory there are often intractable problems associated with trying to reduce something to something else. So in a way I think that's right, and it's my own fault for over-emphasising this, over-egging the pudding, in my objections to a straightforward ontological univocity. But I do think we can revise the criteria in terms of which we ascribe reality to something. So, I would favour the term 'revisionary materialism' – which, before the term 'eliminative materialism' was canonised, was a plausible variant. In other words, the point is that you're not throwing something out, you're

replacing something and amplifying and augmenting what you know and what you understand. This is the important thing. So, for instance, the elimination of gods, goddesses, all sorts of supernatural aspects – that can be understood as a diminishment of the world, but surely that would be kind of a parochial perspective! It's the amplification, it's all the other things we know about that's important. The point is that science has *multiplied* the kinds of things that exist in the world, it hasn't *diminished* them. So it seems to me to be a mistake to think that science and the amplification of our cognitive capacities is about having to give lots of things up and having to eliminate things. Sure, we eliminate things, but only in order to re-describe them as vastly more interesting and complicated things.

The second thing is, I think you're also right that it's unfeasible to claim that there's some kind of ultimate ontological substrate underlying appearances. This is the reason why I think materialism is highly problematic and, as Iain pointed out, it seems to dissolve into some form of alibi, a claim about the primacy of practice or suchlike. Because once physics has eliminated any kind of substantial understanding of materiality – and the whole point about the critique of metaphysics is the destitution of substance, of the idea that substance is the ultimate stuff of the world – materialism doesn't make any sense unless you adopt a materialism of process, of pure productivity, which I accept is entirely viable. In which case I think the problem then becomes one of convincingly explaining the interruptions or discontinuities in the process.

So I would say that there's no limit to realism. It's crucial not to have a parochial definition of realism in terms of

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available semantic or cognitive categories, because we will invariably end up revising or even abandoning them. The reason why I think epistemology is important is because of history, and because it's impossible to fix a moment in time and say now we really know everything there is. There's always a kind of dynamic and a revisability about the way in which we understand the world. And what's interesting about science is just how much it enriches the categories and the criteria we have for making differences in the world. So it's not a diminishment at all, it's a fantastic enrichment and amplification of our discriminatory capacities. We can make all sorts of differences that it was impossible to make previously. So that's my response, basically.

GH: You defended reductionism less than I thought you would. One of the things I like about talking with you is always the way you force me to think about this problem, because it is a problem. In a sense, it's hypocritical to say that nothing can be reduced to anything else, because what does philosophy do? Philosophy takes a very complicated world and reduces it to four or five structures that explain everything else. I guess all the sciences do this as well. Your point about how science has complicated things is also a Latourian point. He sees modernism as hypocritical. At the same time that it's trying to purify the natural from the cultural, it's also creating a multitude of Frankenstein-like hybrids that are crossing over the gap. The ozone hole is both natural and socially-constructed and narrated at the same time. So things only get more and more complicated. How much reduction actually happens? Often when we 'reduce' we are really just explaining things in terms of a

new sort of belief. Chemistry is more complicated in the Periodic Table than it was before, in a sense. They weren't just reducing, were they? Although Mendeleev did reduce chemicals to a small number of elements via the Periodic Table, he also pointed to a host of new elements and chemical properties that had not been suspected before. I think that's all I have to say, but I'm sympathetic to the idea that reductionism should not just be thrown out. We have to be able to do a better job of showing how the tooth fairy is less real than a forest.

QUENTIN MEILLASSOUX: I would like to say to Graham that there can't be any contradiction between our positions, and I will try to show why. I try to elaborate a principle, the principle of factuality, which says that only contingency is necessary. Not merely that contingency is necessary, but that *only* contingency is necessary. So, what do I try to do? I try to demonstrate that contingency has properties, fixed properties. And why do I have to demonstrate it? Because contingency is necessary, and a discourse about something necessary must be a demonstration. And if contingency and only contingency is necessary, everything which exists is contingent. So, I can't speak about what exists. I can't speak about what exists, because it is contingent. Now, what can you do with that which is contingent? You can describe it. What I try to demonstrate is that if you want to speak about what exists you can only *describe*, as phenomenology does – phenomenology is a description. If you want to know where I am, where my system is, in relation to your thinking, the connection lies in the fact that you describe things. It is necessary that phenomenology must

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be description, because, unlike what I do, phenomenology speaks about things which effectively exist. And what I try to do is to show that if you can describe it, it's not for a contingent reason. It's because what exists is just *a fact*. It's a fact that there is relation, that there are really substances, *etc.* And if you want to know how my work relates to what you describe, I would say, maybe it concerns the 'withdrawing substance', because what withdraws from description, for me, is the *fact* that it is. The fact that the thing *is* cannot be described. You can describe *what* it is, *how* it is, relation, *etc.*, but that relation, substance, *etc.*, are facts, and because they are facts you can only describe them. In my language, this is 'ontical' description. Ontical – concerned with what there is. But the *ontological* is concerned with demonstration. The discourse of being is, for me, demonstration, because for me, to be is to be a fact. Why do I say that? Because when you try to speak about being, you have this problem: for me, Heidegger doesn't speak about being. He speaks about modalities of being – conscience, Dasein, *etc.* That there is something, of course, he speaks of it, but it is very difficult to see if he really manages to produce a discourse about it. For me, if you want to have a discourse, an extended discourse, about this very narrow fact that there is something, you must remark that for something to be means the *fact* that it is. The fact, it clearly means to be, and I just speak about this invisible property, this invisible reality of things. Because animals, *etc.*, don't see factuality, we don't see factuality. We *think* it. So you speak about what there is, whereas I speak about this, that it is a fact. There could be another world than ours. So my conception is not to deny the existence of relations but just to affirm their factual existence.

GH: Okay, but the relation between anything I see and what it might be representing? There doesn't seem to be any such relation for you, because what's withdrawing is the factuality rather than the subterranean being of the table, or something like this.

QM: It is not a necessary relation, but it is a relation. I say that laws exist. There are laws. For example, if I'm a Newtonian, I can say there are gravitational laws. I don't deny the existence of laws. I don't deny the stability of laws. Maybe these laws will persist for eternity, I don't know. I just say that it is *possible*, really possible, that laws just stop working, that laws disappear. They are facts, just facts, they are not necessary. It's not that you say that if something is contingent, you say that that it doesn't exist. It's factual, that's all. I fully uphold your right to be a phenomenologist, if you want to speak about things, because you have to describe them.

GH: Right. This is very helpful. I'm seeing your work differently now. There are relations, they are the relations of something contingent. Yes, that makes a lot of sense.

QM: What is strange in my philosophy is that it's an ontology that never speaks about what is but only about what can be. Never about what there is, because this I have no right to speak about.

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GH: Wonderful. I need to think a little more. Maybe I was reading too much into this by interpreting that there were no relations between anything at all in your philosophy.

IHG: Actually, that is fascinating, and I think I accept completely the idea that contingency is fact. We can't gainsay that, because if we do we claim access to some positional element of necessity. But I don't think, actually, that it applies wholly to the position that you're [GH] adopting. You want egress from phenomenological treatment to a genuine description of causality, as you were saying, or a genuine account of causality. And you do that not because you don't want merely to *speak* about being. You reformulate the ontological difference, as it were, not in terms of being and beings but ... sorry, how did you put it?

GH: In terms of the subterranean thing and its relation to something else.

IHG: Yeah, in terms of relations. So you really want to speak about causality. Causality must of its nature be responsible for facts, but is it itself a fact? If there is real causality rather than just the laws we might subscribe to concerning causality, then it entails that there's an egress from the phenomenal envelope, the transcendental envelope, if and only if there is such causality. So there are, as it were, ontological commitments or entailments of your position, it seems to me, and so it's not wholly describable in terms of fact. Unless, of course, we have a specifically temporal understanding of facticity, such that factual states, ontic

states, do appear and disappear with roughly the speed that they would under the model you explicitly evoked vis-à-vis Arab scholars' versions of occasionalism, where the raw speed of possible replacements, states of affairs, becomes bafflingly unthinkable.

So that was a comment I just wanted to make to pull things together. I do think there's an interesting question there, or a series of questions, actually. Vis-à-vis what you said about bodies, I have a roughly similar point. It's true I do suggest that it's wrong to identify matter with bodies but not that bodies are immaterial. So, at one level, the reason why it must be wrong to identify matter with bodies is that if it were the case that matter was a body, then all different bodies would not be matter, which wouldn't make sense of what a body is. So it must be the case that bodies are matter, but bodies are not all there is to matter, and I think that's roughly, actually, one of the central lessons of the advent of field physics. The dereliction of substance in any corporeal form is made real, is made concrete, with Faraday and so on – the idea of field replacing substance around the 1830s. So you have this replacement of a conception of substance as no longer attaching solely to bodies, but rather being a regional element of *physis*, which is comprised of forces. The question then is not reducing bodies to forces, nor saying bodies are other than matter because forces are genuine matter, but rather how these two elements are in fact elements of a process which is productive. Actually it was incredibly poignant when you said I don't go to geology – I would have, had the time not run out! You pointed out that I hadn't in fact dealt with certain things in the examples I gave of my project – technological objects and geology as

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a science, actually dealing with the earth and so on. But in fact that's the subject of my next book on ground. So I wanted to suggest a clarification of the relationship between body and *physis*, body and matter – which is why I think Plato's idealist account of what matter is is the best we have in so far as it's an account of matter ...

GH: You also mentioned Giordano Bruno as an obvious ally of yours.

IHG: Yes.

GH: I immediately thought of his books when I read yours. But am I not right that, for you, *physis* does not exist in the bodies, except maybe as *expressed* in the bodies – but the action is all at the lower level?

IHG: I don't think one element of it is dispensable. I think maybe there's some work I need to do here, because I think this is a similar question to the question of the relation between productivity and product. Clearly, the relation as I described it earlier, that productivity is unthinkable without product is a dialectical trick at one level. But at another level, productivity really is productivity if and only if there are products. Otherwise, what is it? Is it force? Is there force without resistance?

GH: For you, when fire burns cotton, what's happening? Is the fire burning the cotton or is there some deeper layer

at which the causal relationship is unfolding? I thought the latter.

IHG: I'd want to claim that there are innumerable things going on when fire burns cotton, and in the burning of the cotton by the fire.

GH: But it's not a somatic event for you?

IHG: It's a somatic event, a somatic event is one dimension of it, yes.

GH: So you're not actually denying causal relations between bodies, you're just saying that it's paralleled by another relationship at another level?

IHG: Actually, no, I think I *am* denying causal relationships, but only because it's between bodies. And this is not to say that there are no causal relations. It's rather that they go in a variety of directions. If there are causal relationships between bodies – in fact, there must be at one level, there must be, but at another level, it's not by virtue of the bodies that there are causal relationships between them, because there are other things going on as well. So it's the additional element rather than the one or the other. In fact, that was one of the things about your account of occasionalism that I found so useful.

GH: Good, good.

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BENJAMIN NOYS: Earlier you made the remark dismissing Marxian materialism as impoverishing. And I just wondered, in relation to the conversation you had with Ray, there seems to be a question of different kinds of reduction ...

GH: My idea, which I had vaguely in mind until Bruno Latour said it explicitly about a month ago, is that materialism is a kind of idealism. And that's what I want to say, because when you have materialism, what you're doing is reducing the things of the world to a fairly one-dimensional conception of what they are. Physical bodies taking up space in a measurable fashion. And the funny thing is, Žižek does this and *embraces* it and says the only possible materialism is idealism. The irreality of the world outside of my experience of it. So he actually takes that and celebrates it and Latour condemns it from the other direction. I want to condemn it, too. So I was happy with Iain's answer. I'm an anti-materialist.

ALBERTO TOSCANO: I'd like to just follow up on Ben's point. I was wondering if there was another way of organising your index cards, and it has to do exactly with whether the notion of realism should be understood in terms of – this might be a bit abstruse – but in terms of a reference to the real or a reference to reality. It seems to me that if realism has a reference to 'reality', then there is an implicit totalisation of that notion of reality. And I was struck, for instance, by the fact that, in your talk, in a way that didn't really seem to be thematised, you talked about 'the world', and Iain to some extent or another talked about 'nature'. And

I suppose the question is: Is it necessary for speculative realism to totalise reality, or to posit a grand total object of speculation? There are a number of reasons for asking this. I mean, partly, it's out of the notion that if indeed someone like Ray, for instance, or perhaps Quentin, has an attachment to certain aspects of Badiou's ontology, one of those aspects would be a fairly radical gesture of de-totalisation, the idea that the very notion of a universe might be scientifically useful but is philosophically incoherent, the notion of the All. And it also links partly to the question about politics and Marx and so on, because, in one sense, it only becomes a kind of suppressive gesture to politicise ontology or to talk about politics at all if you think that there is actually a total domain of reality or being; because then obviously if this total domain were overdetermined by one aspect of that domain, then this would be some kind of instrumentalisation of ontology. Because that implies the idea that what speculative realism relates to is *all* of reality, and then obviously if politics comes to overdetermine that entire reality, then that would be illegitimate. Now, if there is no total reality or total universe over which ontology or anything, speculative realism, operates, then it seems there's no sense in which one would need to have a speculative realism or an ontology that encompasses science, *etc.* This also has to do with the question Ray raised, because it's also the issue about the extent to which the demands of science and the demands of ontology overlap. Because it does seem that science is wedded to some extent or another to the notion of a universe. Now, it seems to me that speculative realism need not be – in fact, perhaps *shouldn't* be – wedded to the notion of a totality or of *a* reality or of *a* universe.

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So when you said ‘the world’, does a philosophy of objects, of absolutely individuated, vacuum-packed objects, so to speak, as you put forward – does it depend on some totalisation? Because then that would imply that that totalisation is actually the relation within which all those objects are already included.

GH: Ray and I were discussing this on the Tube on the way in. It seems that I have to be committed to the notion of an infinite regress and also infinite progress to avoid this problem of totalisation. And I do feel that I’m committed to that, and I think science is leading that way more and more all the time, right? Where is the smallest particle? They’ve never found it. Where is this largest universe? Many physicists doubt it now. And I’ve been speaking openly in the past few years in defence of the infinite regress and the infinite progress. Maybe I should start calling them transfinite. So, no, I don’t actually have a totality of the world. There are just objects as far as you look. I never come to the end of them and say there’s a largest object that contains them all, precisely for the reason you mention, because then you’d have a final, present-at-hand – in the Heideggerian sense – present-at-hand totality which was constituted totally of relations and which itself was nothing but relations. And I can’t have that, for the same reason that I can’t have a smallest particle, because then you’d have a tiniest present-at-hand atom that had no other qualities, because it would have no relational structure at all. So yeah I do seem to be committed, and this upset me a little bit for the first couple of years ...! No-one wants to be trapped in the infinite regress, right?

Well, what's inherently illogical about the infinite regress? There seem to be a fewer negative consequences than there are to saying there's got to be a final atom.

DANIEL MILLER: I want to ask you a bit more about infinity, with reference to your notion that the object has infinite qualities. You spoke of the chair, earlier, as having infinite qualities. There seems to be a problem, because, again, earlier still, you spoke about what the difference would be between a real crown and an imaginary crown, and you suggested that they could be distinguished on the basis of their qualities. The real crown would have different qualities to the imaginary crown. But if an object has an infinite amount of qualities, how can you distinguish it on the basis of those qualities?

GH: Just by appealing to Cantor, that there would be different sizes of infinities. You could say the imaginary crowns have an infinite number of qualities and the real crowns may have more or less qualities than the imaginary ones, but you can still have different sizes of infinities.

DM: Do you make a distinction very cleanly, between imaginary and real infinities, in that case?

GH: No, there's only one kind of infinity. They'd be different infinities in each case but only one kind. What I'm trying to say is, I don't think you can distinguish between imaginary and real crowns on any basis outside of qualities, because

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the distinction has to be in those qualities themselves. My suspicion is that there have to be different qualities in the cases of the real crowns and the imaginary ones. Existence is not something either imposed or not imposed on the qualities from outside, by God, or by its position in relation to a Kantian subject. In the qualities themselves there has to be a difference between real and imaginary crowns – that’s just my suspicion in the last couple of months.

PETER HALLWARD: Without trying to ask questions I’ve asked before, I understand your system as far as it works for intentional objects: a chair is not exhausted by your sitting in it, but nevertheless it is a chair as opposed to a hybrid of materials or a commodity or something else, in so far as it can be sat on and have all the other associations that make it a chair and not another kind of object; and it’s slightly different, then, from a pile of rocks that we can sit on outside – that alone doesn’t make it a chair, right? And we’ve used it as a chair already today. So as regards the issue of its ‘chairness’ it seems to me that you have this problem of what it means for this particular object, what it is that objectifies it as a chair or as a table if it’s not something to do with a very large number of relationships in that very complicated history of the evolution of something like a chair in the course of history and so on that would explain it. And if you abstract from all those relationships, I don’t see what’s left of the chair *qua* chair. I can see that you can abstract something. You can probably abstract something that starts to look a lot like a Kantian thing-in-itself, but how would it be a chair? Or if you take something that’s less obviously an intentional object, like

a cloud or something, and you try, in a rigorous way, to isolate the product from the process, you abstract it, then, from all the processes whereby water vapour condenses at a certain temperature and altitude and so on, what are you left with? In what sense is it really a cloud as opposed to a particular moment that we can isolate in the way precipitation is condensing up there in the sky? In what sense is it a cloud except for someone who *intends* it as a cloud?

GH: Right. You made a very similar objection to ‘On Vicarious Causation’ before it was a *Collapse* article, which is when I was using shoes as an example, and saying the shoes are the same shoes for me and other people and for ants, and you were asking: Is it really a shoe for ants? And I guess now that I’ve thought about it for a few months, I think the answer is no, obviously, it’s not really a shoe for ants, it’s something else, but that doesn’t mean there’s nothing withdrawing behind my use of it as a shoe. DeLanda makes this point very well on the first page of his new book, which is that, even though we are the ones that create social institutions, this does not mean that our concepts of them exhaust them. So yes, I can be the first person ever to see that pile of rocks as a chair, but couldn’t there still be a ‘chairness’ to it deeper than my use of it? Because I could still keep using it as a chair and still find some leeway to use it as a chair differently from how I’m doing it now. So I think that ‘chair-form’ that I myself have discovered there is still something deeper than my current use of that ‘chair-form’. That’s how I would describe it. I don’t know if that helps.

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ROBIN MACKAY: This very much follows on from Peter's question. I'm very sympathetic to the idea that we have to try to break reality out from its incarceration in our relation to it, our conditioning of it, but it seems to me that physics already does that, but it does it precisely at the expense of the commonsense idea of what an object is. And what puzzles me about your system is that you seem to carry over that commonsense idea of what objects are into this other realm. So, for instance, if there's a billiard ball that hits another billiard ball and it envelopes that other billiard ball in its intentionality – first of all, I can't understand, this is not really an important point, but I can't understand why the intentionality is an object; what is it that makes you call it an object? But secondly, what part of the second billiard ball does the first billiard ball envelop? Only the bit that it hits? The whole thing? How does it know the billiard ball's an object? Does it only envelop half of it, quarter of it? And it seems to me the only way you can answer that is by saying every single piece of the billiard ball envelops every other piece in contact with it, with its intentionality. And so you go down and down, and you're just going to end up with physics again, you're just going to end up with the same ontic explanation of causality that disappointed you in the first place. So, just to go back to Peter's point, it's entirely possible that the ant doesn't know the difference between the shoe and the table that the shoe's on or the piece of grass it's on; I don't understand how these things can be unequivocally named 'objects', in other words, and for me this is the profundity of Lovecraft, why he's a profound realist. Because when you go through the gates, when reality is revealed to you, it's just this complete

chaos which you can't objectify. And obviously Lovecraft is Kantian in that respect, but I can't see how your system can get past that problem.

GH: There are three questions there and I'll take the easiest one first: Why is an intention an object? Well, if you look at the usual definitions of objects throughout the history of philosophy, criteria are along the lines of naturalness, indestructibility, irreducibility to anything else, and so on – these are the classical definitions of substance. My definition of an object is simply a unified thing that has a reality that's not exhausted by any approach to it from the outside, and intention clearly has that feature, because what is phenomenology about? It's about retroactively analysing intentions. Even if I analyse what my intention is at the moment, what looks and what is looked at are not the same thing. So what I'm doing when I'm looking at my own intention of the cup is converting my relation to the cup into an object. It can remain mysterious and puzzling and they do long phenomenological analyses, even of these very simple relations. So that's why it's an object.

RM: But when you say you're converting your intention into an object, that's a very Kantian thing to say, isn't it?

GH: I think anytime we intend something, the intention can be converted into an object, yes. But, just as DeLanda says about social institutions: even if we're creating it, that doesn't mean that our creation of it exhausts the reality of the thing. So, yes, in a way my relation to the cup isn't really

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an object until I convert it into one as a phenomenologist. I can decide, 'Okay, I'm going to analyse my relationship to this', but that doesn't mean that my act of identifying the relation for the first time exhausts it. That's why you have to go on and analyse that intentionality there, because there's more in it than meets the eye. Just by creating kids, you don't know everything about the kids. There's always going to be more to them than you suspected. Causation is productive. I don't think you can ever get from my position to physics, because physics never makes causation into a problem, as far as I can see. The problem of causation in physics is always one of whether causation is deterministic, or whether it's statistical, or how you read quantum theory. There's not really any discussion in physics of what actually happens when one thing influences another.

RM: Isn't that because physics has revealed that that's a false problem?

GH: I don't think it's a false problem. I think it's a *forgotten* problem, by physics. You've got four causes in Aristotle. Where have the four causes gone in physics? Nowhere. You have efficient causation, maybe material causation, they've gotten rid of formal and final. Fine, get rid of final, I'll give you that one! – What about formal causation? Formal causation is where all the action's happening in philosophy, I think. Forms do all the work in Aristotle and elsewhere, and that's what I want to retain. There's no formal causation in physics. My favourite author for dealing with formal causation is Marshall McLuhan, one

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of the really unrecognised giants of the past one hundred years of the humanities. Fabulous stuff, wrongly written off as a kind of pop TV analyst, really brilliant systematic work about how one medium reverses into another under the right conditions. McLuhan deserves to be the founder of a philosophical school. Again, he's a fan of formal cause. And Francis Bacon before him – another completely misunderstood philosopher – not an empiricist in the way people think. You're not just doing experiments and reducing things to their causes, you're actually finding the forms that are locked up and compressed inside of things. And he even says that efficient causation is ludicrous. I was shocked when I read that. We have this textbook image of Bacon that has nothing to do with the real Bacon. So I would appeal to Bacon and McLuhan, great champions of formal cause, which science does not handle properly.

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PRESENTATION BY QUENTIN MEILLASSOUX

I would first of all like to give my thanks to the organisers of this conference. I'm very proud to participate in it, considering the exceptional quality of the contributors. And I am very happy to have this opportunity to express my admiration for the books of Ray Brassier, Graham Harman, and Iain Grant. I think that the very existence of such a philosophical configuration of original conceptual projects is in itself remarkable. I think that we also must have in common, the four speakers, the difficulty of explaining our jobs to our families! But as I said to Graham, I think it is a configuration of what could be called a 'weird realism', four modalities of 'weird realism'. I'd like to discuss here one of the theses of Ray Brassier's beautiful book, *Nihil Unbound*, and try to respond to some of his stimulating objections, supported by the non-philosophy of François Laruelle. Thanks to this discussion, I will expose and mark out the fundamental decisions of *After Finitude*, especially concerning correlationism and the principle of factuality.

As you may know, I have given the name 'correlationism' to the contemporary opponent of any realism. By this term, I wanted to avoid the usual 'parade' of transcendental philosophy and phenomenology against the accusation of idealism – I mean answers such as: 'Kantian criticism is not a subjective idealism since there is a refutation of idealism in the *Critique of Pure Reason*'; or 'phenomenology is not a dogmatic idealism, since intentionality is orientated towards a radical exteriority, and it is not a solipsism since the givenness of the object implies, according to Husserl, the reference to an intersubjective community'. And the same could be said about *Dasein*, which is originally

a 'being-in-the world'. Even though these positions claim not to be subjective idealism, they can't deny, without self-refutation, that the exteriority they elaborate is essentially relative: relative to a consciousness, a language, a *Dasein*, etc. No object, no being, no event, or law which is not always-already correlated to a point of view, to a subjective access – this is the thesis of any correlationism.

By the term 'correlation', I also wanted to exhibit the essential argument of these 'philosophies of access', as Harman calls them; and – I insist on this point – the exceptional *strength* of this argumentation, apparently and desperately implacable. Correlationism rests on an argument as simple as it is powerful, and which can be formulated in the following way: No X without givenness of X, and no theory about X without a positing of X. If you speak about something, you speak about something that is given to you, and posited by you. Consequently, the sentence: 'X is', means: 'X is the correlate of thinking' in a Cartesian sense. That is: X is the correlate of an affection, or a perception, or a conception, or of any subjective act. To be is to be a correlate, a term of a correlation. And in particular, when you claim to think any X, you must posit this X, which cannot then be separated from this special act of positing, of conception. That is why it is impossible to conceive an absolute X, *i.e.*, an X which would be essentially separate from a subject. We can't know what the reality of the object in itself is because we can't distinguish between properties which are supposed to belong to the object and properties belonging to the subjective access to the object.

In my opinion, the *Principles of the Science of Knowledge*, written by Fichte in 1794, is the *chef-d'oeuvre* of such a

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correlationism. The *Science of Knowledge* is to date the most rigorous expression of the correlationist challenge opposed to any realism. I'd like to begin this talk by remembering the principal aspect of this philosophy, so that we can be conscious of the very nature of this anti-realism at its climax. I won't speak, of course, about the details of this very difficult book, but I shall only recall the heart of its argumentation: the principle of its conceptual production, which appears to me as the most precise form of the obstacle that a contemporary realism has to surmount. I will rely on a recent interpretation of the *Science of Knowledge*, which has completely changed the comprehension of Fichte, at least in France: in 2000 Isabelle Thomas-Fogiel¹⁴ proposed a devastating criticism of the dominant interpretation of Fichte in our country – Philonenko's interpretation – and allowed us at last to read the true *Science of Knowledge*, instead of the extraordinary but also eccentric reconstruction elaborated by Philonenko in 1966.¹⁵

Briefly: Philonenko claimed that the three first principles of the *Science of Knowledge* – including the famous 'I = I' – were not true principles, but dialectical illusions that Fichte undertook to deconstruct throughout his system. So, in the *Science of Knowledge*, you have three principles, and he deduces all that follows from these three principles? – No, it's not true! According to Philonenko, they were illusions that Fichte deconstructed! Therefore, of course, Philonenko also had to explain that Fichte was a strange

14. I. Thomas-Fogiel, *Critique de la représentation: Étude sur Fichte* (Paris: Vrin, 2000).

15. A. Philonenko, *La liberté humaine dans la philosophie de Fichte* (Paris: Vrin, 1966).

guy, since he had said to everyone the exact opposite of what he really meant! The situation in France was as if a famous interpreter had claimed solidly for thirty years that the definitions and axioms of Spinoza's *Ethics* were in fact certain illusions deconstructed by Spinoza, and convinced everybody that Spinoza was just a very weird man to say systematically the exact contrary of what he really thought. Thomas-Fogiel quite simply restores – in my view, indisputably – the immediate truth on this point: the principles of the *Science of Knowledge* are *true* principles; and, thanks to her, French philosophers have at last discovered what everyone else already knew!

How must we read Fichte, consequently? According to Thomas-Fogiel, as a thinker of the pragmatic contradiction: Fichte is a thinker who intends to evaluate every philosopher by his capacity to do what he says and to say what he does. A pragmatic contradiction consists, as you know, in contradicting the content of a sentence by the enunciation of this very sentence. It is not a logical contradiction – such as: ‘Peter thinks and Peter does not think’ – but a contradiction between the content of a sentence and its performance, its effective formulation. For example: ‘I don’t think’ does not contain a logical contradiction, but consists in a pragmatic contradiction between the content of the proposition and the fact that I think or pronounce it. The fact that I think this proposition is in contradiction with what I say in the proposition. Thomas-Fogiel used this notion, elaborated by Hintikka in relation to Descartes and Austin,¹⁶ to interpret the *Science of Knowledge* as a philosophy

16. J. Hintikka, ‘*Cogito, ergo sum*: Inference or Performance?’, *Philosophical Review*, Volume 71, No. 1, Jan. 1962: 3-32, included in *Knowledge and the*

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written under the systematic constraint of pragmatic non-contradiction. In particular, the *Science of Knowledge* destroys any attempt at realism by proving it is always and immediately self-contradictory in a pragmatic way. What is a philosopher really doing when he claims to have access to a reality independent of the I? He posits, says Fichte, an X supposed to be independent of any position. In other words, he posits the X as non-positing. He pretends to think what is independent and exterior to any conceptualisation, but in doing so he doesn't say what he effectively does. He says his X is indifferent to thought, but what he does, of course, is simply to conceptualise an X perfectly dependent on his own thinking. Hence, according to Fichte, the pragmatic contradiction between the acts and the thesis of any realist.

But Fichte's very originality, in which he anticipates Hegelian dialectics, is that his contradiction is essentially fruitful. Contradictions produced – notably, by realism – in the *Science of Knowledge* do not lead to the end of the discourse, but to the creation of new concepts able to temporarily neutralise the mortal opposition between content and act. Only temporarily, since such concepts allow one to shift the contradiction again and again but not to abolish it – at least in the sphere of theory, the resolution of the initial contradiction being the privilege of practical reason, not of theoretical reason.

To be more precise, we could say that there is for Fichte a sort of 'double bind' for philosophy itself: it has both to posit the secondariness of thinking relative to

Known (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1974); 'Cogito, ergo sum as an Inference and a Performance', *Philosophical Review*, Volume 72, No. 4, Oct. 1963: 487-96.

an independent real – otherwise we couldn't explain the passivity of sensation – and at the same time it can't posit such a reality without contradiction. This 'double bind', which is ultimately still what 'realism' means for contemporary philosophy – we need it, but we can't claim it, so we claim *and* deny it – this double bind never oversteps, according to Fichte, the limits of the I, because the active I is the first and absolute principle of his philosophy. But Fichte carries out the most elaborate destruction of any realism through a strategy we could call the 'pragmatico-genetic contradiction'; that is, an exhibition of the way in which the realist is forced to create his own concepts in order to escape, for a while, his ultimately fatal contradiction.

To be a contemporary realist means, in my view, to efficiently challenge the Fichtean fatality of pragmatic contradiction; not exactly to challenge the very thesis of the *Science of Knowledge*, but the mode of refutation which is therein invented, and whose principle is always the same: If you think *X*, then you *think* X. That is what I called the 'circle of correlation', the first argument of every correlationism which claims that realism is necessarily a vicious circle, a denial of its very act. Can a realism pass the test of pragmatic contradiction?⁹ That is the question which has governed my own investigations and which I shall examine in relation to the non-philosophy of François Laruelle, on the one hand, and the principle of factuality I set out in *After Finitude*, on the other. But why this comparison with Laruelle?

In his wonderfully radical book, *Nihil Unbound*, Ray Brassier devotes a chapter to *After Finitude*¹⁷ and another

17. *Nihil Unbound*, Chapter 3; also see **COLLAPSE** Vol. II, 15-54.

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to Laruelle's non-philosophy.¹⁸ Brassier, who is a first-class reader, tries to show that Laruelle's 'transcendental realism' is a more reliable and rigorous way to root out the philosophy of correlationism than that which I propose. Even if Brassier's reading is generally kind towards *After Finitude*, he points out what he sees as some weaknesses in my argument, and particularly the fact that I speak of an intellectual intuition of facticity. In this expression – 'intellectual intuition' – Brassier suspects a possible absolutisation of meaning, and maybe a remnant of speculative idealism that threatens my will to escape from the circle of correlation. I shall try to respond to this objection in the following way: First, I will show why the non-philosophy of Laruelle, despite its admirable rigour, fails, in my view, to efficiently fight the argument of the correlational circle. And I will demonstrate this point by applying to non-philosophy a Fichtean model of refutation – that is, a refutation based on the pragmatico-genetic contradiction. Then, I'll show that what I called 'intellectual intuition' in *After Finitude* – and what I shall now call, more precisely, 'dianoetic intuition' – is able, unlike non-philosophy, to neutralise correlationism, even in its Fichtean version – that is, even at the high point of its rigour.

The funny thing is that I discovered, after I decided to confront Laruelle with Fichte, that Laruelle himself, in his *Principles of Non-Philosophy*,¹⁹ compared his own reasoning with Fichte's in the *Science of Knowledge*. But Laruelle is a tributary of the outdated commentary of Philonenko; that's why his confrontation is disappointing.

18. *Nihil Unbound*, Chapter 5.

19. François Laruelle, *Principes de la non-philosophie* (Paris: PUF, 1996).



Quentin Meillassoux

Let's start with Laruelle's conception of what he calls 'philosophy' – or the 'circle of Decision' – which we could also call the 'circle of objectivity'. Decision – with a big 'D' – is for Laruelle the source of every philosophy in any time. Brassier sums up precisely the meaning of this 'Decision' by recalling the Kantian structure which underlies its conceptualisation. Every philosophy is constituted, according to Laruelle, of three moments: first, an empirical *datum*; second, a *factum* made of *a priori* categories, categories unified by a transcendental (for Kant, transcendental apperception); and finally, we have a return of the *a priori* to the *datum*, that is, a unification of *datum* and *factum*, a moment which, in Kant, corresponds to the transcendental deduction. From this last

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unification proceeds experience as the transcendent reality produced by philosophy. Those moments we might also call ‘circle of philosophical Decision’, or ‘circle of objectivity’. Brassier contests – and I think he’s right to do so – that this triple movement constitutes, for Laruelle, the eternal essence of philosophy. He suggests that what Laruelle calls ‘philosophy’ can be identified with what I call ‘correlationism’. Consequently, Brassier claims that Laruelle, with his non-philosophy, works out a non-correlationism more radical and sure than my own version, burdened as it is by intellectual intuition. Let’s see how Laruelle proceeds to extricate himself from the field of philosophy – that is, correlationism, in Brassier’s version. I can’t of course reproduce all of Laruelle’s reasoning, which is complex and evolves from one book to another, but I won’t need to do so to explain my objection.

First, I remark that there is a precise reason, different from Brassier’s own reason, to refuse the identification of philosophy with the circle of objectivity. Brassier claims it is vain to look for an eternal essence of philosophy, philosophy being constituted by the contingent history of texts. But I think there is another reason, a structural one, to refuse the idea that philosophy should be encapsulated in the circle of objectivity, one that Fichte was probably the first to conceive. This reason is: if you want to think the circle of objectivity – what Fichte calls the representation, the unification of *datum* and *factum* and the *a priori* – you need a point of view outside of this circle. That is, if you want to conceive what a representation is, you need a faculty which can’t itself be representative, because there is no representation of representation. You can have a

representation – perceptual or imaginative – of a horse or a wall, but you can't have any representation of a representation. If you want to think what a representation is – that is, a unity of *datum* and *a priori* – you need something other than objective knowledge, this being itself constituted by the unity of *datum* and *a priori*. This was Kant's essential failing, according to Fichte: Kant didn't explain how it was possible to write the *Critique of Pure Reason*. He described all knowledge in terms of objectivity – that is, in terms of representation, constituted by the synthesis of categories and space-time – but his own *philosophical* knowledge about objective knowledge, that is, about representation, couldn't be described in the same terms. How was Kant able to elaborate transcendental notions such as matter and form, categories and representation? This operation needed, according to Fichte, another faculty which was almost described by Kant: the faculty of reflection. And this faculty, reflection – contrary to the apparent opinion of Laruelle – is essentially different from objectivity. Reflection is a non-representative, non-objectivating faculty, which is the condition for conceiving objectivity as such. Reflection is what allows Laruelle himself to stand outside the circle of objectivity when he conceives its unity. Laruelle is outside the circle of objectivity when he describes it, because describing it means not being in it anymore. But this is also the case with every philosopher who was able to describe this circle: all of them adopt, consciously or not, the point of view of reflection, but Fichte was the first to consciously and systematically adopt this point of view in order to construct his system.

Consequently, if you want to escape from the circle of correlationism, you must not only escape from the circle

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of objectivity, but also from the larger circle of reflection, which is outside Laruelle's circle and includes it. Correlationism, as I define it, includes reflection, since reflection is position. When you conceive the circle of objectivity, you are outside this circle, but still in the circle of correlationism, according to me. So if, like Laruelle, you posit something outside the circle of objectivity – in his case the Real outside 'Philosophy' – this Real will still be, according to me, in the circle of correlationism. Because it will be a posited Real: a Real posited by reflection outside of representation. This is exactly what Fichte calls, in his technical vocabulary, the 'independent activity' – that is, to simplify a great deal, the notion of the 'thing in itself', outside representation – Kantian representation – and impossible to conceive through this representation.

Let's demonstrate this point more precisely. Here is my strategy: as I said previously, I propose to apply to Laruelle the Fichtean way of reasoning – not his precise thesis, but the pragmatico-genetic contradiction which constitutes the principle of his argumentation. I am going to reconstruct Laruelle's position in a correlational way, showing how what he calls 'the Real' is nothing but a posited Real, and how the concepts created by non-philosophy just shift this contradiction without being able to abolish it. We shall see clearly, then, why I think that Laruelle doesn't really escape from the circle of correlation.

Let's begin with the Real as described by Laruelle. The Real, he says, is radically indifferent to and independent of the circle of objectivity. The Real precedes thought, but thought, conversely, is always dependent upon the Real, which is essentially unaffected by thought. That is what

Laruelle says, this is the content of his discourse. But – Fichtean question – what does he do? What is the act of his discourse? Laruelle, of course, posits such a Real as independent of any thought. Consequently, he does exactly the contrary of what he says. He says, ‘the Real precedes thought – in particular, philosophical thought – and is indifferent to it’, but the order of what he does is the opposite of the order of what he says: he begins by thinking, and especially by thinking what philosophical thought is, and then progresses to the Real. The Real is truly a notion of the Real which is dependent on thinking, and which is post-philosophical, elaborated from his notion of philosophy. The real order – or the order of acts, not of content – is manifest in the very name of Laruelle’s theory: ‘non-philosophy’. Non-philosophy is supposed to think the relation of thinking with a Real which precedes philosophy, but the name ‘non-philosophy’ can only be constructed from the name ‘philosophy’ together with a negation. Philosophy precedes non-philosophy in nomination, as in the acts of thinking. Hence, we have the first and manifest pragmatic contradiction between what Laruelle says about the Real and what he does when elaborating this notion.

But of course this contradiction, this pragmatic contradiction, is far too trivial to worry Laruelle, and we can imagine that he could easily respond to it. But how? By producing new concepts. So the contradiction, the pragmatic contradiction, becomes fruitful because it compels the thinker to shift it so that he can avoid a gap which in fact will never be filled in. Laruelle could first demonstrate that our objection proceeds from a series of confusions. The Real is a negation of nothing: it is relative to nothing, according to him, and

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especially can't be identified with the concept of the Other which presupposes the X whose other it is. The Real, on the contrary, is radically autonomous, without relation to thought. Thought, on the other hand, can distinguish itself from the Real if it ceases to identify itself with philosophy, locked up in the circle of objectivity, to think under the axiom of the Real. Then thought knows itself as determined-in-the-last-instance by the Real, says Laruelle. That is: thought knows itself as relatively, but not radically, autonomous. This means that thought can produce by itself its own concepts, but has to avoid the sufficiency of absolute autonomy proper to philosophy and which is its intrinsic illusion.

We now have a series of new concepts: radical and relative autonomy, sufficiency, determination-in-the-last-instance, etc. But have we then escaped from the correlational circle? Of course not; we have only deduced what is necessary to think a *posited* Real, if we admit that this Real effectively precedes any position. But Laruelle gets this first position just by force, just by a *coup de force*. The Real is *posited* as indifferent to its positing and as non-related to thought. After that, Laruelle reflects on the possibility of his own theory by claiming the relative autonomy of thought; but in fact, it seems, on the contrary, that his thought is able to posit the Real itself and its relation to the Real. That is, to posit that the Real has no relation to thought, and that thought has a relation of relative autonomy to the Real. He also posits all these concepts as essentially non-dialectical, but what he does is of course easy to dialecticise. For the Real is now linked more than ever to his concepts, more dependent on more and more intricate elaborations

aiming at the exhibition of its independence. And of course, every thesis added by Laruelle will only make the situation worse. That's why the only solution for Laruelle will be the solution, according to me, of every modern realism against correlationism or idealism: as it seems impossible to escape from this position, from this objection, the only solution is to disqualify what you can't refute. The solution for Laruelle can only be: First, to say that the Real is posited by an axiom – that is, something that can be neither demonstrated nor discussed – and secondly, to introduce a precise concept which will disqualify in advance anyone who contests such an axiom; that is, the concept of 'resistance'. I will end my Fichtean reconstruction of Laruelle with this concept that I propose to examine, considering its genealogy and its strategic importance for any contemporary realism.

To understand the fortune of the concept of resistance, we must be conscious of the main characteristic of the correlational circle, which is that this circle is both monotonous and apparently implacable. It is just the same objection, tedious and irritating: if you posit *X*, then you *posit X*. Sometimes we encounter this enraging situation: a brilliant, subtle and interesting theory is easily refuted by a well-known and trivial argument, put forward by a stupid opponent. That is often the situation of the post-Kantian realist faced with the correlationist. And this necessarily produces the same psychological reaction on the part of the realist: he will become both tired and furious. The perfect illustration, the primal scene, of this psychological law of modern realism, in my opinion, can be found in a Tintin comic book. In one of his adventures, Tintin's acolyte Captain Haddock tries to unstick a plaster from his finger.

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Hergé-Moulinart



But of course, each time he removes it with another finger, the plaster sticks immediately onto it! And since the process is endless, Haddock quickly loses his temper. The plaster is identical to the ‘that is what *you think*’ that the correlationist just has to add to any realist thesis one might try to assert. The realist always has to posit more concepts to prove he has accessed pre-conceptual reality. The situation seems desperate: how could you refute that whenever you think something, you *think* something? That’s why the realist, conscious that his reasoning is apparently in vain, has generally renounced any attempt to refute the correlationist and has adopted what I call a ‘logic of secession’ towards him. This secession is a blunt refusal addressed to the correlationist: an ‘I won’t discuss *with* you anymore, I will rather discuss *about* you’. This is a logic of unbinding, of independence, but this independence is not the originary independence of the Real towards the correlation but that of the realist towards the discussion with the correlationist. This logic of secession, it seems to me, takes two principal forms in modernity.

The first one consists in fleeing voluntarily from the discussion in order to rediscover the richness of the concrete world. Schopenhauer said that solipsism was a fortress impossible to penetrate, but also pointless to attack, since it is empty. Solipsism is a philosophy nobody can refute, but also one that nobody can believe. So let's leave the fortress as it is, and let's explore the world in all its vastness! The first strategy of the realist, similarly, concerns the fortress of correlation: 'If you want to stick your plaster on me, please do, but then leave me alone; I have so many interesting realities to investigate!' This is what I call the 'Rhetoric of the Rich Elsewhere'. The realist disqualifies the correlationist argument as uninteresting, producing arid idealities, boring academics, and pathological intellectuals. 'Let's stop discussing, and let's open the windows: let's inhale things and feel the breeze'. This is an attractive and sometimes powerful rhetoric – not in a pejorative but in a Nietzschean sense. A rhetoric of the fruitful concreteness of things, the revenge of descriptions and style on repetitive quibbles. Latour, sometimes, severs all links with correlationism in such a way, and does so with much talent and humour. It must be added, of course, that he also uses other elaborate instruments to fight the circle. But in the case of the 'Rich Elsewhere' rhetoric, it is clear that it is not an argument, but a disqualification of he who argues: the sickly and boring correlationist.

The other method of disqualification used by modern realism is a more fundamental one: it brings out the implicit logic of the 'Rich Elsewhere', which consists in replacing the discussion with the correlationist with an exposition of his motivations. We no longer examine what he says,

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we examine *why* he says what he says. It is the well-known logic of suspicion that we find in Marx, with the notion of ideology, or in Freud, with precisely the notion of resistance. The realist fights every form of idealism by discovering the hidden reasons behind these discourses – reasons that do not concern the content of philosophies, but the shameful motivations of their supporters: class-interest, libido, *etc.* In this way, the realist explains in advance why his theories must be refused by those who are unable to see the truth for such and such objective reasons. Hence he will neutralise any refutation as an already-described symptom of social or psychological resistance, unconscious resistance which is, according to the realist, often unavoidable. But what is interesting, from my own point of view, is that this well-known strategy of suspicion can be understood as the necessary result of an inability to rationally refute the insipid and implacable argument of the correlationist. And we could say the same about the Nietzschean suspicion of the sickly Kantians of the University. Laruelle inherits these strategies through his own concept of resistance: he says, of course, that his non-philosophy must necessarily excite great resistance from philosophy – he predicts that philosophers will reproach him for a *coup de force*, exactly as I did – and he claims that any refutation he will encounter from the point of view of the circle of Decision is the necessary effect of his theory of the Real upon philosophical sufficiency.

Brassier makes an interesting suggestion regarding Laruelle's theory: he says that one of his major concepts – unilateralisation – is a 'surgical intervention upon the body of transcendental synthesis; severing terms from relations,

amputating reciprocity and sharpening one-sidedness'.²⁰ Unilateralisation is a complex concept in Laruelle that I can't explore now but which is admirably explained by Brassier in his book. It is, generally speaking, the consequence of the thought of the radical autonomy of the Real towards thought. What Brassier says, it seems to me, is that Laruelle introduces into the transcendental circle – constituted by the reciprocal synthesis between categories and intuition – the essential asymmetry of the Real and thought, an asymmetry which disjoins the correlations of critical and idealist philosophies. But my own hypothesis about this power of disjunction is that it proceeds more profoundly from the strategy of secession towards correlationism. The radical autonomy of the Real, its unbinding from thought, is produced by the radical autonomy of the non-philosopher, of Laruelle himself, towards any discussion with the correlationist. Laruelle posits the Real as an axiom, and then he posits his refusal to discuss the correlationist refutation of this axiom with the concept of resistance, which disqualifies any objection without answering to it. It is this very secession with the correlationist which creates in the discourse the effect of the radical autonomy of the Real, and which then produces all the effects of surgical interventions upon transcendental synthesis. The meaning of radical autonomy is Laruelle's secession rather than the severing of the Real.

The concept of resistance is an effect, as we said, of the theory of suspicion. But, in my view, and even if I admire Marx, Nietzsche and Freud, realists should at last start becoming suspicious of this venerable theory of

20. *Nihil Unbound*, 147.

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suspicion; Because, as I said, it seems to me that we can trace a genealogy of suspicion and its favourite notion, resistance, which discovers at its root an inability to refute, precisely and simply, the unbearable argument of the circle. I refuse suspicion because realism, in my view, must remain a rationalism. The circle argument *is* an argument and must be treated as such. You don't refuse a mathematical demonstration because the mathematicians are supposed to be sickly or full of frustrated libido, you just refuse what you refute! I clearly understood the calamitous consequences of the notion of resistance when I heard an astrologer, answering placidly to a sceptic, that the latter's incredulity was predictable since he was a Scorpio!

What is at stake, consequently, is to build up a realism released from the strategy of suspicion: a realism which doesn't need to *disqualify* the correlationist because it has clearly *refuted* him. I want that easy and implacable refutation to be transferred to the other side, from correlationism to realism; and, conversely, the argument of resistance to become the last possible defence of correlationism itself. But I don't want to refute only to refute and win the discussion. As we shall see, I'm looking for a creative refutation. That is, a refutation which discovers a truth, an absolute truth, inside the circle itself. That's why I propose an access to the Real not grounded on an *axiom*, but on a *demonstrated principle* – the principle of factuality that I'm now going to set out.

The main problem I try to face in *After Finitude* is precisely that of building a materialism – or a realism – able to refute clearly the correlational circle in its simplest form, which is also the form which is the most difficult to fight with: that is,

the argument that we never have access to something apart from that access – that the ‘in-itself’ is unknown since we only know the ‘for-us’. Here is my strategy: the weakness of correlationism consists in the duality of its opponents. Correlationism is not, in my definition, an anti-realism but an anti-*absolutism*. Correlationism is the modern way to reject all possible knowledge of an absolute: it is the claim that we are closed up in our representations – whether conscious, linguistic, or historical – with no sure access to an eternal reality independent of our specific point of view. But there are two main forms of the absolute: the realist one, which is a non-thinking reality independent of our access to it, and the idealist one, which is the absolutisation of the correlation itself. Therefore, correlationism must also refute speculative idealism – or any form of vitalism or pan-psychism – if it wants to reject all the modalities of the absolute. But the argument of the circle is useless for this second refutation, because idealism and vitalism consist precisely in claiming that it is the circle itself which is the absolute.

Let’s examine briefly the idealist and vitalist arguments. I call ‘subjectivist metaphysics’ any absolutisation of a determinate human access to the world, and I call ‘subjectivist’, for brevity, the supporter of any form of subjective metaphysics. Correlation between thought and being has many different forms: the subjectivist claims that some of these relations, or indeed all, are determinations not only of men, but of being itself. He projects into the things themselves a correlation which might be perception, intellection, desire, etc., and makes it the absolute itself. Of course, this process is far more elaborate than I can describe here, especially in Hegel. But the principle of subjectivism

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is always the same. It consists in refuting realism and correlationism by the following reasoning: Since we cannot conceive a being which would not be constituted by our relation to the world, since we cannot escape from the circle of correlation, the whole of these relations, or an eminent part of this whole, represents the very essence of any reality. According to the subjectivist, it is absurd to suppose, as the correlationist does, that there could be an in-itself different from any human correlation to the world. The subjectivist thus turns the argument of the circle against the correlationist himself: since we can't think any reality independent of human correlations to the world, it means, according to the subjectivist, that the supposition of such a reality existing outside the circle is nonsense. Hence, the absolute is the circle itself, or at least a part of it.

This is why I disagree with Brassier's identification of what I call correlationism with what Laruelle calls 'philosophy'. It seems to me that Laruelle's notion of philosophy as a circle of Decision includes Hegel as well as Kant – idealist speculation with transcendental correlationism. In my view, it is on the contrary essential to distinguish between them since this distinction demonstrates the necessity for correlationism to produce a second argument able to respond to the idealist absolute. This necessity of a second argument is extremely important, since, as we shall see, it will become the flaw of the circle-fortress. This second argument, as I claimed in *After Finitude*, is the argument of facticity, and I must now explain its exact meaning.

I call 'facticity' the lack of reason of any reality; that is, the impossibility of giving an ultimate ground to the existence of any being. We can reach conditional necessity, but never

absolute necessity. If definite causes and physical laws are posited, we can claim that a determined effect must follow. But we shall never find a ground to these laws and causes, except eventually other ungrounded causes and laws: there is no ultimate cause, nor ultimate law, that is a cause or a law including the ground of its own existence. But this facticity, this ultimate ungrounding of things, is also proper to thought. The Cartesian *cogito* clearly shows this point: what is necessary in the *cogito* is a conditional necessity: *if* I think, then I must be. But it is not an absolute necessity: it is not necessary *that* I should think. From the inside of the correlation, I have access to my own facticity, and so to the facticity of the world correlated to my subjective access to it. And this because of the lack of an ultimate reason, of a *causa sui*, able to ground my existence.

Facticity so defined is, in my view, the fundamental answer to any absolutisation of the correlation, for if correlation is factual, we can no longer say – as the idealist does – that it is a necessary component of any reality. Of course, an idealist may object that conceiving the non-being of a subjective correlation is a pragmatic contradiction, since the very conception of it proves we exist as a subject – so that we exist, when we speak of non-existence, non-being, we are existing. But we can reply, this time, that we can conceive our facticity even from the inside of the correlational circle, since Fichte himself has proved it. Indeed, Fichte conceived his first principle – $I = I$, the relation of the I to itself – as essentially ungrounded – in my vocabulary, as essentially factual. Of course, for Fichte, the first principle is not a fact, but an act: the act of conceiving the I. But this act is essentially *free*, according to Fichte – and that means

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not necessary. We choose whether or not to posit our own subjective reflection, and this choice is not grounded on any necessary cause, since our freedom is radical. But to say this is just to recognise, after Descartes, that our subjectivity cannot reach an absolute necessity but only a conditional one. Even if Fichte speaks abundantly of absolute and unconditional necessity, his necessity is no longer dogmatic and substantial necessity, but a necessity grounded upon a freedom itself ungrounded. There can be no dogmatic proof that the correlation must exist rather than not. Hence this absence of necessity is sufficient to reject the idealist's claim of its absolute necessity.

Correlationism, then, is constituted of two arguments: the circle of correlation against naïve realism – let's use this term for a realism unable to refute the circle; and facticity against speculative idealism, against subjectivism. The idealist, the subjectivist, claims to defeat the correlationist by the absolutisation of the correlation; I believe that we can defeat the correlationist only by the absolutisation of facticity. Let's see why.

The correlationist must claim, against the idealist, that we can conceive the contingency of the correlation, that is: its possible disappearance; for example, with the extinction of humanity. The correlation is contingent: we can conceive the contingency of the correlation. But, in this way, the correlationist must admit that we can positively think of a possibility which is essentially independent of the correlation, since this is precisely the possibility of the non-being of the correlation. We can draw an analogy with death: to think of myself as a mortal, I must admit that death doesn't depend on my own thinking about my

death. Otherwise, I would be able to disappear only on one condition: that I was still alive to think of my disappearance and make this event a correlate of my access to it. In other words, I could be dying indefinitely, but I could never pass away, because I would have to exist to make of death a correlate of my own subjective access to it. If facticity can be conceived, if it is a notion that we can effectively conceive – and this must be the case for the correlationist if he wants to *refute* the idealist – then it is a notion we can think as an absolute: the absolute lack of reason of any reality; or, in other words, the effective ability of every determined entity – event, thing, or law of subjectivity – to *appear and disappear* with no reason for its being or non-being. Unreason becomes the attribute of an absolute time able to destroy and create any determined entity – event, thing or law – without any reason for thus creating and destroying.

What I try to show by this thesis concerns the condition of the thinkability of the essential opposition of correlationism: the opposition of the in-itself and the for-us. The thesis of correlationism is that I can't know what the reality would be without me, without us, without thinking, without thought. According to the correlationist, if I remove myself from the world, I can't know the residue. But this reasoning supposes that we have access to an absolute possibility: the possibility that the in-itself could be different from the for-us. And this absolute possibility is grounded in turn on the absolute facticity of the correlation. It is because I can conceive the non-being of the correlation that I can conceive the possibility of an in-itself essentially different from the world as correlated to human subjectivity.

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Consequently, I can refute the correlationist refutation of realism, grounded as it is on the accusation of pragmatic contradiction, because *I* discover in correlational reasoning a pragmatic contradiction: the correlationist's fundamental notions – for-us and in-itself – are grounded on an implicit absolutisation: the absolutisation of facticity. Everything can be conceived as contingent, dependent on human tropism – everything except contingency itself. Contingency, and only contingency, is absolutely necessary. Facticity, and only facticity, is not factual, but eternal. Facticity is not a fact, it is not 'one more' fact in the world. I call this necessity of facticity 'factuality'; and the principle which announces factuality, the necessity of facticity, the non-facticity of facticity, I call the 'Principle of Factuality'. Finally, I call *spéculation factuale* speculation which is grounded on the principle of factuality. Through the Principle of Factuality, I can access a speculative realism which clearly refutes, but no longer disqualifies, correlationism. I think an X independent of any thinking, and know it for sure, thanks to the correlationist himself and his fight against the absolute, the idealist absolute. The principle of factuality unveils the ontological truth hidden in the radical skepticism of modern philosophy: to be is to be factual – and *this* is not a fact.

I shall now move on to my last point: intellectual intuition. I used this expression in *After Finitude* to characterise the intellectual access to factuality – that is, the access to facticity as an absolute – and Brassier wrote that such a notion threatens to close me again into the circle of correlation. Intellectual intuition, with its heavy idealist connotation, seems to entail an absolutisation of meaning, hence an absolutisation of thought. It seems to be a

dangerous concession made to correlationism. Let's try to respond, to give an answer to this objection.

What did I mean, exactly, by this expression, 'intellectual intuition'? Why did I take the risk of using an idealist expression in order, of course, to subvert its meaning? From now on, I shall use, if you prefer, the oxymoronic term *intuition dianoétique*, 'dianoetic intuition'. I mean by these words, the essential intertwining of a simple intuition and of a discursivity, a demonstration – both being entailed by the access to factuality. Let me explain this point.

Why do I think that Laruelle fails to escape correlationism? It is because he doesn't begin by refuting correlationism but by positing as an axiom, a Real supposed to precede any position. If you begin with the Real, you can't refute the objection of the circle – that is, the Real is a *posited* Real. Laruelle posits the Real as autonomous and deduces from this axiom that thought is contingent for the Real. I believe, on the contrary, that you must begin with correlationism, then show that correlationism must itself posit the facticity of the correlation, and demonstrate in this way that this facticity is absolute contingency. Then, finally, you will accede to an independent Real. Hence, the only way to the Real, according to me, is through a proof, a *demonstration*: a demonstration unveils that facticity is not an *ignorance* of the hidden reasons of all things but a *knowledge* of the absolute contingency of all things. The simple intuition of facticity is transmuted by a *dianoia*, by a demonstration, into an intuition of a radical exteriority. I thought that facticity was the sign of the finitude and ignorance of thought. I thought I had, in facticity, a relation to my own deficient subjectivity. I discover now that what I took for human idiocy was

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truly an intuition, a radical intuition – that is, a relation to the Great Outside. We have a *nous* unveiled by a *dianoia*, an intuition unveiled by a demonstration. This is why I called it an intellectual intuition: not, of course, because it is an intuition which creates its object, as Kant defined it, but because it is an intuition discovered by reasoning.

I'd like to conclude with a final comparison between the principle of factuality and other philosophies in the twentieth century which tried to access a Real outside the circle of subjectivity, from Heidegger to Derrida. The main difference between these philosophies and *spéculation factuale* is that the latter avoids what I'd like to call the syndrome of a 'Real without realism'. Philosophies of the twentieth century, even when they tried to escape correlationism, generally – not always, but generally – denigrated realism, which was identified with naïve or dogmatic realism. In his book, Brassier excellently presents the significance of these ways of thinking. I quote:

Thus for much of twentieth-century continental philosophy, from Heidegger and Derrida to Levinas and Adorno, the only conceivable alternative to the Scylla of idealism on the one hand, whether transcendental or absolute, and the Charybdis of realism – which it seems is only ever naïve – on the other, lies in using the resources of conceptualisation against themselves in the hope of glimpsing some transcendent, non-conceptual exteriority.²¹

I think we can say the following: this Real, as a non-conceptual residue of the concept, separates itself from any realism, because it forbids any possibility of a conceptual

21. *Nihil Unbound*, 129.

discourse about the Real in itself. We can speak about the Real as the impossibility of any conceptualisation, but we can't conceptualise the Real. There is a disjunction between the Real and *logos*. A realism is, on the contrary, according to me, a *logos* which turns to the Real instead of turning *around* it. But what do I mean by 'turning to the Real' as regards *spéculation factuale*? My thesis is that there are specific conditions of contingency, which I call 'figures'. For example, I try to show that non-contradiction is a condition of contingency, since a contradictory reality couldn't change since it would already be what it is not. The necessity of non-contradiction is for me a consequence of the falsity of the Principle of Sufficient Reason: since nothing has any reason to be and stay what it is, since everything can change without any reason, nothing can be contradictory. That is what I try to demonstrate in *After Finitude*, so that a conceptual discourse about the properties of the Real proves to be possible. We are not condemned to a 'Real without realism'. I refuse this 'Real without realism', because if I don't have a rational procedure to discover specific properties of the Real, those properties threaten to be arbitrarily posited. My own work consists in elaborating this procedure – which I call 'derivation' – grounded on the Principle of Factuality and the conditions of contingency. Producing a procedure of this sort is for me one of the main challenges of a contemporary realism.

To conclude, I would say that what contemporary philosophy lacks is not so much the Real as realism: the Real *with* realism is the true challenge of philosophy, and that's why I think that the title of our day – speculative realism – was perfectly chosen, and is in itself a sort of event.

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SUHAIL MALIK: If your argument against correlationism is an argument which, as you said, must be a rational argument, and at the same time, the fact upon which your rational argument turns around, is a non-absolutisable fact of the argument for contingency you make, then it seems to me that the fact that's important for your argument is that you can't have absolute reason. So I'm wondering if there's a possible complaint of resurrecting a kind of relativism, because your own reasoning has no absolute reason to it.

QM: I think that the correlationist argument is destructive of the relation to the absolute. If you want to destroy absolutism, you just have to use the correlationist argument. So my strategy is to access the absolute *through* the correlationist argument. The correlationist argument is in fact the demonstration that thinking must think itself as a relation to the absolute. Why? Because as an argument it only works if you suppose that it is possible for it to think its own facticity. But you can't think this facticity without thinking it as an absolute, because if you think that this facticity exists only as a correlate – that the facticity of thinking exists as a correlate of thinking, so thinking itself cannot be factual – facticity disappears. If facticity is a correlate of thought, thought is no longer factual. And if facticity was only thinkable as a correlate of thought, we would be – not just philosophers but everyone – idealist philosophers. We could not even imagine our dying.

Ray has a very interesting reading of Heidegger and being-toward-death. For me, it is not being-toward-death, because death is a correlate of being-in-the-world. Death cannot fight Heidegger because death is a correlate of being-in-the world and *Dasein*. So there is no being-toward-death, because if you want being-toward-death you have to conceive an event able to survive you. You have to conceive a time able to survive you, because if time disappears with you, you don't disappear. To disappear is to disappear in time. This is a demonstration, then. The demonstration of correlationism means the contrary of what it thinks it means, but it is still a demonstration. Now, what is the demonstration, what does it prove? It proves that you can destroy in me the reality of any discourse, as an absolute discourse on absolute reality, using the Rortian tactic of saying that it is contingent: 'Give me the reason why it should be a universal discourse, a universal truth, a universal reality – give me the reason. It's not possible to give a reason.' And I think it's always like that in the history of philosophy. Metaphysics and scepticism – they are always like two enemies fighting against each other, but it is always in scepticism that we discover how to realize metaphysics. Montaigne's scepticism was the key to Descartes' new metaphysics, because it discovered a new way of thinking. I think that contemporary scepticism, the contemporary correlationism, shows us where to look for the absolute. You can pursue contingency, but you can't say that facticity is a fact. If you say facticity is a fact, that even contingency is contingent, what are you saying? The only one who can say that is Hegel. But I think – it's difficult for me to show you – I think that a demonstration is possible.

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I think that philosophy can be a discourse constituted by demonstrations if it renounces being a Hegelian demonstration of what there is. But, as I said to Graham, I think that it is possible to strictly demonstrate a certain truth, but this truth being the truth of the radical contingency of things, you absolutely allow for the freedom of all possible phenomenological descriptions and conceptual descriptions of the world. And effectively, I think that speculation can only take the form of this sort of demonstration. Sure, there is no reason to the world, but this absence of reason is not madness. It's not just delirium. You can have reasoning, strict reasoning, supervening on the absence of reason.

DUSTIN MCWHERTER: I want to ask you about something you said earlier. I think, when you were responding to Ray, you said that your project was one of possibility – how is it possible for science to know things about the pre-human world, such as the arche-fossil?²² But then when you were responding to Graham you mentioned that if everything is factual – if everything is contingent it has to be factual – the only way we can know about *particular* things is through description, like phenomenological description. So my question would be: what would a phenomenological relation to something like the arche-fossil be like? How would that be possible?

QM: In *After Finitude* I try to persuade the reader with what I call 'the problem of the arche-fossil'. The problem of the arche-fossil was for me a way to write in a context

22. For 'the problem of the arche-fossil' see **COLLAPSE** Vol. II, 15-54, 83-169.

principally dominated by correlationist philosophy. So I tried to show the correlationist reader – probably a correlationist – that there could be a problem in correlationism. The whole first chapter is saying: maybe there is a problem with this metaphysics ... And I just demonstrate the problem like that. Correlationism is just a consequence of Kantian philosophy, and Kantian philosophy is philosophy which pretends to answer the question of how sciences are possible, how physics is possible. Okay, but the problem is that physics describes some reality which precedes the existence of the human and even that of the earth, of any living reality. So, can we explain the meaning of science without the principle of the correlationist philosophy, which says there is no science, no meaning, in affirming that reality could exist without a subjective correlate to that reality? Is the Big Bang just a correlate of a proposition? You might say, 'Ah, your Big Bang is just your correlate'. No, no I assure you it isn't. I'm not that old! There is a problem, there is a little problem here! But, in my view, there is no particular problem in description. You can describe the real fact, but you have to explain how thought is able to speak to a reality which is *not* correlated to thought. That's why my project of realism is to try to respond to the Kantian question of how sciences are possible. It is a transcendental question, but the response, the answer, can't be transcendental. It's always from the inside that I try to defeat the correlationist. It's from the inside – the arche-fossil is a way to challenge the Kantian philosophy from the inside. My problem is a problem of the meaning of the sciences. If sciences have significance, have sense, reality is not merely a correlation of thought – how can that be possible? My project is to

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derive from a contingency which is absolute, the conditions which would allow me to deduce the absolutisation of mathematical discourse. So it would ground the possibility of sciences to speak about an absolute reality – by which I mean, not a necessary reality, but a reality independent of thought. I mean the physical universe, which is not necessary, but which is independent of thought. There are two senses of ‘absolute’ here: ‘absolute’ in the first sense means ‘absolutely necessary’. Contingency is absolutely necessary. But in the second sense, ‘absolute’ is that which is not essentially related to the thing. The physical universe is not necessary, in my view, but *is* absolutely independent of thought. I want to ground the possibility of these two ‘absolutes’.

ROBIN MACKAY: Your argument is philosophically positive and constructive, a constructive movement; but on the plane of natural science it seems as if it could be destructive, because you begin with a position where we assume that natural laws are necessary, but we can only assume that *for us*. So, in other words, we have a working system of natural science, but always with a correlationist coefficient added to everything we say. Where we end up is with a situation where you get rid of the correlationist coefficient but instead you have the factual coefficient. So you have the absolute knowledge of contingency – the necessity of contingency – but my question is: can you then replenish this emptiness with natural science? Can you rebuild natural science from that? Because, surely, any scientific statement you make may not be valid tomorrow or in the next minute, so don’t you destroy the basis of natural science at the same time as you secure a rational foundation for it?

QM: I say that everything is contingent. So laws, according to me, are contingent. They are not necessary. As Hume said, we are unable to demonstrate any such necessity. I think that irrationality, in fact, is a consequence of believing in the necessity of laws. If you believe that laws are necessary, what are the consequences? 1) You believe that laws are necessary, and 2) You are unable to explain why they are necessary. You are unable to demonstrate the necessity of laws – unless you are Hegel. So you have a mysterious necessity, and if you want to look for God in this mysterious necessity, as the anthropist does, you will find it.

I make a distinction between speculation – what I do – and metaphysics. Metaphysics is dominated by the Principle of Sufficient Reason, and the Principle of Sufficient Reason says that things are necessary. If you think that things are necessary, but you can no longer demonstrate this necessity – unless you are Hegel – then you create a mysterious entity. ‘Why are the laws necessary? It’s an extremely big mystery’. And this creates a lot of superstition – anthropism, providentialism, etc. ‘Oh, we are astonished by the laws, they are incredible. 1) The laws are necessary, 2) They have created man – *there must be a reason*’! No, there is no reason, because they are *not* necessary. That’s my response. They are not necessary. ‘But how do you know that?’ By reason, by my reason. Hume shows that. Hume says just use your reason, faced with the facts. Try and demonstrate that it is necessary – you can’t. What does it mean? It means that reason says, ‘No, it is not necessary’. And reason has said this very loudly, century after century. It is not necessary. It’s just a fact. Reason can’t demonstrate that it is necessary

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– not because reason is deficient, but because we are mistaken in supposing that it *is* necessary. What makes us believe that these laws are necessary? Our perception, says Hume, our sociality. It's the result of experience, of the fact that laws are stable – stable, not necessary. Stability is not necessity – it's a fact, it's a fact. For example, for an insect I am very stable. If the insect lives for only three days, then I will seem immortal to it. I'm stable, more stable than the insect, but stability does not mean necessity. So, experience says there is stability, and we can say it is not necessity, and who are metaphysicians believing? Reason or perception? Reason or experience? Me, I want to believe reason, and reason says there is no reason. And I don't think this is a destruction of science. Why? Because it is, on the contrary, a rational demonstration that sciences must be empirical. Why can't physicists demonstrate the necessary determination of a law by reason alone? Because these are *facts*, not necessities. We could say, 'Yes, but with your philosophy, laws would disappear in one minute.' But this is probabilistic argumentation. And I try to show this, I try to deconstruct this reasoning, this probabilistic reasoning about the laws. I try to show that in Hume and in Kant you have this sort of reasoning. We believe that if laws were contingent they would change frequently. No, no, no, because we don't have the right to apply probability to the laws, because this would presuppose a totality of cases. But in my view there is no such totality of possibility, because the transfinite of Cantor in mathematics and set theory demonstrated that there is no quantity of all quantities.²³

23. See COLLAPSE Vol. II, 55-81.

IHG: I want to ask you about the Principle of Sufficient Reason, which you use exquisitely, I think, and in a properly Leibnizian sense. The Principle of Sufficient Reason asks only that there be a reason for being, not that it be *the* reason, not that there might not be another later – only that there be one. There must be reasoning. And it seems to me that was one of the reasons why you demonstrate, both in your book and in your talk just now, considerable admiration for, and a logical or argumentative indebtedness to, the classical idealists. You have, it seems to me, an homage in your book to Schelling and his critical understanding of Hegel, for example.²⁴ This is in part a response to what Dustin was saying about saving the sciences, and to go back to the question that Ray raised much earlier in the day which concerns, really, the issue of revisability. We don't need to specify the quantity of sufficient reasons to be given over an infinite time. The Principle of Sufficient Reason merely states that there be *a* reason, not that it be *one* reason. That gets you revisability.

QM: Yes, of course, but I would say, the Principle of Sufficient Reason is able to support a theory of revisability – we can change our reason, etc. But there must be at least one reason. So, you can change a theory, but it is

24. *Après la finitude* (AF) overtly seeks to 'renew the thinking of the absolute' (AF39) in post-Kantian philosophy. For examples of its homage to Schelling, consider Meillassoux's differentiation of subjective from objective, or of transcendental from wild, idealism (AF 35-6); the modal extension of ontology in the form of the '*pouvoir-être*' (AF 73-80) or '*Seynkönnen*'; the asymmetrical and irreversible temporalisation of ancestry, factuality, and speculation (*passim*). Finally, for Meillassoux as for Schelling, Hegel is the thinker who subjugates difference to identity (AF 95). [- IHG]

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not the changing of nature. But what I am trying to do is to claim that nature can change. There is the problem of believing in the necessity of laws, but that's not the problem of believing in the necessity of theories. Nature stays what it is, but theory changes. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Newton perished and Einstein replaced him, but it is not because nature changed in 1905! So, the Principle of Sufficient Reason can extend to, can justify, the evolution of theory, yes. But I want to justify the possible evolution of *nature*.

IHG: So, there needs to be an additional ground.

QM: Without any reason.

IHG: Yes.

PETER HALLWARD: That was a fascinating paper. I'm confused by a very commonsense kind of problem, and I'm sure people have asked you these things many times. But it seems to me that you shuttle between an *ontological* argument that you associate with metaphysics – and particularly the metaphysics of sufficient reason, pre-Kantian metaphysics – and use that to demolish what are essentially *epistemological* arguments that underpin the correlationist post-Kantian position, where, for example, the question of necessity is much more difficult to distinguish from the status of the fact, of the factual. So the question of what is necessary about a certain factual configuration – that we necessarily breathe

oxygen, or that gravity has a necessary relation between masses and so on – all those kinds of facts the correlationist says we can *know* as necessary – in other words, as having a rational justification – and so we can have an account of gravity and so on. But the correlationist position is not about the ontological status of things. For the correlationist, it's not that to *be* is to be the correlate of thought. Correlationism is just a bland epistemological argument of what we can *know* about gravity, or about evolution, or those kinds of things. And so I don't see how the correlationist would be affected by your refutation. They would simply say, 'You're telling us that we can *know* things about an absolute reality independent of knowledge', and they would simply ask you, 'Well, tell us what you know about death, or about the Big Bang, and so on, independent of our knowledge of it', and you will be able to tell them nothing. In other words, it would have the status of arguments that justify something like a negative theology: we can reason our way to knowing that there must be something about which we know nothing.

QM: Correlationism – you're right – is not an ontology, strictly speaking. The correlationist – it's true – doesn't say that reality is the correlation. It's the metaphysics of subjectivity that says that. He just says we cannot know anything apart from what we can perceive or conceive, *etc.* That's all. I refuse to say, on the contrary, that I can't say anything about the absolute. If I can deduce from the absence of reason, from contingency, certain aspects of what things in themselves must be like then I am saying something about the absolute. I know for instance that even if we don't exist,

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whether or not we think, things are non-contradictory. So, my problem is precisely to deduce from facticity some precise, fixed determinations which are able to explain very simple things.

When I look at this bottle, I see qualities which seem to be contingent, but in this bottle there is also something which is not visible, perceptual: its facticity. Its facticity is invisible. Only humans can conceive the facticity of the bottle, because to conceive it means to be able to ask certain questions. And facticity, I believe, is a position which is necessary for correlationism, because correlationism, ultimately, can't answer and doesn't want to answer the question of the ultimate ground. If it could answer it, it wouldn't be correlationism anymore. So facticity is a correlationist thesis. But facticity, for the correlationist, is just our *inability to conceive* the ultimate ground, not the *lack* of an ultimate ground. But what I say is that in conceiving this facticity as just ignorance, you in fact implicitly conceive the capacity of thought to conceive its own end, and thus conceive positively an event which is not dependent on its contingent existence. You – the correlationist – say, 'You cannot say anything about death'. Well, I can't say anything about what it is like to be dead, but I can speak about death as an absolute time which is able to destroy any determined entity, in which respect, the principle of non-contradiction says something about the condition of death. I don't speak of what it is *like* to be dead, of course.

RAY BRASSIER: That was great. It cleared lots of things up. It's just that I wonder if the argument from performative contradiction – the key correlationist argument – is

as strong, as irrecusable, as you seem to be suggesting. Because the claim is that to posit something non-posited is a performative contradiction. But the correlationist must claim to know that the difference between the posited real and the non-posited real is already internal to this concept, to this act of positing. So, in other words, how does the correlationist know that there's no difference between the *concept* of an indifferent real and the indifferent real? He accuses the metaphysician of transgressing the bounds of knowledge by insisting that there's a difference between indifferent reality and our *concept* of indifferent reality, but in order to do that the correlationist must know that that difference is itself conceptual. How does the correlationist know that the difference between the concept of indifference and real indifference is itself internal to the concept? Because the act of positing itself presupposes that there's already a relation, and you must know that you exist in order to be positing, and the relation is not self positing. There's always something that seems to kind of escape and precede as a condition of positing. And in order for the correlationist to say, 'Yes, but I've already posited this difference', he must claim that this is already internal to the concept, that it's already internal to thought. In other words, it might be that the argument from performative contradiction used by the correlationist is not as robust and as devastating as they claim it is.

QM: You're asking how the correlationist knows that there is a difference between the X and the posited X?

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RB: How he knows there is *no* difference – there is a difference but the difference is internal to the act of positing.

QM: In fact, the correlationist says he doesn't know, but he says that metaphysics doesn't know either. He says to the metaphysician, 'How do you know that you are speaking about the X which is essentially the same as the posited X about which you are effectively speaking? How do you know that?'

RB: Okay, but how does he know there isn't a difference?

QM: No, the correlationist doesn't say that he knows that. I will speak for the correlationist ... I asked myself a question, a single question. When I was reading Kant, one day I asked myself: for Kant, are we sure that the thing-in-itself is different from the phenomenon? Because we might well think that Kant says: that the thing-in-itself is unknown doesn't mean that the thing-in-itself is different from the phenomenon, it just means that we don't know whether it is the same or not. But the Transcendental Aesthetic, in fact, says we know that the thing-in-itself cannot be the same as the phenomenon. In fact, Kant says three things about the thing-in-itself. He says that the thing-in-itself exists, that the thing-in-itself is thinkable as non-contradictory – that's what the commentators say – but in fact he also says a third thing: that the thing-in-itself is not identical to the space-time phenomenon. He knows that. He knows that by a very interesting argument

which says that science can only be about phenomena. So if the thing-in-itself was phenomenal, just empirically known, we couldn't have scientific knowledge of it, because there would be no form, no subjective form which is always the same. For Kant, science is possible because we have the subjective form which is always the same: space, time, and the categories. So if science is possible, it demonstrates that we don't know the thing-in-itself – science demonstrates that we don't have any knowledge of the thing-in-itself. So, for a correlationist, Kant has an argument, a very interesting one – that we know that the thing-in-itself cannot be the same as the posited phenomenon. But I don't even say that, I don't think that. My correlationist is more modest than Kant. He just says that we don't know if the X, the absolute X, is the same as the posited X. Maybe it is the same, maybe, why not? 'But', says the correlationist, 'I don't know if it is the case or not. How could I know? How could I possibly know?' As Hegel said, you cannot surprise the thing from behind to know what it is when we are not there. If we are paranoiac we can install microphones in our house so as to know what people are saying about us when we are not there, but we cannot do that to things. Where are the things? They are not there. We cannot go outside our skin to know what is out there. Maybe the irony would be that this world is in itself exactly as it is for us – wow! In that case philosophers are absolutely useless! Maybe, maybe. Correlationism doesn't say it is impossible, it says it's unknowable.