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Genesis: Traversing the Correlation

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Abstract:

“And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep” Genesis

This article examines the problem of belief as it relates to radical negativity and as such engages with two positions in regard to the Real of the void. The first seeks to conceptualise this void in positive terms, as something that can be reached and in a sense overcome. The second, by contrast, situates the void as something inherent to the very coordinates of reality and being itself. As such the following discussion specifically examines the status of objective reality within the continental philosophical paradigm.

Introductory remarks

The contemporary problem of materialism is posited within a broader framework of debates surrounding the status of realism and its relationship to Hegel. Central to this discourse is the problem of how the subject can gain access to a reality separate from the subject. Or more specifically, what are the conditions for the subject to break out of a correlation of thinking and being. The French philosopher Quentin Meillassoux in his first book *After finitude* (2011) offers a compelling account of this problematic and at one level draws out the possible co-ordinates for such a 'materialist' reality. In contrast to the realist position, Žižek formulates a critique that engages with the problem of contingency through Hegel and the logic of radical negativity. On these grounds, Hegel's position provides an account of the relationship between subject/object. This article will critically explore Meillassoux's thought from a Hegelian perspective.

Kant's Copernican revolution secured with it the guarantee that thought of a noumenal realm will always be beyond consciousness - we can never know reality-in-itself outside of our experience of it. While approaching this problematic from a range of positions, subsequent post-Kantian philosophy can be considered as sharing with it a central theme: namely, the inability of such an objective world-in-itself to exist outside of any subjective relationship to it. As Brassier puts it, 'objective reality must be transcendently guaranteed, whether by pure consciousness, intersubjective consensus, or a community of rational agents; without such guarantors, it is a metaphysical chimera' (Brassier, 2007: 51). Thus the conditions of reality post-Kant are offered through a structurally open field that, on the one hand, allow a discursive battleground in which philosophers debate the co-ordinates of our ontology, while on the other, subtly reaffirming a fidelity to the correlation itself. The conditions of the correlation are inherent to the very conditions of a conceptualised reality through the lens of a post-Kantian framework. Reality is naturalised inasmuch as it does not offer, in

an overt sense, a reality that exists 'for us'; it cannot exist without first a relationship to either thought or discourse. Subsequently, all claims to knowledge of a reality are always already filtered by the correlation. To refute this relationship is to rely on a naive realism which in-itself, by virtue of its being thought and said, is already within the correlate. Yet Meillasoux claims to have developed a break with the correlation.

Gods of Unreason: a Brief History of Belief, Reason and the Rejection of the Absolute.

One of the implications of the correlation is the necessary outcome of post-religious versions of Gods. Inadvertently, with the reversal of reason back onto itself, the space for 'Gods' appears through the inability of the subject to know things-in-themselves. As Žižek puts it:

(T)he critique of religion ended up as the critique of reason, as reason's self-limitation which again opened up a space for religious faith, only this time not for the "God of Philosophers," the God whose existence or features can be demonstrated or at least circumscribed by our reasoning, but for the paradoxically abyssal God qua radical Otherness, totally beyond *logos* (Žižek, 2012: 626).

In limiting access to reason from dimensions such as his ethics and the noumenal world, religion, or at least certain forms of faith, return as reason's shadow. Much of philosophy's rejection of modes of thought that conceptualises an absolute, and the contemporary trend away from the metaphysical, Meillassoux argues, have resulted in a necessary acceptance of belief in God(s). In Meillassoux's words, 'by forbidding reason any claim to the absolute, the end of metaphysics has taken the form of an exacerbated return of the religious. Or again: the end of ideologies has taken the form of the unqualified victory of religiosity' (Meillassoux, 2011: 45).

In this regard Meillassoux makes a point about the relationship between the rejection of philosophy's ability to think an absolute and the subsequent rise of belief. A marriage between the critique of metaphysics and religion exists as a tropism in contemporary philosophy. In the critique of each both are drawn together. In destroying the rational framework through which religion, and more generally mysticism, new age spiritualism (etc.) finds meaning, the ability for the metaphysical to exist is also affected. This in turn impacts on the (pseudo) –rational discourse through which various religions critique each other rendering them impotent to engage beyond arguments of belief. Within this matrix, Meillassoux is keen to explicate the true problematic of this tropism: in the removal of thought from the metaphysico-religious - and this is the crucial point - we remove the ability to think an absolute and thus confine it to the realm of belief. As Meillassoux puts it, 'once the absolute has become unthinkable, even atheism, which also targets God's inexistence in the manner of an absolute, is reduced to a mere belief, and hence to a religion, albeit of the nihilist kind' (Meillassoux , 2011: 46). In rendering the absolute beyond reason, or levelling it to the status of belief, discourse is void of rationality and is forged in competing systems of faith. Paradoxically, the harder we attempt to step away from the absolute, the more it is reclaimed by belief: we replace rationality with fideism. Meillassoux is keen to point out that the form this fideism takes in contemporary life-world is through scepticism: 'The destruction of the metaphysical rationalization of Christian theology has resulted in a generalized becoming-religious of thought, viz., in a fideism of any belief whatsoever' (Meillassoux, 2011:46).

Though never using the term correlation, John D Caputo (2007) argues this process of a marriage between the rejection of meta-physics and the rise of belief can trace its genus as far back as the 11th century. St, Anselm of Canterbury, in his book *Proslogion*, sets about defining belief in terms of a lost love seeking to find one another. St Anselm rethinks faith:

The God whom Anselm seeks is a party to the search, implicated in the very undertaking to find him, expected to help, indeed to lead the search and to give the seeker signs, for the seeker's attention is distracted by worldly

cares and his mind is darkened by sin. The *Proslogion* thus does not describe a movement from cognitive degree zero to infinity, but a groping and confused sense of something or someone, somewhere, to a clarified sense of who and where (Caputo, 2007: 39).

Anselm is battling with himself in respect of a God who is both within him and external to him. But there is a sense that this God, which is effectively the position of Kant also, is in some way, unthinkable. Anselm's God is located in the Lacanian register of the Real insofar as it is more a love relationship with that which is beyond the symbolic. It is a belief that asks to believe in itself forged on a foundation of uncertainty. This particular mode of belief is almost formulated on the inherent failure of both the believer and the deity as each search for the other.

If the secular age sees the start of what Meillassoux later calls the correlation, it is fully actualised with the onset of Modernity. There appears a certain shift of religion through people like Kant from believer to subject with God being intertwined through reason. The new subjects are not concerned with God's involvement in conceptualising reality outside of the limits of reason. After dividing reason into his three positions of knowledge, ethics and aesthetics Kant later creates a space for religion in his *Religion within the limits of Reason Alone*. Having divided the human experience between these elements we find God inhabiting the space of the moral law which of itself is an expression of reason. As Caputo puts it, 'that means that we should distinguish the rational element in religion, which is its universal ethical content, from the superstitions, supernatural dogmas, and the cultic practices which vary from one religion to another' (Caputo, 2007: 48). Already in Kant we experience a form of inability to conceptualise an absolute beyond his system of rationality, 'when Kant prohibits us to think the Absolute (since the noumenal is beyond the grasp of our reason), the Absolute itself does not thereby disappear – such a critical delimitation of human knowledge opens up a new discursive space for access to the Absolute' (Žižek, 2012: 627). Meillassoux and Caputo consider this access as on the one hand 'irrational' insofar as the discourse used is one of rationalism. This is an assumption challenged through Hegel.

The Perspective of Perspective (and then Hegel)

Rationalism, in this totalising form, is now attacked from two positions through the work of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche. In both thinkers, reason's claim to truth is approached through a subjective stance and the philosophy of the absolute attacked. For Kierkegaard, 'faith' should not be based on reason (far from it, his reason concluded that) - existence was painful and could only be nullified through a 'leap of faith'. A long way from the Kantian clinical rationality, the anxiety of reality can only be ameliorated with the uncertainty of belief. In his prioritising of the subject, the metaphysical is understood only as a backdrop against the existential.

If Kierkegaard offers a perspective through a form of 'act' in belief through faith, then Nietzsche offers the perspective of perspective. With it, truth, as such, is removed another step from the absolute to a position held by the individual:

Truth is a mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, anthropomorphisms, in short a sum of human relations which have been subjected to poetic and rhetorical intensification, translation and decoration (Nietzsche in Kaufmann, 1976: 46-47).

The Enlightenment meta-physics is replaced with the Dionysian belief that asks the subject to transcend both Kant's categories and Christianity's herd mentality. Philosophy's narratives had become nothing more than stories removed from human existence. Nietzsche required the subject to transcend mere belief through the experience of those willing to risk everything. Truth for Nietzsche is then formulated in a historical sense with its genus a relationship to power. We experience in Nietzsche a form of positivity in regard to the generation of truth that is bound to pre-existing hermeneutics or 'perspectives'. Thus, what Nietzsche calls his Will to Power is this process that draws its meaning through the prejudices of past 'truths'. In other words, for Nietzsche truth is a form of overcoming past relationships of power. This ambiguity in Nietzsche's position highlights the subtle nuance of the Hegelian reading of truth with

its emphasis on conceptualising truth through radical negativity. To the Hegelian, the very notion of truth itself is framed through a logic of dialectics, not through any sense of an overcoming of historical perspectives. It is through constant failure, or the inability of any position to fully account for its own closure that an alternative is recognised. This is not to suggest that in Hegel we see the transition from negativity into some positive overcoming as such. In this naive reading of Hegel we experience dialectics as producing something akin to victory through defeat. To Nietzsche, this change in perspective would really amount to a form of mentality, or a weakness to overcome whatever stood in the way of the production of the subject's truth or belief. This is a misreading of Hegel and should be resisted. For Hegel, the truth of the dialectic is in its own radical negativity which ultimately formulates the subject itself. At a deeper level self-consciousness is for Hegel, 'absolute negativity, pure self-relating existence' (Hegel, 2003: 110). The subject's relationship to truth is only possible insofar as any truth as such is radical negativity itself:

In short, the subject has to fully identify with the force that threatens to wipe him out: what he feared in fearing death was the negative power of his own Self. There is thus no reversal of negativity into positive greatness – the only "greatness" here is this negativity itself (Žižek, 2012: 198).

The shift of perspective for Hegel is the shift that recognises a logic of differentiation and the inability of any notion of completeness or universality outside of the particular point of failure. Alternatively, for Nietzsche, the shift in perspective is at the level of positivity and the affirmative insofar as the Will to Power is the understanding of past historical perspectives with the imperative to in some sense 'overcome'.

The space for belief post 19th century is thus divided. On the one hand, the natural sciences, the human sciences, the economy and politics, while being still relevant as a discourse, its position is diminishing, while the claims of meta-physics and the philosophies of the absolute now losing their grip. On the other, as Nietzsche is

proclaiming the death of God, the faithful still hold with its congregations consisting of those who rejected Modernity's new 'truths'. In Caputo's words:

Modernity had no spiritual vision to offer in the place of the one it had torn down, which is perhaps why religion still prospered among the poor and uneducated rank and file in the churches. But religion was dead and dying fast among its learned despisers who confidently predicted that it was destined to disappear as science progressed and the general level of learning rose (Caputo, 2007: 56).

Religion was, as Caputo describes, altering, but its death is perhaps an over simplification. Using the term re-occupation, Blumenberg (1985) describes the replication of secularisation of theological concepts in post-Enlightenment Modernity. Blumenberg argues that Enlightenment ideas of the teleological emancipation of humanity, are structured in Christian theology. He claimed that, 'reoccupation is the reality underlying the appearance of secularisation is driven by neediness of consciousness that has been overextended and then disappointed in regard to the great questions and great hopes' (Blumenberg, 1985: 85). The great questions and hopes are an example of reoccupation, from the Christian faith in God to Modernity's faith in reason. To Blumenberg the teleological nature of the hegemonic theological ideology of the middle ages, is structurally the same as the ideology of reason and the discursive formations of science that have been dominant since the Enlightenment. This position was first developed by Carl Schmitt who claimed that, 'all the significant concepts of the modern doctrine of the state are secularised theological concepts' (in Blumenberg, 1985: 92). Blumenberg saw political absolutes as reoccupying theological absolutism. Thus ideas such as the belief in self-assertion and autonomy – that are central tenets of Modernity – are examples of the reoccupation of the claim of divine omnipotence of God.

To put a Hegelian accent the Blumenberg argument against Caputo's claim we should conceptualise reoccupation not in positive terms, rather, as radical negativity itself. What is reoccupied for Hegel is precisely the very difference itself. In these terms the

difference between the secularised state and church, is a reoccupation of the process of Othering through which meaning, as such, is generated. The absolute as radical negativity is therefore reoccupied as the very antagonism that defines each position providing its Real limit or qualitative reversal. For Hegel this absolute knowing is the, 'recognition of the absolute limitation of the frame of being' (Daly, 2014: 9). Allowing ourselves certain creative liberties with both Hegel and Blumberg, we could suggest that it is an absolute knowing of the 'field-ness' through which reoccupation occurs, that defines the secular and the religious. Or, the reoccupation of pure difference itself.

Alternatively, with Nietzsche's position, or rather, the acceptance of contingency into the mainstream paths to 'truth', and its inherent paradox, that the perspective itself is no more than a perspective, a relationship is formed to belief. Here an interesting parallel with pre-platonic versions of Christianity that, as St. Anselm articulated, require a subjective dimension of the individual themselves are drawn. Our beliefs and practices no longer require any notion of an absolute but are drawn back into the subject to be positioned or articulated as uncertainty in anything other than it could be 'other'. Even science itself is subjected to the scrutiny of the perspective as the rejection of the absolute and/or the death of God translated as just another position.

Now the death of God is turned against itself. Why not God's death itself just another form of perspective? With the subject's inability to engage with the absolute, both the human and the natural sciences are levelled by the contingency that the 'truth' could always be other. In these terms the death of God is projected back onto itself, or the death of the death of God.

While the argument of the perspective is being proposed to have its genus in Nietzsche, it is a form of thought that has had overreaching influence through the subsequent schools of relativist thinking, not least as it is articulated in post-modernism. It is beyond the scope of this piece to track the influence of such a mode of thought on all contemporary positions. We can though make the point that we are currently experiencing, a certain, irrationality in regard to claims to 'truth'. Belief itself is elevated

to the status of reason and what we are left with are the God (s), '(t)oday, Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud are all dead but God is doing just fine, thank you very much' (Caputo, 2007: 64). Rationality is eroded first by degrees of reason which are in turn culturally relativised. Thought becomes captive to being culturally and historically specific at best; or, in its most extreme, as a mere language game. The subject reconfigured as a discursive construction cannot break out of, as Meillassoux terms it, the correlation. In the rejection of the absolute, our relationship to the 'truth' is either through a 'perspective' or a belief, 'if there is an absolute truth only piety can provide it not thought' (Meillassoux, 2011: 47).

The contemporary rise in certain modes of 'irrational' thought - from religious fundamentalism to new waves of new ageism - is, from this perspective, not understood as post-secular. It is part of a mode of thought that is the result of philosophies rejection of the absolute, or as Žižek puts it, 'not a regression to premodern times, but a necessary outcome of Western critical thought' (Žižek, 2012: 626).

Using this narrative Meillassoux claims that all engagement with thought and reality is caught in a correlation. This is to say that the subject-object relationship is forever trapped within a certain matrix that makes the separation of subjectivity and 'reality' impossible. In other words we cannot think 'for us' a reality that is not bound to the correlation. Convincingly, Meillassoux argues that for every moment in this history of the development of thought (post- absolute), different forms of the correlate emerge. So the correlation as such, can be conceptualised through a range of thought from subjective idealism, to German idealism, through to Wittgenstein and later post-modernism. On each occasion they share one characteristic, 'correlationism consists in disqualifying the claim that it is possible to consider the realms of subjectivity and objectivity independently of one another' (Meillassoux, 2011: 5).

What Meillassoux develops from this narrative is an absolutisation of contingency itself that, to avoid falling back into the correlate, must be a reality in which we can never know things-in-themselves (at least not in any traditional sense). This absolutisation of

contingency produces a dimension he terms 'hyper-chaos' that is accessible only through mathematics and science. This unknown reality must remain beyond thought at this stage if it is to avoid the idealist trap. For the correlationist can argue that we cannot think reality beyond thought, though it may exist; and this reality cannot exist 'for me' - for this itself results again in idealism – but we can argue that a reality could exist regardless of my thinking it 'for me' or not. The separation of the in-itself and a for-us (that does not have to be exclusively for-me) give the co-ordinates for the possibility of realities that might be other. The correlationist can only maintain a position that avoids idealism by accepting that there absolutely could be a reality-(ies) outside a relationship between the subject and object correlate.

Facticity is the name Meillassoux gives for a reality to exist without sufficient reason, the contingency of the correlate itself. It is in the absolutization of facticity that is the ultimate goal of Meillassoux's critique of the correlationist circle. The givenness-without-reason of the correlation, by accepting that everything is necessarily contingent or without reason, produces a set of conditions where it is possible to access the absolute. This absolute has to exist without reason and provides the co-ordinates for a reality that Meillassoux describes as a place where:

Everything could actually collapse: from trees to stars, from stars to laws, from physical laws to logical laws; and this not by virtue of some superior law whereby everything is destined to perish, but by virtue of the absence of any superior law capable of preserving anything, no matter what, from perishing. (Meillassoux, 2006: 53).

Facticity exists in this sense only if it is absolute, that there absolutely must be something outside of the correlation and this something must exist without reason. Facticity must exist in a speculative context as necessary and without reason and cannot be deduced only described. Meillassoux terms this factuality. Factuality is the condition of the absolute necessary character of facticity, and as such is a form of guarantee of something that exists outside the correlate. Though we cannot know at this

stage what it is, only its status as an absolute status of contingency itself which he calls hyper-chaos.

On Speculation and the Absolute

Meillassoux's development from epistemological limitation to a positive ontological feature is problematic. Meillassoux's 'problem' is ultimately that shared by Hegel, namely: how do we arrive at something from nothing? Meillassoux's reading of the absolute status of contingency carries with it a different meaning to the Hegelian account. As Žižek puts it, he, 'crucially simplifies the properly Hegelian relationship between necessity and contingency' (Žižek in Bryant *et al*, 2011: 414). Meillassoux argues that it is contingency and contingency alone that is absolutely necessary: the absolute is this contingency and it is this alone that is necessary. This fails to acknowledge the retrospective manner in which necessity mediates contingency insofar as it provides the co-ordinates for an intelligible structuring principle. Or in Žižek's words, '(t)he starting point is a contingent multitude; through its self-mediation ('spontaneous self-organization'), contingency engenders-positing its immanent necessity, in the same way that Essence is the result of the self-mediation of Being' (Žižek in Bryant *et al*, 2011: 414). For Hegel 'laws are already themselves contingent' (Žižek, 2012: 637); radical contingency in itself does not reject laws in favour for some form of chaos; rather, contingency itself, in an absolute sense, wants the structure of law. Unity is therefore formed through an oppositional structure, or mediation between and within the relationship between necessity and contingency:

On first approach, it appears that their encompassing unity is necessary, that necessity itself posits and mediates contingency as the external field in which it expresses or actualizes itself – contingency itself is necessary, the result of the self-externalization and self-mediation of notional necessity. However, it is crucial to supplement this unity with the opposite, with contingency as the encompassing unity of itself and necessity: the very elevation of necessity into the structuring principle of contingent field of multiplicity is a contingent act; one

can almost say: the outcome of a contingent (“Open”) struggle for hegemony (Žižek, 638: 2012).

The mediation or structuring unity through this failure is the Hegelian absolute, or the limit through which any notion is made possible. It is precisely this inherent failure of the very identity itself that creates unity. Or in other words, unity as such is, ‘the name of a radical tension, or impossibility, that forever bars any identity’ (Daly, 2014: 5).

Paradoxically any notion of identity is as a process of a dialectical movement through inherent failure – a dimension of becoming, not a unity in any positive sense.

Hegel’s speculative identity can be explored further through his example of religion and the state. The unity of identity is marked by a certain inherent lack. This is an argument developed by Hegel in *The Philosophy of Religion*: ‘In general religion and the foundation of the State is one and the same thing; they are identical in and for themselves’ (Hegel, 2007: 236). The speculative dimension in this statement lies not in as a positive articulation: it is not that they are one and the same in any normative sense. They are read in terms of two poles of inherent failure that achieve meaning through the others lack. Religion is conceptualised precisely as that which cannot account for its own failure, its obsession with control, its inability to prove God in any actual sense, the sexual deviancy of its clergy and so on. Religion is both the founder of the state, in its formal context; while at the same time its internal failure in terms of a positive identity. On the other hand, the state only achieves consistency through a series of particularities of which religion is one. In Žižek’s words:

Therein consists the speculative identity of the State and religion: in the overlap of the two lacks, in the co-dependence between the deficiency of the State (its lack of identity with religion) and the inherent deficiency of the determinate form of religion to which the State refers as its foundation – State and religion are thus identical *per negationem* (Žižek, 2002: 104)

While speculation for Meillassoux is a result of a positivisation of contingency that produces a separation of subjectivity and reality, for Hegel the term has an almost contradictory meaning in a radical negativity itself. Through his break with the correlation, Meillassoux assumes an objective field outside of the subject's relationship to it. Hegel clearly rejects any such standpoint, affirming instead that reality exists precisely for us insofar as the subject is the product of substance's inability to fully account for itself. In other words, reality is always, to use the psychoanalytic term 'Non-all', it can never exist independently (for us) outside of the subject's relationship to it. The speculation is therefore not for a finitude beyond the subject; rather, the speculation for Hegel is one forged on the absolute failure of both reality (substance) and subject: we are already bound to the very coordinates of reality's existence, 'Substance shows itself to be essentially Subject' (Hegel, 1977: 21). To Hegel, the subject only knows itself through a process of othering. Likewise, the absolute in these terms is not, as Meillassoux seems to suggest, something attainable 'out there'; rather, the absolute is the inherent failure of this very movement of the radical negativity of the dialectical process itself.

This gap or conceptual lack must be considered inherent to both the absolute itself and to both the subject and substance. For the absolute to be accessible, it is only ever accessible to us in an imperfect sense insofar as its very existence is contingent on the relationship of othering forged on inherent failure. This point is developed by Žižek:

'If we can think our knowledge of reality (i.e., the way reality appears to us) as radically failed, as radically different from the absolute, then this gap (between for-us and in-itself) must be part of the Absolute itself, so that the very feature that seemed forever to keep us away from the Absolute is the only feature which directly unites us with the absolute (Žižek in Bryant *et al*, 2011: 413).

In opposition to Meillassoux, the Hegelian absolute is this very failure itself. Meillassoux's move from epistemological limitation to his positive ontology is re-cast as points of Real failure. In these terms, the absolute is the impossible relationship of

subject = substance. The subject, far from being something that can exist (or even think) independently of substance finds itself no more than the point of failure for substance. Likewise substance is configured not in any way as something than can be set apart; rather, substance itself is defined through its own negation through subject. As Hegel puts it:

(T)he living Substance is being which is in truth Subject, or, what is the same, is in truth actual only in so far as it is the movement of positing itself, or is the mediation of its self-othering with itself. This Substance is, as Subject, pure, simple negativity, and is for this very reason the bifurcation of the simple; it is the doubling which sets up opposition, and then again the negation of this indifferent diversity and of its antithesis (the immediate simplicity). Only this self-restoring same-ness, or this reflection in otherness within itself – not an original or immediate unity as such – is the True. It is the process of its own becoming, the circle that presupposes its end as its goal, having its end also as its beginning; and only by being worked out to its end, is its actual (Hegel, 1977:10).

The absolute for Hegel is this inherent radical negativity that paradoxically frames two irresolvable points of tension: ‘Of the Absolute it must be said that it is essentially a *result*, that only in the end is it what it truly is; and that precisely in this consists its nature, viz. To be actual, subject, the spontaneous becoming of itself (Hegel, 1977: 11). In this view, radical negativity, is bound to the very processes of ontologization and signification itself. This is a difference in perspective to Meillassoux’s version of the Real. In this regard Meillassoux’s approach, at least from a Hegelian perspective, is neither materialist nor speculative. Ironically, while Meillassoux and the Speculative Realists set out in pursuit of materialism, they end up reinventing an idealist version. Hegel on the other hand, begins with idealism and pushes towards a truly materialist account of reality through subject/substance.

Enter the Real: Two Very Different Interpretations

The distinction between these positions is illustrated in Meillassoux's conceptualisation of the Real. In Meillassoux we are given a sense of separation between the radical negativity and reality that is not present in Hegel or in its later psychoanalytic incarnation. This is evident when Meillassoux argues that he refuses '(the) "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' (in Brassier, R. et al, 2007: 435). In these terms, radical negativity is articulated as something that is overcome by realism; it is more a pre-ontological problematic that is distinct from realism, '(f)or Meillassoux, the Real is something that can be captured, and represented, in positive terms by the realism of scientific thought' (Daly, 2014: 14). In other words, realism in some sense offers, through science, a discourse that can engage with the Real, to make sense of it. As Meillassoux puts it, '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*. Realism is, on the contrary, according to me, a *logos* that turns to the Real instead of turning *around* it (Brassier, R. et al, 2007: 435).

The contrasting point is on the articulation of the primacy of the ontological void, 'the only way to account effectively for the status of (self-) consciousness is to assert the ontological incompleteness of 'reality' itself: there is 'reality' only in so far as there is an ontological gap, a crack, at its very heart – that is, a traumatic excess, a foreign body that cannot be integrated into it' (Žižek, 1999: 60). To develop this position further we should draw from the psychoanalytic discourse and explicate its relationship to Hegel. With its deeply Hegelian pedigree it provides an account that conceptualises the full implications of radical negativity on a supposed 'objective reality'.

For psychoanalysis any notion of a reality as such starts from a realm that defies symbolization. It is the limit or blockage of reality. More specifically, it is what Copjec calls the 'Order of the Real.' (Copjec, 1994: 120). The standard notion of the Lacanian Real is offered by Žižek:

(T)he Real is the unattainable traumatic kernel-Void, the blinding Sun into which it is impossible to look face to face, perceivable only if we look awry, from a distorted perspective – if we look at it directly, we get “burned by the sun” (Žižek, 2002: xxvii).

The Real as radical negativity is a transcendental a-historical grimace through which the significatory realms are intimately bound in the pacifying role of presenting the experience of an objective reality. Reality is in effect a plurality of reactions to the Real, ‘a multitude of responses to the same impossible-real kernel’ (Žižek, 1989: 4). Reality is a process of antagonism inasmuch as it does not exist objectively, but is constituted through impossibility. Psychoanalysis conceptualizes the Real as part of a triadic structure with the symbolic and imaginary realms. As Daly points out, ‘both the symbolic and the imaginary function within the order of signification’ (in Daly & Žižek, 2004: 7). In contrast to the symbolic which is in effect free floating, the imaginary attempts through fantasy to give meaning and to structure the symbolic around primary images or nodal points.

Some thinkers, however, have denied the very existence of the Real. Judith Butler for example, argues that ‘to claim that the Real resists symbolization is still to symbolize the Real as a kind of resistance. The former claim (the Real resists symbolization) can only be true if the latter claim (‘the Real resists symbolization’ is a symbolization) is true, but if the second claim is true, the first is necessarily false’ (Butler *et al*, 2000: 66). The error of this paradox is that Real should not be conceptualized as a representable force, but as a radically negative non-discursive void that can only be represented indirectly. The radical negativity is thus internal to the symbolic. In Laclau’s words, ‘if the representation of the Real was a representation of something entirely outside the symbolic it would amount, indeed, to full inclusion.....But if what is represented is an internal limit of the process of representation between internality and externality: the Real becomes the very failure of the symbolic in achieving its own fullness’. (Laclau in

Butler *et al*, 2000: 68). The Real is radical negativity that is experienced via symbolic failure which as a direct consequence, is always beyond symbolic representation.

This psychoanalytic position draws from Hegel the view of radical negativity not as something pre-ontological; rather, the Real, in this regard, is more post-ontological, it is what remains after ontologization remaining as excess. The Real cannot be overcome by realism anymore than an artist can paint without negative space. To attempt to escape the Real is to fully actualise it as it exists paradoxically through the failure of any such reality to fully account for itself. One cannot stand reality (realism) in one corner and the Real in another; realism cannot 'turn to the Real' precisely because the Real is inherent to both reality and the very turn itself. We cannot know the Real more than we know the effects of its lack/excess as reality attempts to conceptualise its own failure, 'it does not exist "objectively", since it is the inscription of the gaze in itself into observed reality' (Žižek, 2002: xxxii). Meillassoux cannot turn towards the Real as the Real is already inherent to the gaze itself.

Wrapping it up (in the Absolute Sense)

The ultimate truth of any finitude for Hegel is in a sense of movement through a dialectical process driven and resolved by negativity. Reality for Hegel is the perpetual overcoming of opposites that are unified in the absolute through their very inherent failure. Negativity is this movement through negation or the failure of the whole to be fully reconciled with its own excess. As Žižek puts it:

'Hegelian 'negativity' serves to prescribe absolute difference or non-being: negativity is constrained to the obliteration of all finite/immediate determinations. The process of negativity is thus not just a negative process of self-destruction of the finite: it reaches its telos when finite/immediate determinations are mediated/maintained/elevated, posited in their truth as ideal notional determinations' (Bryant, L. et al, 2011: 207).

To revisit the story of the rise of so called 'irrational' beliefs – this time conceptualised through a position that understands radical negativity - the problem with both Meillassoux and Caputo's narrative is how they engage with the relationship of the irrational and rationalism as such. In both cases there is the presumption of a given status of rationalism as fully grounded in positive terms. This perspective does not allow for the conceptualisation of the limit, or 'cut' itself. Reason therefore is itself elevated to the level of belief through rationalism. For Hegel no such priority is given, only the status of radical negativity itself that provides the field of differentiation and self-referential structure required for signification. There is no priority to 'reason' as such. To follow Meillassoux's logic is to suggest an externality through which rationality uncovers some underlying truth. For Hegel, reason is the unfolding of the Notion towards the idea. The narrative of belief in these terms is not one that conceptualises one discourse over the other in a traditional hierarchical structure. This is in a sense, a similar strategy as Meillassoux, implements as he prioritises science as the discourse that produces the 'truth' of a reality beyond the correlate. In a classical Enlightenment manoeuvre, what Meillassoux and Caputo miss in regard to their history of belief (and for Meillassoux in his critique of the correlation), is the very inherent failure that is difference itself.

We cannot remove ourselves from the correlation, as the separation is internal to the structure itself, not an externality waiting to be discovered. This inherent failure eludes signification and can never be 'discovered' by any discourse of rationalism, science or mathematics as it is the radical negativity of a logic differentiation that is the absolute. Meillassoux's correlation relies on the authority of the big Other of the 'Great Outdoors': the realm of hyper-chaos conceived as external and distinct. However, as Hegel illustrates, there is no Other beyond the internal differentiation of othering, not only between points but also the othering that exists within any unity itself. Radical negativity is how Hegel maintains movement through dialectics that are ultimately generated through an internal contingency and othering. This is the contingency that Meillassoux externalises and attempts to 'know' through certain prioritised discourses, the crucial point is that no such moment can exist. What Meillassoux misses is precisely that the

subject itself is a subject generated as substance fails to account for 'All', or in other words subject=substance. As Žižek puts it:

(T)he Hegelian "subject" is ultimately nothing but a name for the externality of the Substance to itself, for the "crack" by way of which the Substance becomes "alien" to itself, (mis)perceiving itself through human eyes as the inaccessible-reified Otherness. That is to say, insofar as the relationship of the subject to the Substance overlaps with the Substance's self-relating, the fact that Substance appears to subject as an alien external-inaccessible entity bears witness to a self-splitting of Substance itself (Žižek, 1993: 30).

Substance can never be conceptualised as distinct from subject and vice versa. Meillassoux mistakes this epistemological limitation as a positive ontological break. Whereas for Hegel the epistemological limit is also an ontological limit – again, the two cannot be finally separated. Meillassoux's attempt to elevate contingency to a positive externality is thwarted as it fails to conceptualise the internal differentiation of contingency itself. In other words, it is the correlation itself that is the absolute; it is defined through radical interiority not externality: there is no resolution beyond the radical negativity that is inherent to the dialectical process itself.

And Back Again

Radical negativity is explained in Hegelian terms as inherent to all of reality. Here we can discern the similarity between Hegel's radical negativity and the psychoanalytic Real. The critique of the substance-subject correlate in Hegel underscores the persistence of radical negativity and the inherent failure of any whole – this is Hegel's the absolute. It is in the failure of substance to fully account for itself that we experience the subject as such. This is mirrored through psychoanalytic discourse which emphasises internalisation of the Real in respect of both the subject and object; one does not exist without the (O)ther.

In accepting the status of radical negativity and prioritising the status of the Other, Hegel and psychoanalysis are drawn together. As Zupančič puts it:

What Lacan and Hegel share in this respect is that both take this dimension of the Other seriously – not as a subjective illusion or spell that could be broken simply by saying out loud that ‘the Other doesn’t exist’ ... but as something which, despite its nonexistence, has considerable material effects (Zupančič in Žižek, 2006: 174).

Otherness in these terms is not about ‘overcoming’ as suggested in speculative realism. It is not that the Other exists independently or that we could in some sense eradicate its presence in favour of independence. It is rather that the material effects of the Other are generated because it does not exist. But this inexistence is encountered not through attempts at eradication; the lesson of both Lacan and Hegel is that inherent failure that resides in both subject AND substance (or for psychoanalysis subject/object).

Materialism is generated through this very splitting not just between each element but within them. It is not enough for the subject to be aware of the (in)-existence of the Other, the Other must be aware of it also. In other words, it is the Other’s belief that is the concern. Thus the goal of psychoanalysis is not just the conceptualisation of the Real encounter that is subject, but the engagement with the Real in the Other. Likewise, for Hegel, the dialectic of subject/substance is ultimately resolved in the radical negativity that is the absolute. It is therefore not enough for the speculative realist’s objective ‘reality’ to exist independently of the autonomous subject; but, does ‘reality’ know it exists independently?

This problematic is resolved the belief in the drive; that is to say that the way in is the way out. Reality, as it is generated through historical and material conditions, is Real insofar as substance itself is pure jouissance (or in Hegelian the site of differentiation) that is (mis)-recognised through ideology. Absolute knowing is the realisation of the structuring principle of radical negativity both as subject/substance or subject/object. Recognition of the inherent failure of the belief through the register of the drive is the

qualitative acceptance of the Real in substance and how this generates the subject through this internal logic of failure.

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