

STRANGE FORMS OF ARGUMENTATION: ON MEILLASSOUX'S DEFINITION OF PHILOSOPHY

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ABSTRACT: Even though Quentin Meillassoux's philosophy is still in the making, to use Graham Harman's (2015) expression, it has garnered sufficient attention to become the topic of an ever-growing body of specialized literature. Here we wish to make a contribution in that direction. We offer an examination of Meillassoux's definition of philosophy as "the invention of strange forms of argumentation". We compare and contrast this definition to the one that has been offered by Deleuze & Guattari in *What is Philosophy?*

Our examination of Meillassoux's core metaphilosophical ideas will follow the same methodological procedure that he himself outlined in his fictionalization of Deleuze as a pre-Socratic. We contend that his novel interpretative technique, which relies heavily on fictionalization, should be repeatable by other authors. To this end, we evaluate his potential to become a philosophical heir to Alain Badiou. We explain why this may be the case, by positing a fictional situation that we will name "the Continental Expectation", and then we will link that situation to the contents of Meillassoux's philosophy, specifically to his concept of absolute contingency.

KEYWORDS: Speculative Realism; Quentin Meillassoux; Metaphilosophy

1. INTRODUCTION

Before we examine Meillassoux's definition of philosophy, let us pause for a moment to consider the way in which he presents correlationism, that is, the stylistic elements of that presentation, as if we were dealing with a narrative. The reasons for doing this will become clear later.

Meillassoux's presentation of correlationism gives the reader the impression

that correlationists are, as Hallward (2011: 137) says, “fossilized idealists”. A much less diplomatic but equally possible expression could be used. Nietzsche, in *The Antichrist*, said that Kant was “an idiot” (Nietzsche, 2007: 10). And this harsh expression seems to fit correlationists quite nicely, at least in the way Meillassoux presents them. Faced with the basic facts of contemporary science, such as the dates of the Big Bang and of the accretion of the Earth, Meillassoux presents the ideas of the correlationists in such a way that, to the reader, especially the scientifically-inclined reader, they end up looking like idiots.

Or even something far worse, particularly for those readers familiar with Lenin’s writings. In *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, Lenin (1972: 156-157) suggests that idealist philosophers are nothing more than bourgeois university professors who uphold ridiculous philosophies in order to keep their jobs. From this point of view, correlationists, as Meillassoux presents them, would be today’s version of idealist philosophers whose primary motivation is getting paid for teaching classes at universities. The content of their philosophies would be sheer nonsense. Instead of being individuals who are misinformed about the basic discoveries of contemporary science, correlationists would be ill-intentioned charlatans instead. This is why, among other reasons, Zizek has said in *Less Than Nothing* (2012: 625) that *After Finitude* “can effectively be read as *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* rewritten for the twenty first-century”, a point that has also been acknowledged by Johnstone (2011: 95-96). Previously, Brassier (2007: 246-247) had noted the similarities and differences among both texts, which Brown (2011: 156) emphasizes and elaborates on.

In sum, correlationists would fit at least three possible descriptions, each being worse than the preceding one: they are fossilized idealists, they are idiots, or they are charlatans. But are correlationists really this misguided, stupid or cynical? A cursory examination of the philosophers that Meillassoux calls “correlationists” indicates that the answer is “no”. One can disagree with thinkers such as Frege or Husserl, but to portray their philosophies as the simplistic lucubrations of stubborn, scientifically ignorant charlatans is inaccurate, to say the least. And we believe that Meillassoux is aware of this. So why does he choose portray them as

such?¹

2. MEILLASSOUX'S METAPHILOSOPHY

The answer to the preceding question, we believe, is stylistic. More precisely, Meillassoux chooses to portray correlationists in the aforementioned way due to a stylistic strategy. It seems to us that his target audience, in the first chapter of *After Finitude*, is divided into two main groups. On the one hand, readers of Badiou. On the other hand, readers of analytic philosophy. In that chapter, he sets two goals. The first of them is to convince the readers of Badiou that it is time to move on; specifically, to move on from the enshrinement of mathematics to the enshrinement of the empirical sciences, such as astronomy, physics, chemistry, geology and biology. His second goal is to convince the readers of analytic philosophy that he, Quentin Meillassoux, is on their side. More specifically, he wants to convince them that he is attacking continental charlatanry with the same language in which that charlatanry is expressed; in other words, that he is “fighting fire with fire”, in the same way in which Socrates debated the Sophists “on their own terms”. Meillassoux would thus be a valuable comrade in the fight against postmodernism in the humanities, deploying a rhetorical strategy not entirely unlike that of Alan Sokal.

It will be necessary to make some comments here. A reader of my manuscript pointed out that Meillassoux does not treat correlationists as if they were idiots, at all. I was then referred to Meillassoux's talk from the Speculative Realism workshop that took place at Goldsmiths in 2007. There, the reader says, Meillassoux make it clear that “the correlationist has a point”, something that he had already acknowledged in *After Finitude*. The reader adds that Meillassoux's own position is closer to correlationism than to scientific realism, since he radicalizes the strong correlationist position in order to arrive at his own speculative materialist position. For these reasons, the reader concludes, there is

¹ Of course, Meillassoux does not explicitly mention either Frege or Husserl, but he implicitly refers to them when he asks “who has grasped the more originary correlation: is it the thinker of the subject-object correlation, the noetico-noematic correlation, or the language-referent correlation?” (Meillassoux, 2009: 6). The noetico-noematic correlation refers to phenomenology in general and to Husserl in particular, and the language-referent correlation refers to analytic philosophy in general and to Frege in particular. On the other hand, Meillassoux does explicitly mention both Wittgenstein and Heidegger.

no need to postulate that Meillassoux is employing a sophisticated rhetorical strategy; *After Finitude* cannot be read as a straightforward defense of scientific realism, such a reading is a misinterpretation, and therefore, my manuscript represents a regress in our interpretation of Meillassoux's philosophy.

Allow me to disagree. Consider the following lines from *After Finitude*. Ensuing some lucubrations on the motives that scientists may have for siding with Cartesianism, together with their unwillingness to concede that primary qualities cannot exist as properties of things in themselves, Meillassoux concludes:

"And the truth is that their unwillingness to do so becomes all too understandable once one begins to seriously examine how the correlationist proposes to account for ancestry." (Meillassoux, 2008: 13)

If I was a correlationist, I would feel insulted by the preceding quote. That phrase would not be insulting if Meillassoux said "it becomes understandable" instead of saying "all too understandable". What is this, if not a jab at correlationism? One that is quite below the belt. The use of an idiom like "all too" is entirely rhetorical here.

There is more, however. If the words cited before did not represent an insult, but only an injury, then the following ones quite certainly add insult to injury:

"And our correlationist then finds herself dangerously close to contemporary creationists: those quaint believers who assert today, in accordance with a 'literal' reading of the Bible, that the earth is no more than 6,000 years old, and who, when confronted with the much older dates arrived at by science, reply unperturbed that God also created at the same time as the earth 6,000 years ago those radioactive compounds that seem to indicate that the earth is much older than it is – in order to test the physicists' faith. Similarly, might not the meaning of the arche-fossil be to test the philosopher's faith in correlation, even when confronted with data which seem to point to an abyssal divide between what exists and what appears?" (Meillassoux, 2008: 18)

But perhaps we are not being charitable enough in our reading of Meillassoux. Perhaps the reader thinks that there is nothing wrong with being compared to someone who believes that the Earth is only 6,000 years old. So let us take a look at some of the things that Meillassoux had to say in 2007 at Goldsmiths:

"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." (Meillassoux, in Brassier *et al.*, 2007: 421)

The reader of my manuscript would do well to consider that in the preceding quote Meillassoux is explicitly characterizing the correlationist as "a stupid opponent". Thus, my question to them: how much more proof do you actually need?

It is therefore no stretch of the imagination to suggest that Meillassoux has presented himself, in the first chapter of *After Finitude*, as a continental philosopher who is on the side of intellectually honest analytic philosophers, joining their crusade against the charlatantry of postmodern intellectuals, who are presumably reigning in today's universities, at least in the humanities departments.

But things take a dramatic, severe turn in the second chapter of *After Finitude*. Initially, nothing particularly alarming takes place; Meillassoux begins that chapter by rescuing the medieval term "absolute", signaling to the reader that he is familiar with medieval philosophy in particular, and with the history of philosophy in general.

Up to this point in *After Finitude*, not much is happening. It reads like a good-old fashioned defense of empirical science against postmodern charlatans, in a style that is both novel and enjoyable. This tranquil picture is brutally altered when Meillassoux introduces the concept of hyper-Chaos. In his description of it, Meillassoux produces a complete rupture with everything that he has been saying thus far, including the style of the text. We are now in the presence of an author who presents himself to his target audience in way that the reader is beginning to question what exactly they are reading. Has Meillassoux lost his mind? Is he crazy?² Is he a postmodern charlatan who has deceived and tricked the scientifically-minded readers into thinking that he was on "their side" when, in fact, he was "on the other side" all of this time?

And what about the other subset of his target audience, the readers of Badiou?

² Meillassoux is aware that his philosophical reflections on hyper-Chaos may seem crazy. He acknowledges this point in his interview with Florian Hecker, titled *Speculative Solution: Quentin Meillassoux and Florian Hecker talk Hyperchaos*. There he discusses the concept of craziness; and in one of the definitions of rationality that he advances, he says: "I would say that rationality is really the possibility of being intelligently crazy." (Meillassoux & Hecker, 2010: 5)

Have they been deceived? These readers, who are also familiar with the writings of Deleuze and Guattari, are not so easily shocked by crazy ideas, nor by convoluted texts. By the same token, they are harder to impress, especially when it comes to creative approaches to philosophy. In *What is philosophy?* Deleuze and Guattari say:

“That is, philosophy is not a simple art of forming, inventing, or fabricating concepts, because concepts are not necessarily forms, discoveries, or products. More rigorously, philosophy is the discipline that involves *creating* concepts.” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994: 5)

Thus, no matter how novel, far-fetched or even crazy a philosopher’s concepts can be, it is always possible to subsume them under a Deleuzian-Guattarian framework. Which means that, in order to move beyond that framework, in order to push the horizon further or to raise the philosophical bar to new heights, the sole creation of new concepts will not be enough, however novel or crazy they might be.

If this is so, then the work of Badiou can only be acknowledged as an advance on condition that his philosophy has done something more than the creation of concepts. In *Being and Event*, as well as in other texts, Badiou must have done something different in order for his philosophy to be considered as an advance with respect to the Deleuzian-Guattarian framework.

There are many reasons why this is actually the case, but at least one of them consists in the redefinition of philosophy that he offers in his *Manifesto for Philosophy*. In fact, he formulates several statements which begin with the phrase “Philosophy is...”; but all of these statements say more or less the same thing. For example, he says:

“If philosophy is, as I defend it to be, the configuration, within thought, of the fact that its four generic conditions (the poem, the matheme, the political and love) are compossible *in the eventful form prescribing the truths of the time*, a suspension of philosophy can result from the restriction or blockage of the free play required in order to define a regime of passage, or of intellectual circulation between the truth procedures conditioning philosophy.” (Badiou, 1999: 61)

We may eliminate the conditional (“If...”) together with the parenthesis that specify the generic conditions, and we may also eliminate what Badiou says about the blockage. By doing so, we see that for Badiou, philosophy is “the

configuration, within thought, of the fact that its four generic conditions are compossible in the eventful form prescribing the truths of the time”.

Thus, there is a metaphilosophical difference between Deleuze & Guattari on the one hand, and Badiou on the other. Metaphilosophy can be defined as “the branch of philosophy that asks what philosophy is, how it should be done and why we should do it” (Overgaard, Gilbert, & Burwood, 2013: vii) or, more briefly, as philosophy of philosophy. By defining philosophy in a different way, Badiou effectively distances himself from the Deleuzian-Guattarian framework.

What about Meillassoux? Does he have a metaphilosophy? To formulate the question in a more precise way, does Meillassoux offer a definition of philosophy? The answer is “yes”. It can be found in the third chapter of *After Finitude*, where he says:

“Philosophy is the invention of strange forms of argumentation, necessarily bordering on sophistry, which remains its dark structural double. To philosophize is always to develop an idea whose elaboration and defence require a novel kind of argumentation, the model for which lies neither in positive science - not even in logic - nor in some supposedly innate faculty for proper reasoning. Thus it is essential that a philosophy produce internal mechanisms for regulating its own inferences - signposts and criticisms through which the newly constituted domain is equipped with a set of constraints that provide internal criteria for distinguishing between licit and illicit claims.” (Meillassoux, 2008: 76-77)

Let us pause for a moment to consider Meillassoux’s definition of philosophy. We can restate the three definitions quoted before in the following way:

- 1) Philosophy is the discipline that involves creating concepts (Deleuze & Guattari).
- 2) Philosophy is the configuration, within thought, of the fact that its four generic conditions are compossible in the eventful form prescribing the truths of the time. (Badiou).
- 3) Philosophy is the invention of strange forms of argumentation (Meillassoux).

We will only compare the first definition with the third one.³ Both of them give importance to artistry, indicated by the terms “creating” and “invention”,

³ Latter in this essay we will indicate why we have chosen not to compare Badiou’s definition of philosophy to the other ones.

respectively. But they differ as to what is created or invented by philosophy. For Deleuze & Guattari, *concepts* are what philosophy creates; while Meillassoux states that what philosophy invents are “strange forms of argumentation”, instead of concepts. Deleuze and Guattari say:

“First, concepts are and remain signed: Aristotle's substance, Descartes's cogito, Leibniz's monad, Kant's condition, Schelling's power, Bergson's duration [*durée*]. But also, some concepts must be indicated by an extraordinary and sometimes even barbarous or shocking word, whereas others make do with an ordinary, everyday word that is filled with harmonics so distant that it risks being imperceptible to a nonphilosophical ear. Some concepts call for archaisms, and others for neologisms, shot through with almost crazy etymological exercises: etymology is like a specifically philosophical athleticism. In each case there must be a strange necessity for these words and for their choice, like an element of style.” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994: 7-8)

Concepts, it may be said, are expressed by words or by series of words. A concept such as “rhizome” is a single word, while “body without organs” is a series of words. In any case, the point is that they are expressed by *words*, not by *statements*. Concepts are used in the formulation of statements. There are many kinds of statements, such as declarative, imperative, and interrogative, among others. When Deleuze & Guattari (2000: 33) say in *Anti-Oedipus* that “the body without organs is the ultimate residuum of a deterritorialized socius”, that is a declarative statement. When they say in *A Thousand Plateaus* (2005: 2) “Make rhizomes, not roots, never plant!”, that is an imperative statement. Recall that an argument is a series of declarative statements, in which some are called “premises”, and the last one is called “conclusion”. Thus, an example of an argument would be the following one:

1. If the body without organs is an egg, then it is crisscrossed with axes and thresholds.
2. The body without organs is an egg.
3. Therefore, it is crisscrossed with axes and thresholds.⁴

The preceding argument has a particular “form”, which means that it is a certain kind of argument. In this case, it is an argument called “modus ponens”.

⁴ This example is based on Deleuze & Guattari (2000: 19), where they say: “The body without organs is an egg: it is crisscrossed with axes and thresholds, with latitudes and longitudes and geodesic lines”

For the purposes of evaluating the validity of an argument, it is not necessary to determine whether its declarative statements are true or not. The only thing that matters is the form of the argument. In the preceding example, the argument is valid. Because if the premises are true, then the conclusion must be true as well. That does not mean that the premises are actually true, it only means that if they were true, then the conclusion would also have to be true.

When Deleuze & Guattari define philosophy as the discipline that involves creating concepts, they seem to be more interested in concepts rather than in statements or arguments. Concepts matter more than the statements, and the arguments, in which they are used. Meillassoux's definition of philosophy emphasizes the strange forms of argumentation instead. In other words, for Meillassoux, the strange forms of argumentation matter more than the concepts and the statements that are used in them.

To be sure, he does invent several arguments, in *After Finitude* as well as in other texts. For example, consider the following one:

“1. Here is the first thesis: *a contradictory entity is absolutely impossible, because if an entity was contradictory, it would be necessary*. But a necessary entity is absolutely impossible; consequently, so too is contradiction. Since there is every likelihood that the reader will dismiss such an argument as nonsensical, it is probably best that we begin by examining the principal reasons why he or she is liable to refuse such an inference.”
(Meillassoux, 2008: 67)

Meillassoux claims that this is an argument, and indeed it is. It can be reformulated in the following way, so as to better appreciate what kind of argument it is:

1. If there is a contradictory entity, then there is a necessary entity.
2. There is no necessary entity.
3. Therefore, there is no contradictory entity.

The form of the preceding argument is the following one:

1. If P, then Q.
2. Not Q.
3. Therefore, not P.

Meillassoux's argument is valid, and it has a specific form: it is a modus tollens. What he has invented here is an argument, but he has not invented the *form* of that argument. On the contrary, the form that he uses is a well known one since

Antiquity. There are many more examples of this kind of invention in Meillassoux's texts. In each case, he invents an argument, but not the form of the argument; instead he uses already familiar forms, such as *modus tollens*, *modus ponens*, and others.

Inventing arguments certainly qualifies as an act of creativity, but Meillassoux's definition of philosophy is not limited to this. However, in the original French version of *Après la finitude*, Meillassoux does not use the term "*formes*" (forms) in his definition of philosophy. Here is what the original French text says:

"La philosophie est l'invention des argumentations étranges, à la limite, nécessairement, de la sophistique – qui demeure son double obscur et structurel."
(Meillassoux, 2006: 103)

The French equivalent to the English phrase "forms of argumentation" would be, literally, "formes d'argumentation". But this is not what the original text says. Instead, it says "argumentations étranges". In the Spanish translation, which was directly translated from the original French version by Margarita Martínez, the term "*formas*" (forms) is also missing. In that translation, we read:

"La filosofía es la invención de argumentaciones extrañas, por necesidad en el límite de la sofística, que sigue siendo su doble oscuro y estructural." (Meillassoux, 2015: 124)

Yet, instead of considering the introduction of the term "forms" as an inaccuracy in the English translation, we will instead consider it as an advantage for our own line of reasoning, a happy accident which will enable us to distinguish clearly between an argument and the form of an argument; that is, the logical form of an argument. This being so, we said that Meillassoux invents new arguments, which qualify as strange, but that he does not invent new forms of arguments. Rather, he uses familiar forms such as *modus tollens*. We know what a strange argument is, but we do not know yet what a strange form of an argument is. So let us ask: what form of argument would qualify as strange? More precisely, what is a strange form of argument?

If we are using a classical logic, such as propositional logic or predicate logic, no form of argument recognized as valid in these logics would qualify as "strange". For example, the forms called "constructive dilemma" and "destructive

dilemma” may not be as famous or well-known as modus ponens and modus tollens, but there is nothing “strange” about them; they are valid forms of arguments.

Thus, in order to obtain a “strange” form of argument, it would seem that it is necessary that the form in question be outside the scope of classical logics. One possible example of this, which Meillassoux does not mention, can be found in imperative logic. Because, unlike propositional logic and predicate logic, not all of the statements that are used in imperative logic are declarative. Some of them can be imperative statements. Thus, an “argument” in imperative logic could be the following one:

1. Make rhizomes!
2. A rhizome is an anti-genealogy.
3. Therefore, make anti-genealogies!⁵

In the preceding example, only the second statement is declarative. The first and third ones are imperative. The form of this “argument” is the following one:

1. Do X!
2. X is P.
3. Therefore, do P!

From the point of view of classical logics, the preceding form certainly qualifies as “strange”, because we are not really dealing with an argument here, since some of the statements are not declarative, but imperative instead.

But this is still not exactly what Meillassoux is referring to in his definition of philosophy. Because, in the English translation, he speaks of strange forms of argumentation, not strange forms of arguments. Again, this is another advantage that the translation in question provides for our own line of reasoning. So we must consider the difference between arguments and argumentation. Why are they different? A possible answer to this can be found in Meillassoux’s comments on his definition of philosophy. He says that the model for inventing a novel kind of argumentation cannot be found “neither in positive science - not even in logic

⁵ This example is based on Deleuze & Guattari (2005: 2) where they say: “Make rhizomes, not roots, never plant!”, and latter on (2005: 11), where they say: “We evolve and die more from our polymorphous and rhizomatic flus than from hereditary diseases, or diseases that have their own line of descent. The rhizome is an anti-genealogy.”

– nor in some supposedly innate faculty for proper reasoning”. Let us focus on the second of these, logic. And let us emphasize that for Meillassoux, the strange forms of argumentation that philosophy invents do not have logic as their model. Even more so, when he speaks of “logic” here, he is speaking in a broad sense. The model for inventing strange forms of argumentation cannot be found neither in classical logics, such as propositional logic and predicate logic, nor in “non-classical” logics, such as imperative logic. Therefore, the example of an “imperative argument” that we offered before was only a preliminary step towards understanding what Meillassoux is talking about. Strictly speaking, our example is insufficient, insofar as the strange forms of argumentation that philosophy invents do not have logic, any logic whatsoever, as their model.

This is because there is a difference between arguments and argumentation. An argument is a series of declarative statements in which some are premises and the last one is a conclusion. We can define argumentation, on the other hand, as the act of formulating arguments. In order to formulate a modus tollens, one begins by stating a conditional statement, such as “if P, then Q”. Then one negates Q. Finally, one obtains the negation of P. These are the rules for the formulation of a modus tollens. But there are no rules for the formulation of a series of arguments. Suppose that you are arguing something, or defending an idea. There is no rule that says that you have to begin with a modus ponens, followed by a modus tollens, then a constructive dilemma, and finally a destructive dilemma. Broadly speaking, you can defend your idea using whatever arguments you please, as long as you are using arguments and not fallacies.

Although all of this may seem alien to Meillassoux’s philosophy, its pertinence can be clarified by examining his article on Deleuze titled *Subtraction and Contraction*. Since “to philosophize is to develop an idea whose elaboration and defence require a novel kind of argumentation”, we can ask the following questions: What is the idea that Meillassoux develops in *Subtraction and Contraction*? And, what is the novel kind of argumentation required by the elaboration and defence of that idea?

The answer to the first question is this: the idea that Meillassoux defends in *Subtraction and Contraction* is that Deleuze’s notion of immanence can be understood by reading Deleuze as if he was a pre-Socratic philosopher. He says:

“To understand this point of view, let us place ourselves in the following imaginary situation: let us decide to read Deleuze as a pre-Socratic, of whose writings we possess only a few rare fragments, including the text in question, which we will call the ‘Fragment of the Double Crown’ since in it two philosophers are said to be princes. To these fragments, we must add a ‘life’ of Deleuze by Diogenes Laertius, which teaches us little, apart from the fact that he was known as an original philosopher, rather than as a simple disciple of Spinoza or Bergson; and that his philosophy was known as a philosophy of immanence. This very term, in its banality, means nothing more precise to us than those terms such as ‘water’, ‘air’ or ‘fire’ which designate the first principle of this or that pre-Socratic. The project of we ‘Deleuzian philologists’, then, is as follows: to extrapolate, on the basis of this fragment of the crown, the meaning that the pre-Socratic Deleuze attached to the notion – crucial for him, mysterious for us – of immanence.” (Meillassoux, 2007: 65)

As to the second question, the answer can be found in the rest of the text of *Substraction and Contraction*. Almost the entire text is dedicated to the novel kind of argumentation required for the elaboration and defense of the idea that Deleuze’s notion of immanence can be understood by reading him as if he was a pre-Socratic philosopher. A summary of the main points of that novel kind of argumentation can be found in Harman’s (2015) book *Quentin Meillassoux: Philosophy in the Making*.

In the case of *Substraction and Contraction*, Meillassoux invents both a new idea and a new way of defending that idea. But it is not necessary that new ideas be invented in order to do philosophy; rather, what is required is that the elaboration and defence of the idea be new, but not necessarily the idea itself. In other words, what are primarily required are not new concepts, but new ways of argumentation. Of course, this does not prohibit the creation of new concepts, but it does not emphasize that activity. Rather, it emphasizes the novel ways in which concepts, old or new, can be defended.

Consider Meillassoux’s other book, *The Number and the Siren*. The idea that is developed and defended in this text is not new. It consists in declaring that there is a secret code in Mallarmé’s poem *Coup de dés*, which must be deciphered in order to understand the true meaning of the poem. As Meillassoux says, this idea was already stated years ago by scholars of Mallarmé such as Charles Chassé and Charles Mauron; and it has been discarded by contemporary scholars such as

Jacques Rancière. “For connoisseurs of the oeuvre”, Meillassoux says, “have in general internalized the idea that only a naïve reader would still associate the *Coupe de dés* with the idea of a ‘secret code’” (Meillassoux, 2012: 4).

So the idea that there is a secret code in Mallarmé’s poem is not new. But what is new in *The Number and the Siren* is the way in which this idea is developed, elaborated and defended. In other words, the argumentation that is used to elaborate and defend that idea is entirely novel. Again, a summary of Meillassoux’s novel kind of argumentation in the case of *The Number and the Siren* can be found in Harman’s (2015) book on Meillassoux.

Let us get back to the difference between the metaphilosophy of Deleuze & Guattari and that of Meillassoux. In texts like *After Finitude*, *Subtraction and Contraction*, and *The Number and the Siren*, we find more things happening than the sole creation of concepts. Of course, Meillassoux does create concepts, and with great artistry. In the case of *After Finitude*: correlationism, the principle of unreason, hyper-Chaos, factuality, diachronic statements, among others. In the case of *Subtraction and contraction*: the concept of the pre-Socratic Deleuze, the Fragment of the Double Crown, the Major Crown School and Minor Crown School. But this is not all there is to it. In fact, it is not even the main point of his philosophy. Rather, it is the novel kind of argumentation that he invents in each of these texts what distinguish his philosophy from the Deleuzian-Guattarian art of creating concepts.

We should also pause for a moment on the distinction that Meillassoux traces between philosophy and sophistry. We must remember that Meillassoux says that philosophy is “necessarily bordering on sophistry, which remains its dark structural double”. And of course, he notes, time and time again, that his claims might appear strange or incredible to the reader. Even more so, he is concerned with maintaining credibility in the eyes of his readers, at least a minimum degree of it. Thus, regarding an objection against his line of reasoning in *After Finitude*, he says that it is “an objection which we shall have to expound and refute if we want our speculative approach to retain a minimal degree of credibility.” (Meillassoux, 2008: 83). Such concern for credibility would not arise if Meillassoux was as reckless as Golumbia (2016) portrays him. True, his writing does not follow the standard academic procedures for producing monographs.

But that does not mean that he is not doing philosophy. Although it would be a cliché to remind the reader that some of the best philosophical work has been done outside the norms of Academia, it is a worthwhile reminder nonetheless. Yet this raises the following question: if philosophy can be done in such a way, how do we distinguish philosophy from charlatanry?

Since sophistry, by Meillassoux's own admission, is not only the dark structural double of philosophy, but also that towards which philosophy tends, because it is "necessarily bordering" on it, the preceding question becomes even more difficult to answer. The solution, we believe, can be found by tracing an analogy between Meillassoux's definition of philosophy and his comments on Deleuze in *Subtraction and Contraction*. There he says:

"In this model, *there could be nothing worse than to achieve that towards which we tend*. One tends towards chaos when one invents, when one creates, but there is nothing one intends less than actually catching up with it. It is at once a tendential and an anti-regulative model: we must continually approach the chaos which governs the propensity to create, and continually guard against falling into it." (Meillassoux, 2007: 106)

According to the model elaborated for the pre-Socratic Deleuze in *Subtraction and Contraction*, there could be nothing worse than actually catching up with chaos, even if one tends towards it when one creates. By comparison, we may say the following regarding Meillassoux's definition of philosophy: there could be nothing worse than to catch up with sophistry, even if philosophy tends towards it when it invents.

And how does one avoid falling into sophistry when doing philosophy, according to Meillassoux? By the production of "internal mechanisms for regulating its own inferences", meaning that there be "a set of constraints that provide internal criteria for distinguishing between licit and illicit claims". It seems to us that this is precisely what sophistry and charlatanry lack. Sophists are able to teach anything to anyone, they are able to defend a thesis as well as the negation of that thesis. Charlatans, as the name implies, are able to talk about anything, even about issues on which they are not experts, they are able to talk in a reckless manner about anything they please. But not philosophers. It is not so much that these trace a difference between what can be said and what cannot be said. It would be more proper to say that the difference that philosophers trace

is between licit and illicit claims. Anything may be said, but once it is said, it is not necessarily a legitimate claim. This runs contrary to Wittgenstein's famous final proposition of his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, which says "7. What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence." (Wittgenstein, 2002: 89).

3. HEIR TO BADIOU

Here we will offer an application of Meillassoux's metaphilosophy. We will try to defend a particular idea, by using a form of argumentation which we will try to make as strange as we possibly can. Of course, if we are to follow Meillassoux to the letter, then this means that our example will necessarily border on sophistry, since philosophy tends towards it when it invents. But we will also try to not fall into it, just like one must try to not actually catch up with chaos when one creates concepts in the manner of a pre-Socratic Deleuze.

The idea that we will defend is that Meillassoux is a potential heir to Badiou. Recall that we did not delve into the relation between Badiou's metaphilosophy and Meillassoux's. We said that we would not compare the definitions of philosophy that these two thinkers offer. The reason for this is that it would be too early to inquire on this issue. Not only is Meillassoux's philosophy still in the making, but the relation between his philosophy and Badiou's is still in the making as well. As Harman (2015: 111) says, Meillassoux could well be a potential philosophical heir to Badiou. To be sure, he has already written several texts on Badiou, such as *Decision and undecidability in Being and Event I*; *Badiou and Mallarmé: The Event and the Perhaps*; and *History and Event in Alain Badiou*. But it seems that the relation of his philosophy to that of his mentor is still under development.

However, instead of seeing this as an obstacle, we will once again deploy our strategy of transforming it into an advantage for our own line of reasoning. More precisely, we will fictionalize this situation in approximately the same way as Meillassoux fictionalized Deleuze. This being so, instead of a "pre-Socratic Deleuze", we will speak of a "post-Kantian Meillassoux". Not in the sense of neo-Kantians such as Cohen, Natorp, and Rickert, but more in the sense of idealists such as Fichte, Schelling and Hegel. And in a more specific sense, we may think of Badiou as a kind of contemporary version of Kant. Just as Hume's essays awakened Kant from his dogmatic slumber, Badiou claims that Cantor's set

theory awoke him from his Sartrean slumber. Meillassoux would thus also be a post-Kantian in the sense that he is a post-Badiouian.

In his article *History and Event in Alain Badiou*, Meillassoux (2011) says that he does not speak as a disciple of Badiou, precisely because he is developing his own philosophical positions, different from the ones of his former teacher. We can resort to an analogy to emphasize the difference between a disciple and a philosophical heir. Both Speusippus and Aristotle, among others, were Plato's disciples. Speusippus was Plato's nephew, and he replaced him as the new director of the Academy after Plato's death. Yet, the history of philosophy recognizes Aristotle, and not Speusippus, as Plato's greatest disciple and also as his most important philosophical heir.

Why? Although there are many reasons at work here, including sociological and political ones, it seems to us that one of those reasons is that Speusippus produced a philosophy that was closer to Plato's, while Aristotle elaborated an entirely new philosophy, which departed even further from his teacher's. Of course, there are several Platonic elements in Aristotle's philosophy, especially in the works of his youth. Nonetheless, Aristotle developed a critique of Plato's philosophy which permitted him, in his mature works, to inaugurate a new philosophical system which, despite being indebted to Plato, was sufficiently different from his teacher's so as to qualify as something new and original. Speusippus also criticized Plato's philosophy on several accounts, but his break with his teacher was not as decisive and pronounced as Aristotle's.

So, if Meillassoux is really a potential philosophical heir to Badiou, then he has to do something radically different from his teacher in order to earn that title. At this point, in order to proceed, we may formulate two assumptions, which may initially strike the reader as strange:

- 1) It is the case that there can be a philosophical heir to Badiou.
- 2) The contents of the philosophy of Badiou's heir is less important than the fact that its author is recognized as a heir to Badiou.

Let us explain what we mean. The first proposition simply says that, at some moment in time, a certain author can be widely recognized as Badiou's heir, in the same way that Plato is recognized as the heir to Socrates, Aristotle as the heir to Plato, Marx as the heir to Hegel, Nietzsche as the heir to Schopenhauer,

Heidegger as the heir to Husserl, Russell as the heir to Frege, and so on. Thus, there is nothing particularly paradoxical about the first statement. It is the second statement that presents some initial perplexity.

What does the second statement mean, exactly? It means that, at least in the community of continental philosophers, there is a kind of expectation that has been building up during the past few decades. We are of course formulating this as a conjecture, not as something that has been definitely proven. It seems to us that authors like Alain Badiou, Slavoj Žižek, Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau, Chantal Mouffe, Toni Negri, among others, are some of the most widely read philosophers in the continental community today. This group of authors have, to a certain extent, posited their works as successors to thinkers such as Foucault, Deleuze, Barthes, Althusser and Lyotard, among others, which would belong to a previous generation. We are not saying that the works of Foucault and Deleuze are no longer read today; on the contrary, their works are probably more read than those of Badiou and Žižek. However, just as Badiou has posited his own work as subsequent to that of Deleuze, it seems to us that today there is a certain expectation to know who is going to be the greatest disciple of Badiou, his most noteworthy successor.

What the second statement implies is that the expectation we are referring to has become so acute that it simply does not matter *who* is Badiou's successor, or *what* the contents of their philosophy are. What matters is that his successor is *announced as such*, and afterwards, that his successor *is recognized as such* by the majority of the community of continental philosophy. It is only *after* Badiou's successor is recognized as such, that the contents of their philosophy are studied, analyzed and criticized. We will call this situation "the Continental Expectation".

In this sense, Meillassoux has been announced as Badiou's potential heir, and he is starting to be recognized as a potential heir to him by a considerable part of the community in question. Thus, a newcomer to this state of affairs will begin by *first* recognizing Meillassoux as a potential heir to Badiou, and *only afterwards* (perhaps immediately afterwards, but afterwards after all) they will start to become acquainted with the contents of Meillassoux's philosophy.

How so? In what way could the preceding occur? In the first place, the newcomer to this state of affairs probably heard their colleagues talk about an

emerging philosopher called Quentin Meillassoux, and that his first book, *After Finitude*, has a Foreword written by Alain Badiou, and so on.

We are aware that the reader can meet our preceding remarks with skepticism. And they would be right to be skeptical about this. Because, if the only conditions that Meillassoux has to meet for being a potential heir to Badiou are as banal and superficial as the ones that we have pointed out, then there is not really much at stake. Anyone could have done as much. So what we will provide here is a more profound reason for why Meillassoux is a potential heir to Badiou. A reason which is to be found in the contents of Meillassoux's philosophy. More specifically, we state that there is a fundamental relation between the Continental Expectation and the contents of Meillassoux's philosophy.

What is this relation? On the one hand, the Continental Expectation is the situation in which the community of continental philosophers is expecting Badiou's successor to appear, no matter who they are, and no matter what they have to say. On the other hand, the core concept of Meillassoux's philosophy is absolute contingency, which can be poetically called "hyper-Chaos". This absolute contingency is what makes syntactic systems possible, and among these, different formal languages. Just as one cannot say that the infinite variants of chess are "less legitimate" than classical chess, one cannot say that a certain person is a "less legitimate" candidate to fulfill the Continental Expectation. Because this expectation explicitly says that such a role can be fulfilled by anyone, the only condition being that the person in question has to be recognized as Badiou's philosophical heir. Nevermind what they actually write or say; once it is conceded that the person is indeed Badiou's heir, then only afterwards one begins to pay attention to what they write and say. But if this is the case, then the relation between the Continental Expectation and Meillassoux's concept of absolute contingency starts to become clear. The Continental Expectation is contingent. More precisely, it has, as a property, radical contingency.

Meillassoux is the only philosopher whose work has a concept that can capture what is absolute about the Continental Expectation, namely contingency. Thus, the relation between the contents of his philosophy and that situation is not accidental, it is fundamental. In principle, anyone can be Badiou's heir, but there is only one philosopher, Quentin Meillassoux, whose work has been able to

thematize this situation as such, and in an extreme way, we might add. Who else among the potential candidates to succeed Badiou have a philosophical concept that enables them to claim, in an absolute sense, that anyone can be a successor to Badiou? We are not aware of any such candidates. But what is most important, even if there actually were such candidates, they would not have been the first ones to propose a concept like absolute contingency. In this specific sense, what Meillassoux has done is akin to what Mallarmé has done in *Un Coup de dés*. The Mallarmean act of writing such a poem can only be done once: “Everything is necessarily contingent, except contingency itself *and* the unique act of the Poet who incorporates himself into it - once, once only, and forever. Never again. *Nevermore.*” (Meillassoux, 2012: 166). An attempt to do the same thing that Mallarmé did would not be as groundbreaking as the *Coup de dés* itself, it would be repetition of it, no matter how many variations are introduced. Likewise, an attempt to do the same thing that Meillassoux has done, no matter how many variations are introduced, will not be as groundbreaking as what he has published so far. It will only be a repetition of it. Mallarmé was the first, the only, and the last, to accomplish the sophisticated goal of the *Coup de dés*. It is, in a sense, a work which closes upon itself. Meillassoux was the first, the only, and the last to forge a philosophical concept that can capture what is absolute in the Continental Expectation: that it is contingent, that Badiou’s successor can be, literally, anyone. Anyone else who claims the same thing is only repeating what can already be found in Meillassoux’s work, although in an implicit, rather than in an explicit way.

Yet, why should a philosopher who is able to thematize this have “more right” to claim the title of Badiou’s heir, instead of anyone else? Compare this situation with this other one: suppose that John says “I have invented a game of chess were the rooks move diagonally”. Peter says “In my variant of chess, queens can only move horizontally”. Sarah says “According to my system, pawns can move in all directions”. Each of them insists that their own variant of chess is superior to those of their peers. Then Jane says “It does not matter what variant of chess you invent, all of them are equally legitimate”. Jane would be comparable to Meillassoux. Whoever claims to be Badiou’s heir, implicitly or explicitly, cannot secure the claim that their own work, their own philosophy, is superior to that of their peers.

On the contrary, whoever claims, implicitly or explicitly, that Badiou's heir can be literally anyone, and that all of the candidates are equally legitimate, is the only one that has discovered what is absolute about the Continental Expectation. And it is important that whoever claims this, implicitly or explicitly, be the first to do so. We believe that Meillassoux has been the first to implicitly suggest this, because it can be deduced as a consequence from the contents of his philosophy, even if he is unaware of it.

Stated differently, if you are the first to suggest, even implicitly, that Badiou's heir can be literally anyone, then you are Badiou's philosophical heir *par excellence*, because in order to be Badiou's heir, you have to fulfill the Continental Expectation. If you do this in such a way that your own philosophy is able to capture what is essential about that expectation, then your title is secured. Anyone else who tries to use the same procedure will only be repeating what you have already said.

Yet, an objection can be formulated at this point: this whole narrative of philosophical heirs has been called into question time and time again. For example, Seneca wrote:

“Will I not walk in the footsteps of my predecessors? I will indeed use the ancient road—but if I find another route that is more direct and has fewer ups and downs, I will stake out that one. Those who advanced these doctrines before us are not our masters but our guides. The truth lies open to all; it has not yet been taken over. Much is left also for those yet to come.” (Seneca, 2015: 112)

Which means that, if a different way of doing philosophy is possible, one that has not been previously advanced by our predecessors, then one can choose that as a starting point, instead of having to develop one's philosophy in relation to what one's predecessors have done. Centuries later, Russell said:

“I do not propose to meet the views that I disagree with by controversy, by arguing against those views, but rather by positively setting forth what I believe to be the truth about the matter, and endeavouring all the way through to make the views that I advocate result inevitably from absolutely undeniable data. When I talk of “undeniable data” that is not to be regarded as synonymous with “true data”, because “undeniable” is a psychological term and “true” is not.” (Russell, 2009: 2-3)

Instead of developing one's philosophy by first entering into a discussion with one's predecessors and contemporaries, one can instead choose to begin with

whatever topic one wishes; in Russell's case, by what he calls "undeniable data". So arguing with others is not necessarily a precondition for developing a new philosophy.

More recently, Michel Onfray has suggested that we should distrust the idea that the greatest disciple that Socrates had was Plato. Socrates had other disciples, pejoratively termed "minor Socratics", such as the Cynics, the early Greek Stoics, and the Cyrenaics. None of these, according to Onfray, should be considered "minor" Socratics. Instead, they should be viewed as thinkers that were just as profound as Plato, if not even more so.

All of this means that neither Meillassoux nor anyone else should be considered as a heir to Badiou, since the very idea of philosophical heirs is being called into question. Yes, the history of philosophy has labeled Plato as the greatest disciple of Socrates, otherwise the term "minor Socratics" would have never been used. But this should not confuse us to the point where we continue to *legitimate* the idea of philosophical heirs. Whence, Onfray's *Counter-History of Philosophy*.

There is a way to dissipate this objection, a way that makes use of the contents of Meillassoux's philosophy. Recall that hyper-Chaos can destroy anything. If this is so, then it can destroy the idea of philosophical heirs. It seems to us that this is even more extreme than what Onfray suggests. Because here we are not talking about exposing the fraudulent aspects of the official history of philosophy. Here we are talking about a lawless power which is capable of effectively *destroying* the official history of philosophy, and in the most radical way imaginable: of turning it into *nothing*, from one moment to the next, *without reason*.

Of course, this line of defense has its limitations. Hyper-Chaos cannot destroy the history of philosophy, or any other thing, if does not actually exist. Personally, we do not think that it does. But, personal opinions aside, we may carry on by saying that calling into question the idea of philosophical heirs is speculatively recuperable within the framework of Meillassoux's philosophy. The conclusion to be drawn is this: Meillassoux's philosophy has the conceptual resources for it to be considered the successor to Badiou's, and at the same time it has the conceptual resources for annihilating the very idea of philosophical heirs in general. Let us remember that hyper-Chaos is not pure disorder, since it can

produce both order and disorder. Meillassoux's philosophy, by comparison, is able to posit itself as the successor of Badiou's and also to annihilate this very succession. Why? Because of the *Perhaps* which Meillassoux inherited from Mallarmé. Perhaps Meillassoux is Badiou's heir, perhaps not. Maybe he is the one that will succeed him, maybe not. If it were asked, "Is Meillassoux the heir to Badiou?", then the answer, in the strictest sense, is "Maybe". Or, to phrase it more technically, though less clear: it is not the case that Meillassoux *is* a potential heir to Badiou; rather, it is the case that he *may be* a potential heir to Badiou, in the Mallarmean sense of the *Perhaps* as that which replaces Being.

4. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Let us return to an issue that we discussed at the beginning of this essay. Why did Meillassoux produce such a brutal rupture in the second chapter of *After Finitude*, when he introduced the concept of hyper-Chaos? After all, he was apparently launching an attack against dubious idealistic philosophers in the name of mathematics and empirical science, formulating his attack in the language of those philosophers themselves, like a saboteur sneaking into an enemy facility and planting a bomb. But that whole storyline was brutally disfigured when he introduced the concept of hyper-Chaos. What were Meillassoux's reasons for doing so?

There are a number of possibilities which cannot be initially ruled out. One of them is that it was due to a stylistic reason: Meillassoux composed *After Finitude* in such a way that it would be an enjoyable text to read, regardless of its content. In this sense, the storyline developed in the first chapter is like a battleship sailing towards the enemy's port, only to suffer an unexpected shipwreck when it crashed into an unforeseen glacial mass, an iceberg that we may call "hyper-Chaos". On the part of the reader, the interest in reading the rest of *After Finitude* would reside in finding out why that shipwreck occurred, desperately seeking an explanation for an unforeseen event, like the characters in a science fiction novel who seek an answer to something that initially seemed to be impossible.

There are other possibilities. Perhaps Meillassoux is crazy. Perhaps he is a charlatan. Perhaps he has discovered an important consequence for theoretical physics in particular, and for science in general. Perhaps he wanted to invent a

new literary genre. Perhaps he is doing philosophy in an entirely new way. Although arguments could be offered for and against each of these possibilities, none of them can be entirely ruled out in principle.

But perhaps there was no reason. Perhaps Meillassoux had no reason whatsoever for brutally altering the storyline of *After Finitude* with the introduction of hyper-Chaos in the second chapter. Perhaps this cannot be explained in any way, be it in terms of literature, science, philosophy or sophistry, simply because there was no motivation or reason behind it. A literary critic would attempt to find an artistic explanation, claiming that Meillassoux's motivations are aesthetic. A psychologist would claim that Meillassoux is crazy, since he is upholding something so extravagant that he must certainly be psychotic. An opposer of sophistry would claim that Meillassoux introduced the concept of hyper-Chaos simply because he is a charlatan who wants fame and money. Finally, it could be claimed that Meillassoux is simply developing his own philosophy, departing from his predecessors, Badiou and Deleuze, so as to offer something new and unique.

What all of these claims have in common is that they assume that there was indeed a reason for introducing the concept of hyper-Chaos, just like there must be a reason for why a shipwreck occurred, just like there must be reason for why a pair of dice always turn up a double six every time they are thrown. And if there is one lesson to be learned from Meillassoux's philosophy, the core lesson, if you will, is that perhaps there is no such reason. This possibility, that there was no reason whatsoever, cannot be ruled out either. Yes, maybe he is crazy. Yes, maybe he is a charlatan. Yes, maybe he is creating a new literary genre. Yes, maybe he wants to develop a novel philosophy. Or maybe not. Maybe he is not crazy, maybe he is not a charlatan, maybe he is not creating a new literary genre, maybe he does not want to develop a novel philosophy. Or, to state it more bluntly: even if Meillassoux was some of these things, and even if he was all of these things, that does not necessarily mean that there was a reason for introducing the concept of hyper-Chaos in the second chapter of *After Finitude*. Neither artists, scientists, charlatans or philosophers do art, science, charlatanry or philosophy twenty-four hours a day, every day. Sometimes they do other things. Sometimes artists do things for non-artistic reasons, sometimes scientists do things for non-scientific reasons. Sometimes they do things for no reason

whatsoever.

It would be futile to claim, with a tone of absolute certainty, that the reason in question was unconscious. Appeals to Meillassoux's unconscious are questionable precisely because what is being called into question is the notion of a motivation itself, be it conscious or unconscious. It is possible that there was no reason whatsoever behind his acts, at least this particular act.

Can we claim, with absolute certainty, that as a matter of fact, Meillassoux did not have any reason whatsoever for introducing the concept of hyper-Chaos in the second chapter of *After Finitude*? No, because we cannot rule out all of the other possibilities, artistic, scientific, pathological, deceptive, philosophical. But we cannot rule out the possibility of an absence of reason either. Unlike the endings of science fiction texts, such as Asimov's story of the billiard ball, here it is not simply the case that there was a reason and that we have no way of finding it out for sure. Here it is a case of considering that maybe there was no reason at all. Instead of saying that there must be a reason that we do not know, we could say instead that *maybe* there was no reason and we know this; we know that maybe there was no reason whatsoever.

According to Meillassoux, we would do better in recognizing that finitude is not simply the mark of our ignorance, but a real property of things in themselves. In a similar fashion, we can say that we would do better in recognizing that *perhaps* it is not the case that we are ignorant of Meillassoux's reasons for doing this or that, but rather that there are no such reasons, at all. If, through a sacrifice, Mallarmé himself became Chance (Meillassoux, 2012: 127-128), we may say that Meillassoux himself, through a different sacrifice, became absolute contingency.

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