

# The Ideology of Life and the Necessity of its Critique

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## ABSTRACT:

The notion of life presents a special challenge to theory. Theoretical conceptions of life tend to conceive of life as an ambiguous zone, neither purely objective, nor purely subjective. For any critique of the notion of life it becomes, thus, difficult to come to terms with its object. Can the notion of life become a target of a critique of ideology? On the one hand, the critique of ideology, as Žižek develops it, proves the necessity of a theoretical, and subjective, supplement as its condition of possibility, and psychoanalysis itself developed as a supplement to any objective notion of life. On the other hand, theory can attempt to present this split in the given itself. In the latter case, as I try to show in the work of Meillassoux, the notion of life necessarily reappears, as it is the essential conception of a transition between the ontological and the phenomenological. The first one to understand life as an ambiguous concept was Kant, and Meillassoux, thus, reiterates Kant in an absolute form. In absence of a conception of a supplementary subject, the notion of life then becomes uncriticisable. The possibility of such a critique depends upon the status of the subject.

## Key words:

Kant, Žižek, Meillassoux, Life, Ideology, Materialism, Subjectivity

## 1) In which age are we living?

In the preface to the first edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant claims our age “to be the genuine age of *criticism*, to which everything must submit”<sup>1</sup>. By critique, Kant explains, he does not “understand a critique of books and systems, but a critique of the faculty of reason in general, in respect of all the cognitions after which reason might strive *independently of all experience*, and hence the decisions about the possibility or impossibility of a metaphysics in general, and the determination of its sources, as well as its extent and boundaries, all, however, from principles.”<sup>2</sup> And, in the preface to the second edition, Kant adds a clear opponent of this method: “Those who reject this kind of teaching and simultaneously the procedure of critique of pure

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<sup>1</sup> Kant 1998, p. 100 (A xi).

<sup>2</sup> Kant 1998, p. 101 (A xii).

reason can have nothing else in mind except to throw off the fetters of science altogether, and to transform work into play, certainty into opinion, and philosophy into philodoxy.”<sup>3</sup> Critique against philodoxy: critique, following Kant, is the determination of sources of reason, and the determination of its extent and boundaries; but, above all, critique is about work, certainty, and philosophy. The rest can only be play, opinion, and philodoxy. Critique, thus, has a double effect: it is the determination of the possibilities of reason, but at the same time it serves as a distinction from philodoxy. It is a twofold undertaking, a positive determination of sources on the one hand, and on the other hand, the negative side of critique is not the limitation of reason, but, rather, the cut by which it splits its time. Thus, if Kant understands his age to be the age of critique, this is not only an objective claim, establishing the fact of enlightenment taking place, but a critical claim also has a subjective side. A critical claim distinguishes philosophy from philodoxy, certainty from opinion, and work from play. If Kant understood his age to be the age of critique, this implies the subjective necessity, the demand, to overcome philodoxy. For Kant, critique became necessary, because there had been no “secure path of science” yet, instead “a mere groping, and what is the worst, a groping among mere concepts”.<sup>4</sup> *Ein bloßes Herumtappen*, as the German reads, a blind stumbling around, without any orientation. Critique was sought to provide orientation in a situation of complete disorientation in metaphysics.

But, Kant’s description of his age to be the one of critique dates back to 1781/1787, and the question is, in which age do we live? In the contemporary situation, disorientation arises mainly from a situation, which is often referred to as that of the death of ideologies. There is an implication to the formula of the “death of ideologies” that is highly symptomatic, as Alain Badiou remarks:

“This motif of the end of ideologies is essential. It comes with a good-natured tone: The ideologies have done so much harm!... But it is an extremely violent motif. Besides, it is not clear why ideologies should have been living and afterwards died. Ideologies are not a species of animals, it is not like with the elephants. It is prescriptive. Ideologies are neither alive nor dead, they are not organisms.”<sup>5</sup>

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3 Kant 1998, p. 120 (B xxxvii).

4 Kant 1998, p. 110 (B xv).

5 Badiou 2014, p. 125-126. My trans., J.V.

This might, at first, appear to be an anecdotal comment – of course, ideologies do not live and die like some animal species. But, it is remarkable that the idea of the end of ideologies is mixed with the conception of ideologies as living organisms. As if the evolutionary development had singled out ideologies, because they have proven to be incapable to survive. In Badiou’s argument, this small comment refers indirectly to his identification of the contemporary ideology. In his *Logics of Worlds*, Badiou describes the contemporary ideological situation as a “democratic materialism” that only accepts the existences of “bodies and languages” and finally culminates in the imperative to live without an idea.<sup>6</sup> This materialism is *democratic*, in the sense that it intends an objective equality of languages, but it is above all a *materialism* of life:

“In order to validate the equation ‘existence = individual = body’, contemporary doxa must valiantly reduce humanity to an overstretched vision of animality. ‘Human rights’ are the same as the rights of the living. The humanist protection of all living bodies: this is the norm of contemporary materialism. Today, this norm has a scientific name, ‘bioethics’, whose progressive reverse borrows its name from Foucault: ‘biopolitics’. Our materialism is therefore the materialism of life. It is a bio-materialism.”<sup>7</sup>

The aim of *Logics of Worlds*, then, is to set up another imperative, based on a materialist dialectic, an imperative that is the consequence of the exception of the idea: live with an idea! Badiou could, thus, be understood to mark our contemporary philodoxy as one that exempts the idea, and refers to the living, individual bodies. The assertion that there are exceptions to the logic of the given entities of bodies and languages is, of course, not a simple correction of the logic of the given. The exceptions open up to another logic: they are there as exceptions to the given. And, only from this point of view – the exceptional point of view – the contemporary ideology of bodies, and languages, can be said to be one without an idea. Despite the prevailing differences, Badiou is very Kantian in this point: the reference to the idea (to reason for Kant) is the necessary reference to be made against the reigning *philodoxy*, otherwise the *philodoxy* might not even get into view as a *philodoxy*, but simply is the description of what there is. But, the reference to the idea (or to reason in Kant) is the reference to something that is objectively indiscernible.

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6 Badiou 2009, p. 2

7 Badiou 2009, p. 2.

Thus, if one translates the Kantian formula into Badiou, then our age is the age of the idea. The actual situation of the idea is precarious, especially in terms of politics, but it is necessary to cling to the idea to gain the view on the contemporary ideology as a belief system, based on the givenness of bodies and languages. An idea, in Badiou's understanding, is a subjective construction of a truth procedure; but, at the same time, an idea is always in distance from any sort of opinion, from any construction without an idea. An idea combines certainty, work, and philosophy.

An idea, in the Badiouian sense, is not only the unfolding of a procedure, but it is also precisely based on a prescription – in politics, e.g., the idea is constructed and realised as the singular procedure to set the prescription of equality into work. In this first, basic sense, ideas are ideological, as they are prescriptive for their own singular operation. An idea splits the democratic materialism, by acknowledging that there are not only bodies and languages, but also truths. Therefore, put in other words, an idea splits the contemporary ideological notion of life as a pure animalistic happening of drives and needs. Within this paradigm of animalistic life, though, it is a 'natural' consequence that belief systems perish, because they can only be conceived of as organs in the circle of finitude. But, in the perspective of the Badiouian account, there is not only the precarious question of the idea, but also the question of the life, which appears on both sides: live without an idea, live with an idea. The idea is not set in opposition to the notion of life: rather the idea traverses the life of bodies and languages, and supplements a subjective stance to their objective givenness.

But, then, there is the ideological objectivity of bodies and languages, but what about the notion of life? For Kant, metaphysics was the "battlefield," in which reason permanently "got stuck,"<sup>8</sup> and the critique of reason had the aim to provide a new ground for a new metaphysics. Is the battlefield of our time the notion of life? In a certain sense, one could think so, as it seems to be the case that the notion of life is, at least, one of the central notions of the "contemporary sophistry".<sup>9</sup> What is it that makes life such a central notion? As I will

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8 Kant (B xiv-xv), p. 109.

9 Badiou 2009, p. 35. Let us not forget that, at least in continental philosophy, there is hardly any philosophy that does not allocate an important place to the question of life. There is a tradition from Foucault, Deleuze to Agamben and Malabou. These traditions can be examined as Aristotelian or Spinozist traditions, but I think one central paradigm of the notion of life has hitherto been omitted from the picture: Kant.

try to show in the following, the notion of life fits above all very well to a post-ideological ideology, i.e. an ideology that has passed beyond the confines of two objectively opposed terms. Life can be understood as a post-critical concept, and then it tends to absorb theory within itself. The tricky thing about the notion of life is, and this will be the main claim that I want to unfold in the following, that it presents a special challenge to theory. Theoretical conceptions of life tend to become indistinguishable from their object, if this very object – life – is conceived of as a zone of indistinguishability. I will try to explain these points by following very specific examples, not by jumping into the vast history of theories of life in modernity. First, in order to get to terms with the notion of ideology, I will reconstruct an older article, in which Slavoj Žižek explains the vicissitudes of the contemporary notion of ideology. I will then turn to the excerpts from Quentin Meillassoux's *L'inexistence divine*, to show that the development from *After Finitude* to *L'inexistence divine* mirrors the development from the first to the third critique. What I will try to show is that Meillassoux reiterates a Kantian aspect of the notion of life: namely the undecidability between its vitalist and its materialist understanding. The problem of the notion of life becomes visible in what could be called the naturalisation of the indistinguishable. Finally, life proves to be a tricky target for the critique of ideology, as it seems to be unideological in itself: maybe, therefore, a critique of the ideology of life is urgently needed. But, the possibility of such a critique depends upon the status of the subject.

## 2. The objectively undistinguishable standpoint of critique

Today, to put forward a statement on ideology is, more than ever, in itself already a critical gesture. The paradoxical time we are living in, in which ideologies are assumed to suffer the fate of living bodies, makes it possible that any insistence on the existence of ideology already implies a critical intention. The notion of ideology, thus, becomes in itself critical: once you start a discourse on contemporary ideology, you are, in fact in a critical discourse.

One of the first central problems to be remarked: even if the notion of ideology itself is already critical, is not the idea of critique in itself already hypocritical? As Slavoj Žižek has remarked, the suspicion also works the other way round, and one of the first doubts one might have is that the critique of ideology can be nothing else than ideological itself:

"[D]oes not the critique of ideology involve a privileged place, somehow exempted from the turmoils of social life, which enables some

subject-agent to perceive the very hidden mechanism that regulates social visibility and non-visibility? Is not the claim that we can accede to this place the most obvious case of ideology? Consequently, with reference to today's state of epistemological reflection, is not the notion of ideology self-defeating?"<sup>10</sup>

Then, there is not only ideological ideology, but also ideological critique. Both sides of one operation can be ideological: "When some procedure is denounced as 'ideological par excellence', one can be sure that its inversion is no less ideological."<sup>11</sup> The consequence from this is that, ideology is not about 'true' or 'false' in relation to the content. It needs, rather, to be distinguished from the content to escape this ambiguity, and it should instead be understood as a notion concerning the implied subjectivity of some procedure or operation: "An ideology is thus not necessarily 'false': as to its positive content, it can be 'true', quite accurate, since what really matters is not the asserted content as such but the way this content is related to the subjective position implied by its own process of enunciation."<sup>12</sup> So, we are passing from the side of the object, to the side of the subject.

But, how is, then, any possibility of a critique of ideology still possible? Would not such a possibility need criteria that are not only purely subjective? Žižek's first step is to distinguish different conceptions of ideology, as pertaining to different historical situations. The first historico-dialectical moment of ideology describes ideology as a system of beliefs, and its critique as a symptomal reading of its defective functions. The second moment externalises ideology, and explores "the material existence of ideology in ideological practices, rituals and institutions."<sup>13</sup> Of course, Althusser, and the *Ideological State Apparatuses*, are here the important reference. Thirdly, "this externalization is, as it were, 'reflected into itself': what takes place is the disintegration, self-limitation and self-dispersal of the notion of ideology."<sup>14</sup> After this distinction of three moments, Žižek then attempts to conceptualise the notion of ideology, but without falling short of its inner ambiguity or its dialectical structure. The problematic point, is,

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<sup>10</sup> Žižek 1995, p. 3.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 14.

that for any possibility of a critique of ideology, there seems to be the necessity of a point outside of ideology, from which such a critique were possible in the first place. Surely, it is not an option to claim that this point is, simply, to be found in the affirmation that everything would be ideological, as then everything and nothing at the same time could be understood as 'inside' ideology, because, there is no 'outside' any more. Rather, ideology has a spectral or reflective gap inside its own notion, a gap that is inherently played out in the distance between 'spontaneous ideology,' and the necessity of active 'impositions' on the other hand. On the one hand, there is "*ideology that always-already pertains to materiality as such*" and on the other hand "*materiality that always-already pertains to ideology as such*".<sup>15</sup> Ideology is never fully with itself, it is rather – even if Žižek might reject the term – a structure around a gap, rather than a presence. This is a general split, which then is rearticulated in a specific way through different historical modes of the division of labour, and the organisation of the state. Two important consequences are drawn from this structural gap inside ideology itself: first, ideology always distinguishes itself from some other "mere ideology".<sup>16</sup> Ideology, thus, always has an enemy, one that perhaps most often is blamed to be ideological. And, second, the spontaneous part of ideology is not simply to be equated with a distinction between 'spirit' and 'matter'. This is the question of the spectre, without which no reality can exist. Reality as such, and Žižek follows Lacan in this point, cannot be fully symbolised, there is always a necessary gap in this structure in which precisely the specter arises. "What the spectre conceals is not reality but its 'primordially repressed', the irrepresentable X on whose 'repression' reality itself is founded."<sup>17</sup> The spectre is the apparition of the real of reality, its repressed moment in a different form.

One name, under which this spectre can be thought of, is the name of class struggle: it is the X which appears only in the moment in which it is tried to be effaced. The crucial point, here, is that in this sense class struggle cannot be objectified, it has no objective reality, but it is rather the real of this reality, in the sense that it is the oppressed moment of the social constructions. It prevents "the objective (social) reality

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 21.

from constituting itself as a self-enclosed whole.”<sup>18</sup> It is, precisely this repressed real point that, in Žižek’s view, enables a critique of ideology today. But, this point is subject to a decision at the same time: it is possible to conceive of it as the index of a zone of the spiritual Other, as Žižek reads Derrida – then freedom is only partially accessible. Or, one conceives of this point as an impossible possibility, upon which an act is needed that breaks with the symbolic reality. Then the spectre is the truly false guise of the void of freedom. Depending on this decision, freedom is to come, and will always be yet-to-come, or “the act of freedom qua real not only transgresses the limits of what we experience as ‘reality’, it cancels out our very primordial indebtedness to the spectral Other.”<sup>19</sup> In abstract terms then, the critique of ideology will have to have a conception of ideology based on a constitutively missing real element, and a renewed understanding of materialism needs to present itself as a genuine incomplete theoretical edifice. “It is at this precise place that psychoanalysis has to intervene (...) - not, of course, in the old Freudo-Marxist manner, as the element destined to fill up the hole of historical materialism and thus to render possible its completion, but, on the contrary, as the theory that enables us to conceptualize this hole of historical materialism as irreducible, because it is constitutive.”<sup>20</sup> Thus, psychoanalysis is needed as a theoretical supplement to prevent philosophy from the threat of closure, and to theoretically grasp the point of departure for any possible critique of ideology today. Through the historico-dialectical steps, which Žižek unfolds in the course of his argument, it becomes clear that this argument itself is unfolded in a very specific dialectical and historical setting: it is our contemporaneity, in which psychoanalysis is needed, and it is the modern subject we are dealing with: “One should always bear in mind that the subject of psychoanalysis is not some primordial subject of drives, but as Lacan pointed out again and again - the modern, Cartesian subject of science.”<sup>21</sup>

For our purpose here, we might underline that psychoanalysis can pinpoint an objectively undistinguishable ground for the critique of ideology, a ground that is an abyss to be taken as a starting point for a

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18 Ibid., p. 21.

19 Ibid., p. 27-28.

20 Ibid., p. 28.

21 Ibid., p. 29.

renewed materialism that avoids ideological closure.

If one takes this argument back to the beginnings of psychoanalysis, one might claim that this was the point psychoanalysis made in its beginnings against the medical discourse on life: not only does the infamous notion of the death drive, in its Freudian and Lacanian variants, imply the immanent question if there is a nature of drives – do drives tend to finally dissolve themselves in the anorganic or do we live because we stumble on, because the drive of life is the principle of more-than-death – but also psychoanalysis is from its beginnings on the attempt to present a surplus to the objective account of nature, natural life. Psychoanalysis implies the question: what is it to live? In its twofold relation – what is to live in a biological, scientific understanding, and what is to live in the precise difference to the former understanding. But, to psychoanalysis, life is question of a surplus to nature, and not the name for the analysis of the most general structure of (human) nature, as Alenka Zupančič makes it clear:

“The image of human nature that follows from these Freudian conceptualisations is that of a split (and conflictual) nature, whereby ‘sexual’ refers to this very split. If Freud uses the term ‘libido’ to refer to a certain field of ‘energy,’ it is to refer to it as a *surplus* energy, and not to any kind of general energetic level involved in our lives. It cannot designate the whole of energy (as Jung suggested), since it is precisely what makes this whole ‘not-whole.’”<sup>22</sup>

It is, in this sense, that the notion of the sexual needs to be understood: it refers to an “irreducible unbalance of human nature” and the “generative source of culture is sexual in this precise sense of belonging to the supplementary satisfaction that serves no immediate function and satisfies no immediate need.”<sup>23</sup>

If one understands the crucial point of psychoanalysis to be that the meaning of life is precisely the exemption from pure natural and biological relations, we can see that the argument Žižek makes parallels this move of psychoanalysis: the point of psychoanalysis, why it is necessary for contemporary theory, is that it proves there to be more than the simple given (the belief in objective structures of the society hinders us for example to grasp the in-objective real of class struggle). Thus, psychoanalysis can, from the beginning on, be understood as

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22 Zupančič 2008, p. 10-11.

23 Zupančič 2008, p. 10.



an intervention against the reduction of human life to purely natural, objective causalities. In other words, psychoanalysis is the supplement of the objectively indistinguishable surplus of life and the critique of its naturalisation.

In this perspective, it seems as if the target of a possible critique of ideology necessarily is some fully (objectively/subjectively) determined entity, be it the 'social reality' or the notion of 'life'. But, at this point, one could also ask: what happens when this target itself proves to have indistinguishable traits, being unfolded inbetween objective and subjective determinations. It might well be that certain theories of the notion of life present life precisely as this: as a category of something which is not completely determinable. But then, this notion of life might bear a challenge for possibility of a critique of ideology: if life as such is not a totality, can it then be ideological?

In the following, I will try to unfold, and explain, these questions in the context of one philosopher, who is very attentive to the question of totalisation. Nevertheless, we will see that the question of the subjective supplement becomes suspended. The question, thus, becomes, if a non-totalisable objectivity can be objectively thought of, and if this is a different materialism to the one building on the notion of the suppressed real and the supplement of the act. And, for Meillassoux's conception, it is precisely the notion of life that plays a crucial role.

### 3. Divine Inexistence and the advent of life

In Meillassoux, the question of life comes to the fore in the frame of an ethical perspective: in his unpublished book, named *The Divine Inexistence*, of which we know only excerpts, from Graham Harman's book on Meillassoux, the central point is the possibility of the *resurrection of the dead* combined with an *ethics of immortality*.

Thus, when Meillassoux's first book, *After Finitude*, opposed metaphysics as a power leading to faith and to ideological irrationality, and, in this regard, developed speculative realism as a critique of ideology, then the fragments of *Divine Inexistence* go a step further, and attempt to discuss an ethics based on an ontology of contingency. But, perhaps the genealogy is even different: if one recalls that *Divine Inexistence* is actually the unpublished dissertation of Meillassoux, then ethics as a topic might, however, be of greater importance for the project of speculative materialism than *After Finitude* suggests. One might get the impression that there is an ethical demand already at the ground of the ontology of *After Finitude*. Be this as it may, the fragments

in Harman's book haven't been revised by Meillassoux, and have been fit into the framework of *After Finitude*, such that we are on the same ground in terms of concepts.

These fragments are concerned with phenomenological appearances, and especially those appearances that radically change the sense of what might be addressed as 'the world' in a first attempt. Meillassoux discusses the emergences of matter, life, and, thought that follow one after another. Each of these emergences radically changes its before. The main question here is: how can one conceive of these changes without deducing them from their before, without reducing them to an effect following from a cause? The appearance of radical novelty is Meillassoux's topic in these fragments: how to account for something new in the realm of appearances without reducing it to the old.

For the context of my argument, two things are interesting here, which are to be unfolded in the following: 1) if *After Finitude* was the attempt of a reversal of Kantian correlationism, and thereby a reversal of the general Kantian frame, *Divine Inexistence* proves to continue this reversal of Kant, but now on the inside: a systematic Kantian framework is picked up and repeated, but with the attempt to completely change its meaning. This inner framework is the constellation of matter, life, beauty and ethics. 2) If *After Finitude* sought to establish a new understanding of the absolute, an absolute thought separated from any notion of the subject, then the phenomenological perspective of *Divine Inexistence* brings the absence of the subject to the fore. And, from this point, it might become necessary to question the concept of speculative realism from the point of the missing theory of the subject.

Even if overly simplifying, it might be necessary to reconstruct the central issues of the fragments at first. One of the main keywords here is *justice*, because justice signifies for Meillassoux the material appearance of a universal.<sup>24</sup> Justice, in the context of *Divine Inexistence*, is developed as the consequence of the axiom of contingency as being the only necessity there is. And this latter thesis, the central thesis from the book *After Finitude*, claims that everything given is contingent in its

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<sup>24</sup> We see here how close Meillassoux follows Badiou, and at which point he parts his own way: Badiou defines justice as a concept in the realm of politics: "Justice means examining any situation from the point of view of an egalitarian norm vindicated as universal." (Badiou 2012, p. 29). If politics, as a truth procedure, realises universality, it realises the impossibility of being to prefigure the event. Meillassoux, however, translates this non-relation back into a relation, for justice here relates the phenomena to the ontology of contingency.

being given, but that contingency itself is necessary, the only necessity that can be known and that is absolutely valid. This rational concept of the absolute is gained through an internal turn of that principle which Meillassoux calls *correlationism*: namely that Kant's reigning thesis that cognition of the absolute were impossible, because any cognition whatsoever is bound to the subject and therefore relative. Meillassoux's main argument is to prove that the correlationist, if he or she wants to avoid becoming an idealist, is implicitly constrained to make an absolute presupposition.<sup>25</sup> If the strong correlationist, that is the one who radicalises Kant's argument, says that one cannot say anything about something outside the correlation of thought–being, then the idealist answers: right, there exists nothing outside this correlation. The correlationist cannot agree, for he has no insight, not even negatively, into anything beyond the correlation. He has to answer that it is only *that we cannot say or know anything*, whereas, it would still be possible that something else exists. But, this entails that the correlationist has to concede that there is another absolute possibility: namely, that everything could be completely different. Voilà: this contingency becomes necessary, because it founds the possible cognition of the given in the first place.

Now, one can draw relatively particular consequences from this foundation of the absolute in the contingency of the given. If it is possible that everything changes without any reason in one instant, that all natural laws lose their consistency, then it might also be possible that the dead resurrect, just like it once has been possible that matter, life and then thought came about. The first objection against this 'anything goes! Even the dead may resurrect!' might be that, in this case (anything goes), everything would be in the state of pure chaos, and therefore stable; but here Meillassoux's claim is that the absolute contingency does not necessarily imply the permanent chaos: rather there can be a consistency of empirical laws, however, their very foundation will have to be recognized as contingent. Thus, the question of the resurrection is more complicated than a simple 'anything goes'.

So, *justice* is a keyword. Justice is a tricky keyword though, because it combines two understandings. The first, already mentioned, is the combination of the singular and the universal, but justice does also refer to the peculiar *ethical* understanding of justice, namely to do justice, to re-establish justice, to undo harm. The world, which

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 25 For the following, see Meillassoux 2008, p. 36-42.

Meillassoux demands to think, is a world of justice in both of its senses, and therefore the resurrection needs to be thought: “[F]or it is only the World of the rebirth of humans that makes universal justice possible, by erasing even the injustice of shattered lives.”<sup>26</sup> The ethical imperative that is connected to this necessity of absolute contingency, brings us to the demand to live in the face of this possibility. *Divine Inexistence* could be translated into: divine life, which would mean: “Live in that manner that you anticipate the divine, even if you know that it does not exist!”

As the resurrection of the dead is for us something which can only be thought in religious terms, and is otherwise completely inexplicable, the first question that needs to be solved is the question if it is possible to think something that would be so new that it exceeds the boundaries of our understanding. The appearance of a radical novelty becomes, therefore, the major interest of the fragments of *Divine Inexistence*. As already has been indicated, Meillassoux identifies three major events of novelty, namely the advent of matter, the advent of life, and the advent of thought. The principle of these events is an event *ex nihilo*. But how to understand the phrase ‘*ex nihilo*’ if it does not only serve as a formula which covers up an unsolvable problem? As a name for an enigma?

The argument takes its starting point in Russell's paradox of set theory. Becoming cannot be understood as the actualisation of a set of possibilities, because there cannot be a set of all sets of possibilities, there cannot be a set of possibilities that includes this specific set of actualised possibilities. Meillassoux's argument is tricky: It is not say that we have to abolish God and to *assume* that the world was somehow created *ex nihilo*. But, if one not simply wants to allege the creation *ex nihilo*, how then actually find a proof that emergence *ex nihilo* is possible? For Meillassoux, the *ex nihilo* is proven in the given. If an emergence *ex nihilo* can be understood as the excess of the effect over the cause,<sup>27</sup> then it can also be understood as the excess of quality over quantity. This excess is given amidst the given material world:

“All quality as quality is without why, since none of its content refers to anything other than the advent *ex nihilo* of its being. The absurdity of asking why red is red suffices to reveal the excess of becoming over every law: its capacity for creating new cases from nothing, cases for which no genealogy can be established in the world

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 26 Meillassoux 2011, p. 190.

27See Meillassoux 2011, p. 177.

prior to its emergence. A red is without why because no material underpinning can ever tell us how this red is red. (...) The remarkable thing is that the brute facticity of quality is where the inexistence of the Whole is immediately given. For the facticity of quality refers to its advent *ex nihilo*, which refers in turn to the absence of an originary Whole from which it could be inferred with complete necessity.”<sup>28</sup>

Thus, creation *ex nihilo* is actually present. Meillassoux, then, unfolds this argument more closely, with regard to the emergence of life and he directly refers to discussions from the 19<sup>th</sup> century about its emergence. On the one hand, the thesis of *hylozoism* needed to claim that there exists animated matter from the beginning; on the other hand, the only alternative was to claim a strong dualism between soul and matter. As Meillassoux puts it: “As such, the rigid alternative that supported Diderot’s belief in universal sentience continues to hold: either we renounce the materialist hypothesis and institute an irresolvable dualism between soul and body, or we maintain the essential unity and require ‘that stones think’.”<sup>29</sup>

The alternative, which Meillassoux develops to get out of this impasse of materialism, is not only to think the advent of life as an event *ex nihilo*; but also to claim that this advent retroactively reorganizes the structures of matter. That “there is more in the effect than in the cause”<sup>30</sup> may explain the advent as such, but it also needs to be explained how this ‘more’ is transforming the material laws, if the explanation of the advent shall be a rational one. The advent of life, therefore, has a qualitative and a quantitative side: the qualitative advent changes retroactively the conditions to which it has not been related before.

This explanation of the advent of life avoids the impasses of 19<sup>th</sup> century alternative between a dualism (which in fact was not even a real alternative) and the thesis of animated matter. It was not even a real alternative, because Hylozoism, the thesis of animated matter, leads to the necessity of explaining the different intensities of life. Meillassoux refers to Bergson, who criticised that intensity here served “only to mask qualitative discontinuity by means of mathematical continuity”.<sup>31</sup> Thus

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28 Meillassoux 2011, p. 181.

29 Meillassoux 2011, p. 182.

30 Meillassoux 2011, p. 177.

31 Meillassoux 2011, p. 182.

both explanations, hylozoism as well as dualism, end in metaphysics. Life presents a stumbling block for any theory of immanence that wants to explain the coming about of the new. Three points are remarkable in this account: 1) creation *ex nihilo* is not only a question of *some* emerging quality, but rather the emergence of quality as such and its retroactive inscription into quantity. 2) From this point of the argument the previous alternative between dualism and hylozoism proves to be not an alternative at all, and 3) the explanation of life repeats the question of the contingency of laws in a very peculiar sense. For it is not only that the contingent novelty of something has to be explained, but also how consistency of laws despite their general contingency, can be explained.

At this point one might recall that Meillassoux’s project in its main frame is conceived as a rejection of correlationism and more or less explicitly as a rejection of Kantianism. But, *Divine Inexistence* goes a step further and turns speculative realism into what could be said to be the most faithful inversion of Kant possible. This turn consists of two steps. The first step, done in *After Finitude*, was to rearrange for a ground to think the absolute: instead of creating space for religion by redirecting metaphysics such that it makes faith possible and demonstrates us the necessity of this faith at the same time, metaphysics finds itself now deprived of its core, the absolute has moved onto the world as *absolute contingency* and thus a space is created to believe in that of which you know that it does not exist (as Meillassoux will put it later on).<sup>32</sup> This ontological inversion of Kant brings us to a second step, which can only implicitly be found in Meillassoux: the repetition of *the* Kantian problem, his main question that he attempted to tackle through many of his books, namely: how to understand the emergence of life as a novelty but without reducing it to some previous cause. Meillassoux does not discuss this, but it can be taken as the background for *Divine Inexistence*.

In Kant, the most advanced answer he gives is found in the *Third Critique*, and this answer will be developed in the context of the beautiful on the one hand, and the question of life on the other. Of course, both parts belong together, and I would argue that the transcendental turn in the end is even motivated by the hitherto unsolvable question of life.<sup>33</sup> How can life be explained, if it is not to be reduced to some previous metaphysical entity (like animated matter), nor to some previous

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32 „[B]elieving in God because he does not exist“, Meillassoux 2011, p. 239.

33 This would be the central argument I develop further in my book on Kant: Voelker 2011.



quality (God)? This question can be transformed into the question of how to explain a given singularity without presupposing that there is a previously constituted generality (*objektive Allgemeinheit*, in Kant), a law, in the realm of which it was already implied as a possibility. You cannot simply deduce it, nor is it possible to simply accept it as something strange, which just does not fall under the previous laws. One needs a conception of this strange thing appearing, this strange appearance outside every law. If the law of the laws, the law that accounts for the emergence of laws, cannot explain the emergence of a new singularity you are put in a highly problematic situation. You would have to argue that you have laws of nature for example and you have laws of laws, but then you stumble on something new, and this undefined novelty simply breaks your chain of laws. And then you are left with a split between this novelty and your law of the laws – and the only thing left is to say: there are laws of nature, and there are laws that explain the continuity and the relation of laws, and if something new arises that does not fit this chain of laws than it can only prove that there is a bigger law, a law of the law of laws, or God. Thus, both explanations do not work: neither can the novelty be simply explained as a consequence of the given, nor can it simply be stated as something new that is in absolutely no connection with your general idea of laws (of appearance). If anything, then this is precisely the question of Kant's third critique.

Thus, we remark a strange repetition of Kant here. For it was Kant who sought to invert the relation between subject and object, and in the consequence of this inversion, he was confronted with the appearances of strange things or events that mark a novelty inside the transcendental realm without being deducible from it. Because, for Kant, the central law of coherence is called nature, and the specific moment of novelty, of radical change is precisely life. Life is the thing that emerges in nature without obeying to its laws. And life correlates with beauty for one single reason: because life marks the same difference inside the *objectivity* of nature, as beauty marks a difference on the side of the *subject*. Beauty is the name for the subjective experience of pleasure without any objective reason. Because of the transcendental turn – objects follow the law of the subject – both sides come with an inner twist. The difference on the side of the objects, on the side of nature, is not purely objective, but has to be understood as an objective difference *for transcendental subjectivity*, that is a difference inside transcendental subjectivity itself, or: it is a subjective difference or split at the same time. Beauty, as subjective phenomenon on the other hand, cannot be

understood in purely subjective terms, because in some sense, the split of the beautiful splits (transcendental) subjectivity and cannot be subjective alone, it presents something else to the transcendental subject. And as such beauty marks a quasi-objective split in subjectivity, which is the split on which the subject as a subject of experience will be founded. It is here that another subject enters the scene: the subject of the beautiful is not the transcendental I, but the subject of a contingent experience of a non-objective gap (the beautiful) in nature.<sup>34</sup> The question of ethics follows: because this split founds the subject, and is a split that can precisely not be founded in nature, a split that has no grounds in any metaphysical entity, the subject is only subject when it recalls its founding character. You have to live in that way that you recall the split of subjectivity, because subjectivity does not have any other ground. In Kant the question of the beautiful will then be connected with the morally good. But the term 'justice', that Meillassoux uses, seems to take the same place. Justice names the relation of this non-relation. Law and Singularity, Nature and Life, the Split and Subjectivity – it is the problem of relation that has to be thought as a relation of two sides that do not relate, but at the same time cannot be understood without relation. Justice names this relation without relation.

And then we see that Meillassoux's argument is a complete repetition of the Kantian structure. Strangely enough, the inversion of the transcendental frame in Meillassoux leads to the same problems as Kant was led to, above all to the question of life.

But, where is the systematic place of beauty in Meillassoux? Beauty, for Meillassoux, stems from the faithfulness to ethics. In fidelity to the knowledge about the necessity of the contingency of everything given, which makes the resurrection of the dead as a contingent event possible, in this fidelity the speculative materialist is not a fatalist who waits upon the new human mankind to arise. Precisely because the necessity of contingency is a thought, it can only be upheld as thinking and cannot relapse into faith, but needs the permanent confirmation by thought, which upholds the necessity of contingency. This confirmation is basically a confirmation that at any point in time things can be different, and as such the confirmation is an anticipation of a possible change. But it is an active anticipation. The anticipation of change keeps change in the realm of the possible, and change might contingently come true.

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34 See Rado Riha 2009 for the difference of the subject in Kant.

But, the contingent coincidence of hope and being is what Kant, as Meillassoux has it, describes as beauty.<sup>35</sup> The sphere of beauty in Kant is closely linked to that of ethics, and the bridge that Kant builds is the question of the symbol. Via the symbol Kant achieves the link between the beautiful and the morally good, because the beautiful is conceived as a symbol of the morally good. Meillassoux takes up this point as well: it is the realm of the symbol in which the link between being and value or being and thought is anticipated. Our time, for Meillassoux, is in the quest of a new symbol to enable this link, as the old symbolic orders have ended: the cosmological symbol as the coherence of the universe and the earth has broken under the influence of science. It became the romantic symbol of the coherence of man and nature, which because of its deficiencies was superseded by the historical symbol. And it is the end of the historical symbol, which we are witnessing in our time. For Meillassoux, all of the previous symbols depended on metaphysics, whereas the new symbol that emerges from the necessity of the contingency of everything given, detaches itself from metaphysics and links an absolute that is no longer metaphysical with an ethics in the world of phenomena. The symbol, here, is a phenomenal sign for the possible appearance of justice. The appearance of the new symbol anticipates the appearance of the universal, i.e. justice.

Thus, there is on the one hand an indirect repetition of Kant's understanding of beauty as a symbol of morality. The beautiful, in Meillassoux's rendering, is no longer the symbol, but the beautiful corresponds to the phenomenal appearance of the universal, that follows upon the symbol. Differently put: the appearing symbol anticipates the coming beauty of justice. But this is not only Kantian, because on the other hand, the history of the symbol that Meillassoux unfolds reminds of the Hegelian structure. In Hegel, we find the partition in symbolic, classical and romantic forms of art. For Hegel, art was *symbolic* as the ambiguity and inadequacy between sensitivity and meaning. Art was *classic*, as the relation of equivalence and finally art was *romantic* as the renewed disintegration and documentation of this disintegration. In Meillassoux's account both traditions are set into a relation: In the Kantian context we can read the emphasis on a history of the symbol as a Hegelian critique. But, insofar as all three types of symbols are recognised as metaphysical symbols, Meillassoux also applies a Kantian critique to the Hegelian stance. In relation to both

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35 See Meillassoux 2011, p. 218.

stances, the absolute metaphysical form is the one of the identity of identity and non-identity. In opposition to this suspension of difference, Meillassoux proposes the inclusion of the Kantian and the Hegelian stance in that *moment* of a history of the symbol in which the new symbol leads to the beautiful as coincidence of thinking and being *in the form of the just act*. "In other words, the universal can arise only on the condition that it be awaited as such *in the present*. It must be actively anticipated by acts of justice marked by fervent commitment to the radical requirement of universality, and by the discovery of the non- absurdity of such a requirement. This amounts to affirming that *the final World can commence only on the condition that it be a recommencement*."<sup>36</sup>

Beauty, and justice, historicity and the act, and the possible resurrection of the dead. Why do questions of life and beauty appear central in a philosophical system, which tries to think a rational absolute? The decisive question here is, whether there is a necessary link between the construction of such a system, which understands itself to be materialist, and the questions of beauty and of life? There are two objections against the relevance of this question, which should be rejected in advance:

First, one could argue that the question of life is central for any philosophy, because any philosophy will have to touch upon questions concerning how we want to live, the question of ethics. But, one should not all too quickly conflate the ethical question with the question of speculative materialism. Meillassoux aims at the possibility of the emergence of life as such, independent of its specific dimensions. And the question of ethics finds its point as the consequence of the relation between the ontological and the phenomenological. Because this is the explicit claim of *Divine Inexistence*: The ontological serves as a ground for an ethics. Ethics, thus, here is not the name for the question of how we want to live amidst the given, but rather the name for a possible demand for the universal. But still, against this, one could argue that the question of life and ethics only touches upon the ontological if being is equated with *phusis*.

The second objection could bring forward that, in the contemporary debates, the question of life plays a decisive role and that the role of bio-scientific developments has turned the question of life into a huge obstacle for materialism. Here, the speculative materialist might play the ontological card again and simply refer to the

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36 Meillassoux 2011, p. 215.

contingency of anything given, and might thus reject the significance of any contemporary development.

If both objections are rejected, the conclusion can only be that the appearance of topics like life, beauty, and ethics marks the point of intersection between the ontological and the phenomenological. The question of life seems to be one, without which speculative materialism cannot understand itself as materialist. So this is the first necessary question: why and how do life and the beautiful allow for a bridge between the ontological and the phenomenological? The second question leads to a systematic omission or to a blind spot in the debate on speculative materialism. Of course, a blind spot is perhaps not only an omission, but maybe a suspension, a calculated absence or a conditioned absence. But nevertheless: who is the *subject* of this life, this ethics, this beautiful? Is there a subject of speculative realism? Against this question, one could obviously reply that this question might be nonsensical, for the whole project consists in the idea to establish a concept of the absolute in thought, precisely without any necessary dependence on any subject. The whole project is about the decoupling of object and subject, correlationism was the reign of the subject – so why insist on the point of the subject?

The assumption would be the following: maybe, if one agrees with the aim of speculative materialism – that it is necessary to think the absolute –, maybe this thought of the absolute precisely demands a new thought of the subject. What if the absolute cannot be thought without a different conception of the subject, one that differs from the so-called correlationist notion of the subject?

But still, there might be the second objection to this question: obviously there is a subject of the *ethics of the absolute*, namely that subject that realizes in its acts the *Divine Inexistence*. Thus, we can sharpen the second question and combine it with the first: is it one and the same subject that realises the necessity of the contingency of everything given? Is the subject one? One, which in the end would have an ontological status?

#### 4. The ambiguity of vitalism and the materialist supplement

As was seen in the discussion of the emergence of quality, it is an essential point that for Meillassoux that this emergence ex nihilo is given, and with it the inexistence of the Whole: “The remarkable thing is that the brute facticity of quality is where the inexistence of the Whole

is immediately given.”<sup>37</sup> It seems clear that, for Kant, the point is exactly the opposite: the whole problem of the questions of life and the beautiful is a problem of subjectivity, even though we find in the third Critique – this is where Kant discusses the questions of life and the beautiful – a transition from a purely transcendental subjectivity to a subjectivity that is not presupposed. In the *Critique of Judgment-Power*, finally, appears a problematic subject, based on the experience of pleasure as a non-objective feeling. It is the non-objectivity, which is necessary for the possibility to uphold the universality of the aesthetic judgment. The aesthetic subject expresses its difference from anything objective. But, because, for Kant, in the last instance the realm of the given is nature, subjectivity can also be understood as a point of difference in nature – the point at which nature differs from itself. This construction opens up one central ambiguity: is subjectivity then, understood as human life, a split in nature, is spirit a part of nature, its inner difference, or is subjectivity a non-natural but nonetheless indeterminable difference?

I would propose to understand this ambiguity, in non-Kantian terms, as a distinction between vitalism and materialism. The vitalist option (in Kant) would be to understand that nature differs from itself, and that this difference is the core of (its) being. But why then conceive of the alternative structure as materialist? Because Kant, in his attempt to develop the notions of life and of the beautiful, insists at the same time on point of the infinite judgment, that kind of judgment that ascribes existence only via the negation of a predicate: the soul is not-dead is here the most famous example which Kant discusses in the Critique of Pure Reason, this is to say: the soul exists as something that is undead.<sup>38</sup> The core of life, as well as the beautiful, can only be determined in negative manner, although it exists. Life exists precisely as non-natural. While the beautiful is a feeling of non-objective character, the point of life is its irreducibility to the conceptual laws of nature. Therefore, the difference from nature to itself cannot objectively be stated.

Kant develops this understanding of life as a direct consequence of the impossibility to explain life in the old way of reducing life to some special element in nature or as dualism, that is to say he starts at the same point as Meillassoux, but he draws a different consequence from

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<sup>37</sup> Meillassoux 2011, p. 181.

<sup>38</sup> See Kant (A 72), p. 207. I develop this extensively in Voelker 2011. Also Slavoj Žižek has underlined this point on different occasions.

it. The old explanation of life, if it did not want to refer to a dualism, needed to single out a peculiar element of nature upon which life depends. And, insofar as the old way of understanding implicitly always has been Aristotelian, presupposing the given entity of nature, *phusis*, there are good reasons to argue that Kant in his third critique lays the latent foundation for a revolution of materialist thought: life becomes for the first time an irreducible quality, its own term, without referring to a dualism, nor being an entity of nature. Life points to a materialism without object. The method that enables this understanding is the infinite judgment, to understand life as the non-natural emergence from nature.

But, it is left undecided in Kant, whether this irreducible quality belongs nevertheless to nature, for example as its inner split, or whether this quality is not only irreducible, but can also not be explained via the laws of nature. For Kant, all there is, is only nature, and the understanding of nature and the regulation of this understanding as reason. As there is no ontology Kant that would allow to make a distinction between the nature we experience and a different level of being, there seems to be no chance for Kant to keep the two spheres – the one of nature and the difference from it – apart. But even if left undecided, Kant indicated a philosophical resistance to the reduction of the difference to the one of nature. He indicated that philosophy might have to resist the temptation to re-inscribe the difference from nature into the laws of nature again.

This ambiguity should then, again, in a non-Kantian use of the terms, be understood as the double possibility of vitalism and materialism in Kant. Based on this, one could emphasise as a possible first distinction between vitalism and materialism the question of a moved substance (nature as differing from itself): vitalist would be those systems, which in their arguments refer to one and the same substance as *becoming*, directly or indirectly. A vitalist logic refers the emergence of life back to the movement (be it via a split) of substance, installing a direct link between the moving substance and the emergence of life. In contrast to this, a materialist thought cannot simply negate this chain without falling into dualism. As the choice between hylozoism and dualism proves again to be no choice, a materialist thought would need to turn the Kantian point from the implicit to the explicit. In Kant, this point is left undecided and implicit, and therefore this negation of a continuum of nature risks to become part of this continuous logic itself. *A materialist logic needs to interrupt itself, for if it does not interrupt itself, it*

*will necessarily become a stable logic, and enable a stable causality between substance and life, the ontological and the phaenomenological.* In a certain way, Meillassoux actually sees this point very clearly: A materialist logic needs not only to account for absolute contingency, but also for relative stability, because otherwise the point would only be to insist on total chaos of the given, another conception of stability. The total chaos is nothing else than an anarchist metaphysical account: everything changes at any possible time, the only thing that can be said is that there is nothing stable. Which is pure stability.

But back to Kant: if the Kantian system can be said to not allow for an interruption of its own system – that is a systematic change of itself without any previous cause – we could then conclude that it stays implicitly vitalist, because it does not provide any means to exclude vitalism. Of course, the underlying presumption is that systematic thought has an inherent tendency to turn to vitalism, and as such, the materialist task is to provide means to prevent its own slipping into vitalism. Is this to say that vitalism is the natural state of theory? Yes, but one would conceive this naturalism as one ascribed from the point of materialism. Because, apart from the materialist perspective, simply nothing happens, as vitalism in the last end is stability. Nothing new comes about. Thus, it is only from a materialist perspective that another thought can be identified, and identified as vitalist. Only from a change in nature thought can arise and can identify another thought.

But, is life a subjective or an objective force? What Kant in fact does, is to overcome the old dualist position: there is matter and then there is animation, as well as the old vitalist position: (some) matter is animated through an inner objective force. And he overcomes the dualism between subject and object: from a Kantian point of view, the old materialist has to exclude the question of the subject, because in the last instance the subject will become a metaphysical claim. And the old vitalist has to neglect materialism at a certain point, for he has to claim that there is some inherent force in nature that cannot be reduced to matter. The question that has to follow is one about the status of this ambiguity itself.

Kant transfers this opposition into an undecidable ambiguity in which life follows a non-objective logic that can only subjectively be grasped. But Kant links this ambiguity in the last instance to 'nature' as its conceptual background, 'nature' is the frame in which this ambiguity can arise, and precisely this brings along the risk of a stabilisation of this logic, and therefore the ambiguity between materialism and vitalism



in Kant can be understood to be itself overdetermined in a vitalist mode.

Kant invented the doubled suspension of these oppositions between subject/object and vitalism/materialism, and a good part of the contemporary theory works inside the space of this doubled suspension when it comes to the question of life. Life becomes an objectively indistinguishable force of nature. But, as long as nature is taken as a given entity, and as long as there is no account for the absolutely new, this undecidable ambiguity risks to become stable as such.

Implicit vitalism would mean any theory that cannot provide any means by which its basic figure of thought is prevented from referring to one, closed entity. To put it even more bluntly: any theory that is not capable to actively prevent that it could be understood as the theory of one form, movement, or relation is immanently vitalist, because in the end it will have to subscribe that this one form, movement, or relation is the one that explains not only being, but also becoming. A materialism, which begins with a given entity, is in its end indistinguishable from a vitalism.

If we return to Meillassoux at this point, we can at first recall the point that it is not the case that there was no question of the subject in speculative realism. On the contrary, the turn to ethics, the question of the act, the anticipatory producing of justice, this turn implies of course the question of the subject. Right at the beginning of *After Finitude*, when the problem of correlationism is brought on the table, Meillassoux sees that correlationism not only crosses out the possibility to think any object apart from its relation to the subject, but that the correlationist is also incapable to think a subject apart from its relation to an object.<sup>39</sup> It would be false to say that speculative realism does not address the question of the subject: But this question is put in a specific manner that entails a specific problem. Meillassoux criticises the transcendental subject as one that is always positioned in the world, a subject that is inseparable from its body and that as a condition of knowledge thereby prevents the possibility of absolute knowledge.<sup>40</sup> One may criticise this interpretation of the transcendental subject, but Meillassoux's reading nevertheless indicates an important point: For there is indeed an ambiguity of the subject in Kant, between the transcendental subject and the subject of the third critique. But, in Meillassoux,

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39 Meillassoux 2008, p. 5.

40 See Meillassoux 2008, p. 25.

the absolute is being realized by the subject acting according to an ethics that is build on the absolute necessity of contingency. The point of universality is desubjectified. And thus, the realisation of this absolute marks a possible equivalence between the ontological and the phenomenological, an equivalence that then is called beautiful. This equivalence can be understood to be the contingent realization of the absolute by a subject. But, because the ontology of contingency precedes the subject, this subject is indeed not a subject of a process, but it is the direct equivalence of a point zero of becoming. It responds to an ambiguity which Meillassoux tends to leave undecided: that is, if the claim about the necessity of the absolute contingency of everything given as a statement is itself given, is it then thereby contingent? But, because Meillassoux leaves this final question undecided, the series of consequences from this undecided claim makes it only possible to think of two choices: either, the claim about absolute contingency is in itself absolutely contingent. Then, actually *nothing* would have been said, and nothing would happen. Or, it is necessary, and then it allows only to think of one type of the subject, namely that one that realises the necessary contingency. One life, one subject. At this point one can make a different use of the well-known argument of retroactivity: the absent multiplicity of the subject retroactively totalises the ontological ground on which it has been founded. The question would be, whether the conception of the subject as one retroactively turns the undecided ambiguity of the ontological ground into *one*.

Thus, Meillassoux's project reiterates the Kantian ambiguity on a deeper level: the point is not the undistinguishability (of life) in relation to nature, but the objective undistinguishability of the absolute itself. The subject emerging from this absolute nevertheless proves this absolute point to be *one*. Thus, if Kant's project and its followers can be said to imply a vitalist overdetermination, Meillassoux's project presents the point zero of the vitalist-materialist threshold.<sup>41</sup> But, of course, the question is then, whether the phenomenological-ontological equivalence is the real problem, because it proves to be an account of being as one. The notion of life is, precisely, the notion of the transition from the ontological to the phenomenological, this is why it was so interesting for Kant, and this also why it reappears in any account of this

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41 Meillassoux takes a firm standpoint against vitalism, but he unites vitalism and idealism, because in the last instance vitalism for Meillassoux is part of the absolutization of thought. See Meillassoux 2008, p. 51, and Meillassoux 2012, p. 3, where he invents the term „subjectalism (...) to encompass at once all forms of idealism and all forms of vitalism.“



transition.

If this is true, then it would follow that in any case a theory of the subject is needed which does not retroactively turn the ontology into a given one. One option for this is a theory that intervenes as a supplement, as in Žižek's conception outlined above. Psychoanalysis here points out: a materialism without an object is not given. *It is precisely a claim upon that which is not given.* Against this, the notion of life presents the option of the non-given as appearing in the given. Life is undecided and undistinguishable. If ideology is the theory of closure, then life might present the most refined closure possible. Against this, we could say that a materialism of the subjective supplement subtracts itself from the given, while a claim that is oriented towards the given necessarily has to fall back into the claim of a stability of the process between ontology and phenomenology. A supplement against the ideology of life is needed – for a theoretical conception of life.

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