

from "l'inexistence divine"

quentin meillassoux, translated by
nathan brown

TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION

Since the publication of Quentin's Meillassoux's slim treatise *Après la Finitude* in 2006, rumours have circulated concerning the relation of this book to a larger work in progress, titled *L'Inexistence Divine*, of which the arguments in *After Finitude* constitute a partial précis.¹ Yet we already have the complete text of Meillassoux's doctoral dissertation of the same title, filed at Université de Paris in 1997.² Indeed, a digital file of the dissertation is readily available online. Doubtless the arguments of the dissertation might be refined, expanded, consolidated—yet the text that we have, filed when Meillassoux was thirty years old, is a coherent and rigorously argued philosophical system, at ease with the entirety of the tradition in which it intervenes and immensely consequential for a contemporary understanding of philosophical rationalism, of the philosophy of time, of the relation between necessity and contingency, and of the theory of physical law.

What is striking about this document, for the reader of *After Finitude*, is the marked difference of its rhetorical strategies, its order of reasons, and its philosophical style from those of Meillassoux's first book. The dissertation has in common with *After Finitude* the clarity of argumentation and the conceptual radicality that made that book a signal intervention in contemporary philosophy. But here

we find little or no reference to some of the major watchwords that have guided the reception of *After Finitude*, for better or for worse. The term “correlationism” is nowhere to be found among the dissertation’s four hundred pages (though there is a twenty page section discussing the problem of “the correlation” in Heidegger’s oeuvre). Whereas *After Finitude* opens by challenging “correlationism” to account for “the arché fossil” or “the problem of ancestrality,” a brief subsection titled “Le problème du fossile” occupies just over two pages in the middle of Meillassoux’s dissertation. Perhaps even more notable is the rhetorical tenor of the argumentation, which largely forgoes the polemical style characterizing much of *After Finitude*. The version of “L’Inexistence Divine” that we have in the archives develops a more patient and constructive relation to the tradition it interrogates, featuring detailed and powerful commentaries on Hegel, Heidegger, Heraclitus and Anaximander, and on the problem of participation in Plato. Absent are the terminological fireworks of references to “hyper-chaos” or the “menacing power” and “omnipotence” of time; in their place we find a more sober reflection upon the immanence of time and becoming.

Indeed, what comes to the fore in this early work is the degree to which Meillassoux’s philosophy is centrally concerned with how to think the relation between immanence and becoming through a theory of time. Whereas “something akin to Time” is identified with “Chaos” in *After Finitude*, it becomes clear in “L’Inexistence Divine” that the philosophy of time is the major problematic within which Meillassoux situates his theory of absolute contingency. In my view, the dissertation might fruitfully be read as an effort to go beyond Heideggerian and Derridean responses to Hegel’s thinking of time—as an effort to carry out the properly ontological thinking of time promised by Heidegger as Division III of *Being and Time*, a philosophical project that Badiou’s renovation of ontology in *Being and Event* largely left aside. When Heidegger declares, in section 65 of *Being and Time*, that “*Temporality is the primordial ‘outside of itself’ in and for itself,*”³ he puts us on the path toward a difficult conjunction of exteriority, immanence, and temporality that Meillassoux pursues with striking originality, beyond the “correlational” structure of Heidegger’s thought.

Equally important is the very different articulation of the Principle of Factiality that we find in Meillassoux’s dissertation, and it is this section of the text that I have chosen to translate below. This principle—that only contingency cannot be thought as contingent, that only contingency is necessary, and thus absolute—is established in the central chapter of *After Finitude*. There, however, Meillassoux’s

argument takes the form of a dialogue between correlationist, subjective idealist, and speculative philosophers, circling around a discussion of claims about the afterlife and working through the exposure of impasses internal to the relation between correlationism and subjective idealism. In “L’Inexistence Divine,” on the other hand, we an argument for the principle of factuality articulated without any reference to the impasses of other positions, and thus stands more clearly on its own terms. Perhaps we might view Meillassoux’s development of his critique of correlationism as a response to objections, or possible objections, to this form of the argument. If so, it might help us to understand and situate some of the discursive or logical problems Meillassoux attempts to resolve in *After Finitude*. What is particularly notable about the dissertation’s initial articulation of the Principle of Factuality is the greater emphasis placed upon the “anhypothetical” form of the argument, the status of which is here granted a full subsection of the discussion and theorized more explicitly than in the version published later.

I would like to thank Quentin Meillassoux for his permission to translate and publish this excerpt from his doctoral work, with the proviso that this should be considered a provisional stage of his argumentation. Any errors or infelicities of the translation are solely my responsibility. My hope is that readers of French will turn to the original text of Meillassoux’s dissertation in order to consider the arguments of *After Finitude* in relation to his earlier, more expansive presentation. My sense is that, until we have access to his published revision and further development of this impressive philosophical beginning, knowledge of the dissertation would substantially refine discussions of his thought.

FROM "L'INEXISTENCE DIVINE," PART TWO. THE FACTIAL

We will see that the resolution of the problem of induction ultimately requires the demonstration of the impossibility of the Whole. But, more generally, we have noted that this demonstration requires a profound rethinking of the notion of contingency. Yet to rethink contingency is to rethink *as well* its immediate contrary, necessity. We will thus, in this second part, attempt a redefinition of this pair of opposites—a redefinition that will admittedly have consequences far greater than the resolution of the problem of induction. In effect, it is the notion of reason itself that will be modified. Since reason is defined as a discourse grounded upon necessary argumentation, as opposed to any other arbitrary discourse, to rethink necessity is thus to modify the very notion of rationality. The demonstration of the impossibility of the Whole will thus be a consequence of an immense modification of our usual concepts, as we will now endeavor to show in detail.

What we call the factial, or *factial ontology*, is the ground of our entire discourse: it rests upon an unprecedented redefinition of necessity, and by the same token of reason as necessary discursivity. This redefinition grounds our concept of un-subordinated contingency in its distinction from chance, since to transform the region of necessity amounts to modifying the frontiers of its other, which is contingency, or facticity, as such.⁴

1. THE PRINCIPLE OF FACTIALITY

Formulation

Reason, one says, is the field of necessary discursivity. But what is necessity? Nothing seems to be necessary, since beings, in their determinate and empirical existence, given in their radical contingency, make up our world in its entirety: I can not, it seems, give any ultimate reason for the existence not only of this or that thing (every reason requires another reason, all equally contingent, and so on to infinity), but even for the existence of the world in general (the world appears to me as a pure fact). The canonical paradox of rationality is thus given in this form: reason presents itself as *universal* discursivity, *necessary* and *true*, thus as the thought of that which is—but that which is is given as *particular* and *contingent*. If reason is not a chimera, then it must resolve this problem: how to disengage, amid the factual beings given in experience, that which, adequate to beings as such, is not itself contingent? What we call the factial, or principle of factiality, proposes

an unprecedented solution to this classical difficulty, which itself involves the whole status of the rational.

We must find that which, at the heart of the facticity of beings, is not itself factual. The factual solution is formulated thus: *what is, is factual, but that what is is factual, this can not be a fact. Only the facticity of what is can not be factual.* Yet again, put otherwise: *it can not be a fact that what is is a fact.* The rational, as necessitating logos (*logos nécessaire*), is then identified with a discourse bearing upon what all beings are (*ce qu'est tout étant*), *that is to say upon the necessity of contingency.* The contingency of beings, and this alone, is not a contingent property of beings.

The elucidation of this concept of necessity rests thus upon what we call the *principle of factuality*: *only the facticity of what is can not itself be a fact.* We thus distinguish the facticity, or the contingency, of what is from the *factuality which designates the impossibility of redoubling facticity, that is to say of attributing facticity to facticity itself.*

The principle of factuality will then have the burden of establishing a necessary discursivity, *non-contingent*—which we call “factual”—whose object is the non-factual (necessary) facticity of what is.

2. CLARIFICATION

a. Non-Redoubling

The specificity of the principle of factuality does not reside in stating the non-contingency of contingency, but in the affirmation that *only* contingency can not itself be a contingent property of what is.

The non-contingency of contingency could signify that contingency is deduced from a principle *exterior* to it and which will be, itself, a necessary being: such is Hegelian contingency, deduced as a necessary moment of the Whole, and which thus finds in the absolute its non-contingent reason.

The affirmation of the non-contingency of contingency could also signify that what exists is certainly contingent, but that this contingency is not total, absolute, i.e. that a necessary principle limits this contingency from its exterior, for example a law or a logical principle. One will say, from this perspective, that it is contingent that a being has such and such empirical determination, but that it is

not entirely contingent, because its contingency is proscribed by certain physical or logical principles.

The non-contingency of contingency expresses, in these two cases, the limitation of contingency by principles exterior to it and declares these necessary (we recognize here the thesis of subordinated contingency). But why these principles are necessary, from whence their necessity derives, how contingency may itself be limited by what it is not, precisely these questions are no longer posed since they seem, from the perspective of such a conception, insoluble or trite.

In relation to these theses, the novelty of the principle of factuality is thus as follows: we affirm that contingency *and it alone* is *absolute*, i.e. *insubordinate* to every principle exterior to it, and *we draw from this very absoluteness of contingency the necessary principles by which it is usually limited*. No doubt, it is in this proposition that the originality and “strangeness” fundamental to the factual method resides. If its meaning is not mastered, all our succeeding statements will seem absurd. Let us see what this assertion entails.

b. Figures

The contingency of what is must, according to us, be considered as absolute. This absolute signifies that *every determination of a being may not be*: one can not find any possibility of demonstrating that a being must be thus rather than otherwise, since every assertion of this order refers to another determinate condition, which itself has no reason for being thus rather than otherwise. No determination can therefore be called necessary, which notably means that no determinate physical law can be considered as necessary. It follows that necessity must be drawn from that which, in a being, is not one of its determinations. Such is the case, and the *unique* case, of the contingency of its determinations: since *the contingency of the being's determinations is not a contingent determination supplementary to this being*.

That a being must be this color, with this form, in this place, that it has this or that determination, this always appears to us as a fact. But that all these determinations are factual is not a *new* determination of the being which would be added to those preceding it. In that case, it would itself be a contingent determination. But it would then add to the contingency of this determination that contingency is itself a new contingent determination of the object, and so on indefinitely. That the object is a fact would thus itself appear as a fact that might not have been: as

if the object may not be contingent, just as it may not be red or sweet. One would then say: the object is in fact red, it is in fact a fact, as if this facticity of the empirical were itself an empirical fact *among others*.

On the contrary, it must be affirmed that *contingency can not be a contingent determination of beings, since it is the contingency of these determinations*. And *this is not a simple affirmation, but the unveiling of the source of every necessary statement as the impossibility of redoubling the factual—i.e. the impossibility of attributing facticity to facticity itself, of affirming the contingency of contingency*.

This impossibility thus allows us to see: the factual is what may be or not be; facticity can not then itself be a fact, “something” which may be or not be, since such an affirmation must *necessarily* pass through the affirmation of the facticity of facticity, i.e. through a conditioning of facticity *by itself*—that which, as we have established, can not condition facticity. We can justifiably say that the statement “X is red” is true on the condition that red indeed exists in X. But we cannot say “X is contingent” is true on the condition that contingency “exists” in X, since this conditioning itself appeals to the contingency of all determination. We thus see that *we can not speak of the contingency of a being in the same way we speak of a contingent being*.

The *intuitive* grasp of this *difference* (contingency is not given in experience as an empirical property) to which *responds* the unconditional rationale of contingency (it is impossible to say that contingency may not be *without* the presupposition that “contingency is contingent”)—this understanding is revealed as the comprehension of the veritable difference between contingency and necessity. Necessity is not a mysterious property of beings, *alongside* other properties that are, themselves, contingent. Necessity designates the very contingency of all determinations of beings, *contingency as such*. Or more precisely, necessity resides in the impossibility of speaking of the contingency of beings as if this contingency were itself a contingent being, i.e. a being at all, since all beings are contingent. *Necessity thus consists in the impossible auto-attribution of contingency, the impossibility of qualifying the contingency of contingency, the fact of the factual—what we have called the impossibility of redoubling the factual*.

This non-redoubling reveals the origin of *every* necessary statement: *a necessary statement has as its object not a being, but the contingency of beings*. This point is essential: it signifies that the principle of factuality reveals not a necessity among

others, but *the very essence* of necessity. This principle thus takes on the burden grounding—or of refuting—the necessity of statements concerning *that which is*—logical, mathematical, or philosophical. Again, it signifies that *only the necessity of contingency will adjudicate the necessity of these statements*. The principle of factuality thus “radiates,” according to a specific procedure, toward a multiplicity of propositions—those we call *Figures*—which draw their legitimacy from this center alone. These Figures, in multiplying the “forms” of necessity to which beings are submitted, progressively illustrates, following a “paradox” constitutive of the factual, *an auto-limitation of contingency*.

We will see that the principle of factuality grounds as well *the absolute* (the term will be justified) necessity of the principle of non-contradiction, of the impossibility of the Whole, or even the necessary existence of something in general. *Because contingency is necessary, everything does not prove possible (tout ne s'avère pas possible)*: the necessity of contingency *implies* the impossibility of contradiction or of the Whole. Put otherwise, it is because everything must be contingent that everything can not be possible.

This factual ground of the Figures relies upon the following step: it is a matter of giving a *reason* for the *identification* of the *unthinkability* of a statement with an ontological *impossibility*, and not a simple factual and subjective incapacity. *The factual has for its object the demonstration that unthinkable statements are also impossible*. In order to make this more clear, let us anticipate an example of a Figure, the Figure of non-contradiction. The necessity of this principle usually rests upon the *unthinkability* of contradiction: to think contradictorily is not to think—it is to produce a pure *flatus vocis*—because contradiction is unthinkable. If we would then speak of *something*, of beings in the widest sense—real or possible—we must respect non-contradiction. The necessity of the principle of non-contradiction rests here upon the unthinkability of contradiction. Yet such a principle can do nothing—and this is not its role—to give us a *reason* according to which nothing could—at the heart of being—be unthinkable. Such a principle can not, in sum, deliver us a *reason* why such unthinkability is not a simple *subjective incapacity* on our part to think contradiction. That a God *exists*, who transcends the limits of what is thinkable for us—reason, against this, usually cannot adduce any reason. In general, reason can not give a reason for identifying the unthinkable with the impossible: one can always retort that this unthinkability is a pure fact, due to the conformation of our mind, and this in a sense psychological or transcendental. Such is the canonical limit of rationality, which legitimates through weakness

faith in a beyond of the thinkable. This is why the principle of non-contradiction, the necessary principle *par excellence*, is itself submitted, from such a perspective, to the ultimate contingency of all rational statements: there is no reason why the unthinkable is effectively impossible.

The factual ground of the Figures consists in providing such a reason. This reason will always consist in holding that a Figure is impossible because if it could attain to being it would result in a being that would be necessary. Let us return, by way of illustration, to the example of non-contradiction. One usually affirms that the contingency of a being is *limited* by a logical principle exterior to it: a being, one says, may, in a contingent manner, be red or blue; it may, in a contingent manner, exist or not exist, but if it in fact exists, and if it is red, then it can not be red and not-red at the same time. From this point of view, the necessity of the principle of non-contradiction *limits* the contingency of the being. But, from such a perspective, the necessity of this principle remains *itself* a pure fact, since we can not give a reason according to which a being could not be contradictory. We can only maintain that contradiction is *for us* unthinkable. In sum, the facticity of the being is found to be limited by another fact—that of the unthinkability for us of contradiction. No absolute necessity, unconditioned by a fact, can be attained.

Faced with such a conception, the factual affirms, and claims to demonstrate, that *it is the very contingency of beings that, carried to an absolute, drives the necessity of the principle of non-contradiction.* And this for the *reason* that the necessity of the contingency of beings implies that they not be contradictory, since if a being were contradictory it would have in itself its proper negation *and could not be otherwise.* A contradictory being could not cease to be what it is, since it would also *be* what it is not: it would then *not* be contingent, but necessary, with God as its example, eternal and contradictory, or rather eternal *because* contradictory.⁵ *The principle of non-contradiction,* far from being opposed to what is contingent in beings, draws its whole necessity from the necessary contingency of being. And we see immediately that the preceding objection—claiming that the unthinkability of contradiction is itself a pure fact, thus reaching no ontological impossibility—no longer holds *since this unthinkability rests from now on upon the very necessity of facticity.* One cannot claim that the unthinkability of contradiction rests upon a fact of thought without presupposing that this facticity of thought one has argued is, itself, unsurpassable: but this again legitimates the ground of all necessity, which is the non-contingency of contingency alone. However radical the relativist he cannot, without refuting himself, contest the absoluteness of contingency he deploys

systematically to contest the absoluteness of the concepts of thought. It is by such a procedure that we demonstrate the unconditioned (i.e. absolute) necessity of the Figures and of one of their parts, the impossibility of the Whole.

What are the immediate consequences of this mode of thought? Hitherto transcendence, understood as that which exists beyond the thinkable, benefited from a properly rational legitimation. Because reason could only accept its proper limitation by certain first principles, whatever these were could only be *posited* in their ultimate contingency. Reason, in search of a necessary first principle, therefore itself called for its proper overcoming, and faith could legitimately posit itself as the accomplishment of the rational. One easily grasps that if the itinerary we have proposed succeeds, such an articulation of reason/faith will no longer have any place: it will no longer be possible to limit reason "by reason" due to the facticity of its principles, since these principles will from now on be grounded upon the very necessity of this facticity. And as it is no longer possible to condition this same facticity without appealing to itself ("facticity is a factual principle") reason would appear capable, on its own, of giving reasons for the final *truths* of the real world: the term truth, classically understood as correspondence between thinking and being, is found to be rigorously justified since we demonstrate that rational unthinkability effectively makes us accede to an ontological impossibility. One can no longer claim that thought only gives us access to certain structures that appear to us necessary, and that we cannot surpass this ultimate facticity, since rational necessity derives precisely from this absolute necessity of facticity.

We thus see where the specificity of the factual resides: necessary principles no longer derive from limiting contingency from the outside in the name of a necessity whose origin remains mysterious and, in the last instance, itself contingent; on the contrary, necessary principles are drawn from contingency itself, grasped in its radicality. The remarkable point is that contingency rules itself by these principles that it can not transgress precisely for the reason that they are absolute. The path opened by the factual is thus an unprecedented *semantics* of logic and mathematics, tasked with clarifying these discourses by grasping as their invisible object the necessary contingency of what is.

We will content ourselves in this work with treating the logical principle of non-contradiction, the principle of identity, of the indefinite, and of the infinite. Elsewhere, we will consider the consequences of the principle of factuality for the most classical problems of metaphysics (the problem, here inaugural, of induc-

tion; the problem of knowing why there is something rather than nothing; the problem of solipsism); we will be able to see that in the light of the factial these problems are no longer insoluble or insignificant.

c. The Principle of factiality as anhypothetical principle

The preceding considerations will not fail to seem strange. Understanding the source of this strangeness requires a return to the principle of factiality in order to grasp its exact status.

The “exotic” character of our analysis of the Figures stems from the *mode of reasoning* we have deployed. We *have* reasoned, since we have proposed arguments and arrived at conclusions; but we have done so in such a way that the rationality at work seems *foreign* to what we normally understand by the idea of reason.

This rationality intersects with neither of the *two* conceptions one may generally have of the rational: these two conceptions of the rational we name *metaphysical* and *hypothetical*.

We have tasked ourselves, in due time, with rigorously determining the nature of metaphysics. Let us say for now that metaphysics, according to us, is essentially characterized by the affirmation that *there are necessary beings*. The object of the mode of reason we call metaphysics is to respond to the question: “why is a being thus and not otherwise?” It thus states why it is necessary that a being is what it is—is thus, and not otherwise—by referring this being to the necessity of a reason, of a cause, a cause which is *another* being. Consequently, the purest model of metaphysics is, following Heidegger, *onto-theology*: which puts in play a reasoning that ascends toward a *first* being, a supreme Being which is absolutely necessary because it is *causa sui*, its own reason. For metaphysics to reach this height, a being must be what it is by reason of a first being which must itself be what it is by reason of itself.

It is not difficult to see how the factial is distinguished from this mode of thought: necessity is not the necessity of a being, since there is no necessary being, but of the contingency of beings—contingency which is not itself a being. Factial rationality thus does not give the reason for a singular determination of a being but gives the reason for the contingency of such a determination. *Gives a reason*, this no longer consists in responding to the question: why is it necessary that a being

has these determinations?” but to the question “Why is necessary that the determinations of a being are contingent?” We thus understand how the very notion of reason finds itself detached (*décalée*) from its relation to its metaphysical expression.

However, the contemporary abandonment of metaphysical rationality is such that it is doubtless not the rupture of the factial with the latter that produces this sense of unfamiliarity, *but rather the fact that the factial breaks equally with hypothetical rationality—i.e. with all forms of rationality that set out from a posited beginning.*

The principle of this second rupture is simple because radical: *factial rationality claims to demonstrate its beginning.* It is through this claim that the factial establishes its strangeness in relation to the contemporary epoch, and its appearance of absurdity. For what we call hypothetical reason designates the conception according to which the beginning of reason can only be *posited*—as an axiom, postulate, thesis, hypothesis, etc.—i.e. posited *no less than* the hypothetical-deductive reason deployed by logic and mathematics, or the inductive reason deployed by the experimental sciences. Now this idea of an indemonstrable beginning, posited—“hypothetically,” in the Platonic sense—by all rationality is made the object, in contemporary thought, of what we could call a *consensus*, to my knowledge unwavering. With regard to this consensus, the factial statement of a *demonstrated* first principle seems to rekindle the deepest illusion of philosophy since its Platonic inauguration: to have knowledge of an *anhypothetical* principle, a principle grounded by rational thought which would not itself be posited irrationally (in a contingent manner) but which would, on the contrary, itself be grounded in reason.

Such is, in truth, the case with the principle of factiality: *we affirm that the principle of factiality is the anhypothetical principle demanded since Plato as the first principle of philosophy.* And yet, we affirm *at the same time* that this first principle does *not* lead to a metaphysics, i.e. to a rational ground of the necessity of particular beings that rests upon a supremely necessary being. We must then show how we can hold onto these two ends our affirmation: *anhypothetical ground of the rational and rejection of metaphysics.*

We have said in what respect the principle of factiality breaks with metaphysics, and we have seen in what respect this principle breaks equally with hypothetical rationality. This rupture consists in the principle of factiality *not being posited* but

grounded in a *primary demonstration*. Primary demonstration means this: *argument stamped by necessity presupposing nothing*. In sum, we claim that the principle is demonstrated *but not deduced*: it is demonstrated without being deduced from *another* statement. In order to evaluate this assertion, we must return to the manner in which we uncovered the principle of factuality.

Recall that we set out from a *provisional* definition of contingency. What was the status of this “pre-given” contingency? *This provisional contingency was nothing other than ignorance*. In effect, we have begun by affirming that what is, including ourselves, is given to us without any reason for being, nor any reason for being as it is. The contingency offered to us *at this point* could thus be presented as a *subjective* ignorance of the reason for the being of beings (*d’être de l’étant*). We can not even say if such a reason exists or not, if the notion of reason itself has any meaning. The reason would thus only be given under the form of a subjective and problematic absence formulable as follows: “*I don’t know why things are, and are so; I don’t know if I can know; I don’t know if this question has any meaning.*” “Being contingent” thus signifies my ignorance of the reason for things, my ignorance even of the being or non-being of such a reason, and my ignorance of what such a question could mean. The missing “reason” thus has no positive sense: reason *as absent* refers solely to my *capacity to not understand* why a being would be thus. My *incomprehension* of beings, thus my *power of questioning*, has produced this provisional contingency under the form of a subjective ignorance referring to a reason without proper content, since it is absent, and identified with a problematic project: the demand for a *response* to the “why?”

The principle of factuality consisted in identifying my ignorance with a knowledge. Contingency, in effect, is transformed into a knowledge of the *effective* absence of reason for every being, including the being that I myself am. Let us pause upon this point: the “change of perspective” we call for consists in ceasing to make of contingency a sad subjective incapacity to understand what is, in order, on the contrary, to intuit the contingency *even of that*. One must get used to perceiving—but with a non-empirical perception, with a properly *intellectual* intuition—the real absence of reason for empirical beings, so as to make of facticity a positive access, *a priori* and unsurpassable, to being itself—so as to make thought a power of truth without limit.

The search for a possible reason for beings has thus touched upon the discovery of the very essence of the notion of reason, as reason for the general possibility

for a being, whatever is, to be or to not be. Reason thus no longer resides in the existence or inexistence of a being, but in that if it exists, a being must necessarily be able to not exist, and if it does not exist, must necessarily be able to exist. And for this, it turns out, *there is* a reason, indicated by the argument for the non-redoubling of contingency. Factial reason thus grounds knowledge upon the very essence of ignorance. Non-knowledge carried to its pinnacle becomes the base of knowledge by a “transmutation” of the concept of contingency—that concept which designates the very operation of ignorant questioning, becoming the principle of access to the thought of being itself. But this knowledge of non-knowledge is not Socratic knowledge: it is not the simple understanding of one’s ignorance (I know that I do not know), since knowledge of the necessary contingency of beings leads to certain non-arbitrary consequence for beings—i.e. to the multiple Figures that are so many conditions fulfilled by beings to satisfy of their facticity.

We have disengaged an initial index of the absence of presuppositions from the principle of factuality—producing knowledge from non-knowledge itself, and this through an argument (the non-redoubling). But this will doubtless not suffice, in the eyes of the reader, to ground the assertion of a primary demonstration. One is always entitled to suspect in the claim to ignorance from which we set out, or in the argument employed in response to it, a mass of naïvely unnoticed presuppositions. It is thus the very nature of the argument that must legitimate the primary character of the demonstration: one has to show that this argument can not be conditioned by *another* principle, implicitly admitted, and which in consequence would only be posited in a contingent manner.

To do so, let us reexamine in detail the argument for the non-redoubling of contingency. We have said that contingency can not itself be “relativized” without being immediately reestablished. If I affirm, against the principle of factuality, that contingency itself is contingent, I base this argument upon the idea of an irreducible contingency: in the occurrence of the contingency of contingency. But this contingency “squared” is no different than what I tried to refute: it is absolute, ultimate, irreducible. The contingency of contingency does not give way to any other contingency than factial contingency, i.e. to absolute contingency, *that contingency which, alone, is out of its own reach*. To contest the principle of factuality is thus to refute oneself, it is to claim that contingency is not absolute because it is absolute. The necessity of contingency is thus established by the unthinkability of its conditioning by any thing other than itself, which comes back once again to affirming its unconditionality.

But this unthinkability of the redoubling of contingency *thinks equally its passage to the outside of mere thinkability*—that is to say, its passage *toward being itself*. To affirm, against the principle of factuality, that the thought of contingency is simply a contingent thought—a category that only applies for us, but not in-itself—this can only be done on the condition of affirming the irreducible contingency of thought and, by the same token, of all that it thinks. The idea that what one thinks is only a “for us” that does not reach the in-itself always rests upon the postulate that thought can only attain those thoughts which have no meaning considered independently of the thought that thinks them. After all, one says, just as thought is contingent (man as an individual, and as a species, is mortal) everything that it thinks is as well.

This reasoning falters, however, upon *one* thought, which is precisely the thought of contingency. Because one must admit that, on this point, at least, thought attains a content *that is not relative to itself*—i.e. that is not relative to itself in as much as it is. I can very well tell myself that the world to which have I access only exists in these determinations for as long as I am (there is no time, no qualities, no space, etc., without subjective consciousness of time, of qualities, of space). But precisely this can not be said of the condition of having access to the very contingency of all things, *including and above all of myself as subjective thought of all things*. This relativist, or transcendental, reasoning no longer holds for contingency, *and for it alone*. In the thought of my contingency as a thinking being, I accede in thought to that which is not dependent upon my thought, to an in-itself, and not a for-us. If I think that I may not be, I must effectively admit that this content of thought that is my possible non-being does not depend upon the fact that I think it. Because, if my non-being depended upon the fact that I think it, it would only be possible on the condition that I exist, thus it would not be possible. Contingency, including my own as a thinking being, is thus the only object of thought that is given as necessarily independent of the thought that thinks it. *The contingency of the thought can not depend upon the thought of contingency*.

And thus, that the contingency of contingency is unthinkable *for us* requires that it be impossible *in itself*. *Here it proves unthinkable that the unthinkable is not impossible*. It is unthinkable that contingency be contingent, and it is unthinkable that this unthinkability is not also an impossibility in itself of being, independently of thought.⁶ Thought thus attains in contingency a content independent of its purview, a content radically *exterior* to it. The Figures, consequences of the contingency of beings, are thus so many characteristics of beings which one can no

longer treat as if they only apply for us: they are given, on the contrary, as the properties *in itself* of beings, independently of the existence of thought, since they follow from the contingency of all things, and notably of the thought that thinks them.

In this way, the factial thus returns us to the apparently hackneyed category of the adequation of thought with being. "In this way": this means that the factial secures in one and the same movement *both* the power of thought to think being as such *and* the radical difference between thought and being. Since the Parmenidian statement: "Being and thought are the same," the "crux" of all philosophy resides in that it seems impossible to bind thought to being, in the mode of *truth* (thought thinks that which is), without ending up with a simple *identity* of thought and being (that which is is thought). The principle of factuality *resolves* this aporia. If thought unites with the contingency of that which is, contingency does not unite with it: because the thought *is* a contingent being, whereas the contingency of beings is not itself a being. Thought thus thinks itself as contingent at the same time that it thinks the non-contingency of contingency: that is to say, thought thinks that it *may* disappear, *but that the contingency that it thinks will not disappear with it*. It is contingent that there exists a thought adequate to the necessity of contingency, but it is not contingent that this thought of contingency be necessary, as it is independent of thought: *that there is a donation of facticity is a fact, but that facticity is given as non-factual can not be a fact*. That the essence of beings be thinkable as contingency thus excludes that thought be the essence of beings: because if that which is must be thought as contingent, thought must be a contingent being *among others*.

Thought thus presents itself at one stroke, and for the same reason, as adequate to being and as different from being.

We can now return to the stakes of this discussion to understand the anhypothetical character, demonstrated and non-positated, of the principle of factuality. Our problem is to show that the very nature of the argument grounding the principle of factuality (the non-redoubling of contingency) prohibits us from considering the principle as based upon another principle, necessary to its demonstrative capacity and implicitly *admitted*. In that case, our primary demonstration would only be a consequence of a positated principle, and we would not escape hypothetical rationality. That it is not thus, that the demonstration of non-redoubling can not be said to rest upon anything other than itself, just this is what the following

statement allows us to see: *one cannot condition by a contingent statement a statement bearing upon the unconditionality of contingency.* The general idea is as follows: a “hypothetical” principle is stated as contingent, i.e. as simply posited, as without reason. But the principle of factuality pronounces *that which is* of contingency: its content, its aim, is the essence of contingency. And this essence is that it is impossible to relativize contingency without appealing to it. *Now, such would be precisely the operation which would consist in conditioning the principle of factuality by a posited principle:* one would condition by a statement *granted to be* contingent a statement bearing upon the non-contingency of contingency: one would thus condition anew contingency by itself, and one recognizes anew that it is impossible to condition contingency otherwise than by itself. This would be precisely the content of the factual statement that one would claim to condition.

One may understand more intuitively how the factual frees itself from the constraint of beginning hypothetically by posing the following question: when we claim that reason must set out from a posited principle, *is this assertion itself posited?* If we say yes, in that case the assertion is not necessary: it must then be admitted that another assertion is equally possible, namely: “reason begins with a principle that is not posited, but demonstrated.” If the assertion is posited, it can not then by itself constitute an objection to the factual.

If, on the contrary, one claims that the assertion is necessary, one must proceed to carry out the demonstration. But then this demonstration will itself have to rest upon a posited principle, in which case we are back where we started. This demonstration would therefore have to be primary. And in truth, such is precisely the path followed by the factual: *the theoretician of the factual says the same thing as the partisan of hypothetical reason, except that he demonstrates that which the latter says, and it is by this demonstration that he ceases to say the same thing.*

In order to clarify this last assertion, and to eliminate within it all appearance of paradox, let us tarry with it a little further. We will then have a clear idea of the factual overcoming of hypothetical reason, gathering together the preceding diverse arguments before advancing. In order to do so, it is useful to distinguish between two aspects, always linked, of hypothetical reason: that is, those we call its *empiricism* and its *logicism*. In effect, to affirm that reason must set out from a posited statement can entail: 1) that all thought of the real must set out from particular facts offered by immediate experience, or submitted to its protocols; but 2) the posited beginning designates as well the place of logical principle(s) bound

up with reason itself—among which, fundamentally, is the principle of non-contradiction—which can themselves only be accepted and not demonstrated.

Now, what is the position of the factual vis-à-vis these two aspects of hypothetical reason? Let us begin with empiricism. The empiricist affirms that, if we would establish any knowledge whatever of what there is, we must set out from facts—i.e. from particular facts given in experience. *But the principle of factuality says nothing else*, since it demonstrates that there are only contingent beings, thus particulars, necessarily impossible to know *a priori* in their particularity. One therefore understands what we meant to signify when we stated that the factual says “the same thing” as the partisan of the hypothetical beginning: by this we single out the empirical aspect of the hypothetical beginning, since the factual asserts, like the empiricist, that one can only speak about particular beings through reference to the indeducible givenness of a fact. But the difference between empiricism and the factual is that the factual demonstrates in a non-empirical manner the necessity of the empiricist proposition. Thought, according to us, does not set out from facts, but from the *necessity* of setting out from facts: and this necessity is no longer a fact, but the non-facticity of fact as such.

It is in this same way that we diverge from hypothetical reason in its second aspect, logicism. As we have said, if the necessity that there are only facts is avowed, then this necessity must be able to *ground*—and not only posit—a certain number of principles, those we have previously called Figures, *such as the principle of non-contradiction*. We have already evoked the way in which the factual claims to account for the ontological necessity of this principle, usually confined to the formal consistency of discourse—we will not return to this at the moment. It suffices for now to emphasize that the factual diverges from hypothetical rationality in its logical aspect in that it claims to ground certain of these principles: it does not refute the necessity of these principles but only the idea that this necessity can only be posited. But take note! We do not claim so much as to ground *all* the discursive principles of reason, but only those which are *not* dependent upon the conventions of language. To be clear: it is not a matter of grounding all the principles and axioms deployed by multiple logics and by contemporary mathematics—that would properly be viewed as absurd. On the contrary, it is a matter of distinguishing, amid these principles and axioms, those which have an ontological value and those which have only the value of “interesting” conventions. The factual will function as a kind of sorting mechanism between that which can legitimately be considered a concept applicable to beings as such (the Figures) and that which

is only applicable as a convention allowing us to describe such and such a being in its specificity—in short, the factual procures for us the procedure required to separate ontological propositions from ontic propositions.

Thus, the factual reveals to us the possibility of completely overcoming hypothetical reason in confirming its usual theses: the factual is no longer a mode of hypothetical reason because it demonstrates what the latter posits.

We can now “collect” the divergent arguments employed in the discussion. The weakness of hypothetical reason stems from its inability to elucidate the nature of the contingency of its primary statements. This contingency appears to it as a limit upon thought, as the non-knowledge which presides over all knowledge. But the factual is the operation by which contingency ceases to designate the limit of knowledge in order to identify itself, on the contrary, with the *a priori* knowledge of the effective absence of reason for that which is. This argument, which makes of non-knowledge the primary knowledge, is not a void wisdom knowing that it knows nothing, because the necessary contingency of beings leads to non-arbitrary consequences for beings—the Figures. In clarifying the nature of contingency, the factual proposes an argument that can no longer be linked to another statement of previous knowledge, since every other statement returns us to a newly unelucidated contingency.

The principle of factuality is thus identified with an unconditionable argument making knowledge the very essence of non-knowledge. It is justly said to be anhypothetical, grounded in a primary demonstration.

We summarize thus: *against hypothetical reason and the empiricism* which accompanies it, we affirm that reason can set out from a principle that is necessary but not posited; *against Platonism*, we affirm that the necessity thus attained is not that of a being (or of many) but of the contingency of every being; *against Kantianism*, we affirm that this necessity is a necessity in itself, and not simply for us; and finally, *against Hegelianism*, we affirm that this power of thought to attain a necessary and absolute beginning does not identify thought and being, but guarantees on the contrary the radicality of their differentiation.

NOTES TO TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION

1. Selections from Meillassoux's ongoing work on *l'Inexistence Divine* have been translated in Graham Harman, *Quentin Meillassoux: Philosophy in the Making*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011. Unfortunately, these translations are appended to an introduction to the philosopher's work that I find misleading.
2. Quentin Meillassoux, "L'Inexistence Divine" (doctoral dissertation, Université de Paris, 1997).
3. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*. Trans. Joan Stambaugh. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010, 314.

NOTES TO MAIN TEXT

4. *Important note.* Let us set these terms once and for all: my object is to determine the nature of the difference between contingency and necessity. Given that my goal is to rigorously define the difference contingency-necessity, initial use of the word "contingent" must rest upon a *provisional* and intuitive definition. This definition, grounded upon the usual meaning of the notion, must guide us, setting out from certain problems, perhaps certain impasses, to posit a definition with a final and rigorous sense, such as will not be very different from the usual meaning but that will appear clarified and free us from previous difficulties.

Being contingent thus designates *for now* indifferently the fact—without reason—of being thus and not otherwise, or the fact—always without reason—of existing rather than not existing. These two meanings are intuitively connected in that being thus or not being thus (being red, round, heavy, one, multiple, etc.) entails that such a determination (red, roundness, etc.) exists or not. Being contingent is thus being *de facto* thus, without ultimately requiring a reason according to which something cannot be otherwise. The term *facticity* is used here as strictly synonymous with the notion of contingency: it designates the character of being contingent or factual (and not, obviously, factitious). The substantives "contingency," "facticity"—to which correspond the adjectives contingent and factual—are thus used as terms entirely substitutable with regard to their signification.

The term "factual" (with an "i") is a neologism that I use indiscriminately as a substantive or an adjective (speaking of the factual, or of factual ontology): the factual is the name of the *theory*, explicated here, of the difference between contingency and necessity. This theory rests upon the notion of factuality, which is different than the notion of facticity (or contingency), and which I define in the following section.

5. The strangeness of this reasoning derives from telling us *why* non-contradiction bears ontological necessity, since this necessity is generally accepted as proceeding from the absolute itself. The reader will spontaneously say that the supposition "If a being were contradictory..." is such an absurdity that it can not give rise to any reasoning. If a being is contradictory, it is nothing, one will say, since nothing can be said of it. But the factual asks *why* a contradictory being can be anything—and if the reader retorts: "Because it is unthinkable"—the factual asks again *why* the unthinkable is impossible. It is to this last and ultimate why that we here provide a response.

6. Unthinkability of the unthinkable—is this not a circle, where I ultimately remain within thought? No, since to suppose that the unthinkableability of the unthinkable is an unthinkableability

only *for us* is to presuppose anew the contingency of this thought of the thought, etc.