

Instrumental Spectrality and Meillassoux's catoptric controversies

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Since the review of Collapse iv, I have been reconsidering some of my initial thoughts regarding Quentin Meillassoux's provocative essay *Spectral Dilemma*. After a few more reads, I started to tentatively question some of the aspects of Meillassoux's spectral solution which is supposed to be coextensive with his speculative philosophy outlined in *After Finitude*. Some of these unsubstantiated strictures have been vaguely sketched out here. Now in order to highlight and streamline some of these 'tentative' criticisms, I shall try to categorize some of these problems into purely conjectural charges against Meillassoux's spectral solution. Perhaps in order to see that if the speculation of a speculative philosophy is truly uninhibited and venturesome, it is crucial to interrogate that philosophy with the same daring cruelty present at the core of each and every speculative thought. In other words, the determination of a speculative philosophy in taking risks and probing the abyssal must be put to trial with the most speculative charges in a manner reminiscent of the Spanish Inquisition¹:

- I. The allegation of being a decisional philosopher and adherence to Aristotelian instrumentalism.
- II. The imputation of speculating in the manner of a Lutheran theologian and bringing back the omniscient God in the guise of hyper-chaos.
- III. The Illusionist controversy and resorting to specular trickery.

I.

Those who have read Meillassoux's essay in Collapse iv know that spectral dilemma is presented as a speculative solution, a way out of the diametric morbidity of religion and atheism which paralyses and even mortifies the living and its world. Therefore, spectral dilemma is an ethical or even a political project which presents a speculative ethics of justice drawn upon the principles of hauntology and the necessity of contingency which drops the Principle of Sufficient Reason yet adopts the Principle of Non-contradiction. In this sense, spectral dilemma gives Meillassoux's speculative philosophy an ethical front supposedly backed up by and in accordance with the necessity of contingency and hyper-chaos. Meillassoux begins his essay with questioning – via recourse to hauntology – if essential mourning for the spectres of terrible deaths (trapped within the diametric space of religion and atheism,

¹ This is a preliminary sketch of three interconnected charges which appear on this blog before being published elsewhere.

hence caused by a God who has been emphatically affirmed or denounced) is possible? The first charge against Meillassoux's spectrality, accordingly, is that his Spectral Dilemma restrains the speculative vector brought about by the necessity of contingency. Moreover, Meillassoux's recourse to hauntology in order to formulate a solution for undermining the confines of religion and atheism obliges him to assume a decisional position which not only dampens the speculative drive mobilized by the absolute contingency but also makes his philosophy amicable to instrumental and neo-moralist regimes of ethics and politics. Even though in this case such regimes are severely mutated and explicitly dissociated from the gravity of their Idealist necessities, they still obstruct the speculative tempest unleashed by the absolute contingency of the cosmic abyss.

The first charge also summarizes part of the problems that I have with hauntology in general and then in particular, Meillassoux's attempt to devise a speculative solution by inducing what he calls 'essential mourning' to the 'divine inexistence' harboured by the necessity of the contingency. Essential mourning, as Meillassoux proposes, is the 'completion of mourning for essential spectres'. (Collapse iv, p. 262) Yet what are the 'essential spectres'? They are 'those of terrible deaths: premature deaths, odious deaths, the death of a child, the death of parents knowing their children are destined to the same end – and yet others. Natural or violent deaths, deaths which cannot be come to terms with either by those whom they befall, or by those who survive them.' (ibid) Essential spectres are begotten by those terrible and unjust deaths which could not be mourned properly by either religion or atheism and hence, cannot leave the world of the living so as a result they simultaneously suffer and drive the world of the living into a despairing morbidity or 'hopeless fear'. Accordingly, the essential spectres should be mourned ('by the living') *properly*, that is according to the divine inexistence as an alternative to the depressing dichotomy of religion and atheism which cannot appropriately address both the wanton evil and the indifferent negligence of God:

We call *spectral dilemma* the aporetic alternative of atheism and religion when confronted with the essential spectres. (Collapse iv, p. 265)

It is precisely in confronting this aporetic alternative with the essential spectres in order to mourn them properly that Meillassoux's spectral dilemma as a speculative ethics of justice both instrumentalizes the speculative drive whose interests 'do not coincide with those of living' (Ray Brassier) and confines the dimensions unlocked by the contingency of natural laws. The latter restriction is the result of being implicitly restrained by the ontological domain. We have previously argued that mourning is concurrently determined by two inward and outward vectors, one fastened to the living and the other to the dead. In order to mourn for the dead, or more precisely, transform their negative vector of influence to a positive vector of subtraction capable of liberating them and hence contributing to our life (i.e. remaining so and as such), we must first ground the living as a necessary agency or state which despite its separation from the dead can be correlated to them. *In other words, one cannot mourn for the dead if she is already dead, which is to say, mourning entails the intervention of the living as a necessity in order to make doing justice to the dead and correspondingly, the living possible.* If the female protagonist of Herk Harvey's *Carnival of Souls* is not able to mourn for the dead and as a result her life is disturbed by the haunting dead to the point of mortifying madness, it is not because she has not found a way of proper mourning yet but it is because,

she herself is already dead. This brings us to a speculation whose terrifying vista can put an end to our vain and moral attempts to mourn for the essential spectres once and for all, and in the process save us from the maddening despair caused by a mourning which is cursed to be perpetually *improper*. We describe this terrifying vista that delivers us to a new dark age as follows: We cannot properly mourn not because mourning is tethered to polar axioms of religion and atheism whose alternatives must be found (Meillassoux) but because we are already dead – that is our life is a pure contingency not only in the future (hence our actual death) but also anterior to our very existence. If we are both anteriorly and posteriorly set on pure contingencies then we are as dead as those who have died or will die in terrible deaths. It is only in the ontological apartheid of the living that the dead can be taken as a negative agency which either must be expelled or instrumentally affirmed. If we assume that the ‘anterior posteriority’ (Brassier) renders us already dead, then we must come to terms with the pure contingency of our own life and the precarious position of the living itself. That the living is already dead and it is the attempt to ‘properly’ mourn for the essential spectres that denies the dead their independent *nomos* (with its respective justice) and ushers us toward a victimologic neurosis.

In line with the principles of mourning (that the dead must be mourned properly by *the living*), Meillassoux’s essential mourning surreptitiously reinscribes the necessity of the living. Yet the necessity of the living is the first thing that is abandoned by the absolute contingency (*viz.* the necessity of contingency). Therefore, in demanding and drawing upon an *essential* mourning, Meillassoux accedes to the decisional position that is inherent to mourning: The dead can be mourned because *we are alive*; our life and the conscious of being in life is the first guarantor for the possibility of mourning from which we must proceed to find a *proper* or *essential* mourn. Yet this insistence on aliveness or being conscious of being in life which is the first assumption and the necessary ground of mourning is precisely a philosophical decision which must be renegotiated. Even if this decision leads to a true justice to the dead and correspondingly brings about a non-morbid justice for the living, its burdening weight qua its ontological privilege encumbers the speculative drive which is supposed to be at the core of Meillassoux’s philosophy.

The surreptitious reinscription of the living qua *mourning’s necessity* from which Meillassoux’s spectral dilemma draws its so-called speculative solution strongly resembles an implicit decisional function inherent to hauntology. The essential spectrality of hauntology is not limited to the effectuation of a deadly negative influence over the living which must be mourned properly so as to make the living possible. Hauntology has also a hidden function which reinscribes the myth of the living at the expense of the dead. The negative influence of the dead over the living which must be mourned properly bespeaks of the living’s inherent instrumental correlation with the dead. The hauntology brings the dead back in terms of spectres so as to pit them against the living, that is to say, implicitly and albeit negatively reaffirms the necessity of the living. In other words, the spectre’s negative influence not only brings neurosis but also serves as an evidence – even though a miserable one – which is sufficient to ensure the living of its life. In confronting the essential spectres, one often comes to this conclusion: If I am disturbed by the returning ghosts and the lingering dead who haunt me in reality and in dreams, then I must be alive, for if I was dead too, then how could I be terrorized by *the same*? In this sense, the dead are instrumentalized as spectres so that the living can be negatively affirmed and grounded even through a neurosis which secretly

contributes to human's basic self-esteem. For this reason, hauntology can be posited as the politics of instrumentalizing the dead and the essential or proper mourning is its enforcer or what legitimately accentuates such politics.

Meillassoux's essential spectrality restricts the operation of speculative justice, for it – contra Artaud – delimitates the presence of cruelty only in the death of those 'who obstinately cast off their shroud to declare to the living, in spite of all evidence, that they still belong amongst them.' (Collapse iv p. 262) This rigid delimitation of cruelty respectively restricts justice not really to the dead who are seemingly supposed to be liberated by essential mourning but to the living for which the spectre marks an instrumental correlation with death, their own death. If the essential spectrality of the hauntology surreptitiously testifies to the life of the living through a neurotic or negative bond, then doing an essential justice to the dead by this assumption that cruelty is only limited to those of terrible deaths also contributes to the living. In other words, a justice in terms of the law of the living is a justice to the dead but ultimately for the living. The dead in this sense is *liveware* (the instrument of the living). The reason for this undercover instrumentalism present in *Spectral Dilemma* is that the relation of justice to cruelty is one of a decisional collusion because the locus of cruelty is purely a decisional one. If as Artaud (and Deleuze in *Difference and Repetition*) suggests that cruelty is at base of every determination, then life as the first decisional determination (especially as accentuated in essential mourning) is itself an inexhaustible source of cruelty. It is in properly tackling with the cruelty of life qua its purely decisional determination that we can break apart from the instrumental approach in regard to the dead and bring about the cruel reign of a speculative ethics of justice. Only by a philosophy of cruelty that sheds a dramatic light on our equivocal inexistence (why is it that I am living while I am already dead?) and the precariousness of life's ontological decision for and by the living can the cruelty of the speculative reunite with ethics.

In resorting to hauntological methods for mapping a way out of the despairing tyranny of religion and atheism, Meillassoux's spectrality reduces into a speculative ethics of justice that is devoid of an ethics of speculation. The latter presupposes an irremediable cruelty in venturing thought beyond the comforts of the living whose putative life has been disturbed by the spectres of those who have unjustly died. In other words, spectral dilemma as an alternative to the haunting dichotomy of religion and atheism is not fully an index of a speculative thought any longer because its venturesome cruelty (i.e. speculative power) has been trammelled by an ontologically oriented ethics which implicitly privileges necessity of the living over its pure contingency. This is another way to say, that in attempting to wed the ethics of the dead (for the living) with the principle of absolute contingency (that which belongs to nothing and no one), Meillassoux's spectral dilemma sacrifices the speculative front of his philosophy for the hackneyed ethical responsibility of the philosopher qua the living who is compulsively obsessed with doing justice to the dead on behalf of his living brethren. Yet such an act of justice for and to the dead is merely an implicit tactic to liberate the living (as acknowledged by Meillassoux himself) and return to its comforting but illusive domain once again. Therefore, the spectral dilemma as an 'essential mourn' assumes and privileges the ontological necessity of being entrenched in the relation between the speculative and the ethics (of justice). It is precisely for this reason that Meillassoux finds himself compelled to propose a solution for rescuing the world of the living from the

haunting memory of the cruelty inflicted upon those who have died in terrible deaths by an indifferent or a tyrant God. However, we can only speak of such cruelty in death if we assume that life, ontologically speaking, is not itself cruelty or cruel but rather is inherently a ground or guarantor for justice. But if the absolute contingency of the cosmic abyss usurps everything even the necessity of life and the living, then how can we speak of doing justice to the dead because the spectre's terrible death is as vacuous of the life of the living? Both the so-called terrible deaths of the lingering dead and the life of the living are the result of the absolute contingency of the cosmic abyss. Accordingly, the positions of both in regard to each other are flattened by the absolute contingency. It is this emphatic flattening between the terrible or cruel death of the spectre and the life of the living that prevents the act of justice qua spectral ethics as outlined by Meillassoux – that is justice (i.e. 'essential mourn') to the essential spectres (the subjects of terrible deaths) in the name of the life that they have been denied. Yet according to the absolute contingency, the dead have not been denied any life because such a life never existed as a necessity; it has been a mere contingency, that is to say, already-dead all along.

Whether terrible or not, inflicted by a tyrant God or not, the death of the lingering dead is not external to the life of the living who is imagined as the presupposed harbinger of justice. Death as the effect of absolute contingency is internal to the life of the living as that which amputates the necessity of the living as the agency required for doing justice to the dead. In short, Meillassoux's spectral justice is forced to crash from within precisely by the central core of his own philosophy that is necessity of contingency which remorselessly consumes anything remotely attached to the necessity of the living. This seems to suggest that Meillassoux is oblivious to the crushing power of the speculative front of his philosophy which is harboured by the absolute contingency. For if he weren't, he was not interested in reconstructing a system of justice that adheres to an instrumental approach to the dead. This seems to insinuate yet another provisional problem for the entire project of speculative realism or at least speculative philosophers: The speculative drive is so uninhibited that it either intimidates or forces the speculative realist philosopher to resort to utopianist or neo-moralist politico-cultural formulas, or goes so far as to mandate a complete dismissal of socio-political consequences implicated in the impact of speculative singularities on socio-cultural or politico-economic fabrics.² It is as if the very figure of the philosopher (be it a speculative realist or an Idealist anti-realist) is urged to dam the speculative flood from within his/her own philosophy in the manner of what Freud attributes to the hidden mechanisms of repression over which even the ego has no control. It is in this sense that philosophers automatically tend to underestimate the monstrous cruelty of speculative drives of thought and readily forget the spontaneous and inaccessible repressive mechanisms of the living 'which brood in the dark' (Freud).

II.

In what is now suspected to be *Protrepticus*, the young Aristotle presents a seemingly rudimentary but structurally elaborate model for his future metaphysical system of ontology

² These consequences or implications should not be confused with the possibility of having a political vector of (belonging to) speculative realism.

or the science of being qua being. This model is nothing but the feared punishment of the Etruscan pirates whose terror haunts the history of philosophy, a terror far more terrible than the fear of impalement which paralyzed the progression of the Muslim Ottoman hoard throughout Europe. Yet whereas the fear of impalement immobilized the Turkish hoard, the simultaneous physical and metaphysical horror of the Etruscan torture aroused philosophy and became an excuse for it to loiter throughout the recent portion of the history of humankind. The Etruscan torture has been described as chaining the living person to a rotting corpse, face to face and limb to limb until the living person perishes by the decay of the corpse. Only when the living person was blackened by putrefaction, the Etruscan robbers freed the living, now a corpse, from the chains. A metaphysical torture and a model for the intelligible ontology, Aristotle suggests that the relation between the body, the soul (psyche) and the intellect (*nous*) as the triad of his ontology can be explained as follows: ‘their bodies [those who have fallen into the hands of the Etruscans], the living with the dead, were bound so exactly as possible one against another: so our souls, tied together with our bodies as the living fixed upon the dead.’ (Cicero quoting Aristotle in *Hortensius*)

The soul qua living (or in Cartesian fashion, the mind) is chained to the body qua dead (instrumental matter). This is both the price and the punishment of serving the *nous* and bringing the universe back into unison with the intellect (the One, the Ideal, the necessity of *qua being*). Yet it is not only the living that is chained to the dead but also the dead (the body) is tethered to the living in accordance with the Greco-Roman motif of mirror (Dionysos’ mirror and the Orphic tradition associated with the Etruscan punishment). The dead is chained to the soul (viz. the vital meaning or the intermediary slave of the intellect) as an instrument. That is to say, in the same way that the living is chained to the corpse, the dead is chained to the living so that it can serve the living as an instrument.³ The living or the soul, in this sense, animates the body qua dead through an instrumental correlation ordered by the *nous* (or the necessity of being). The necro-animist tyranny of ontology makes sure that the dead can only be captured through an instrumental bond with the living, an instrumental correlation whose purpose is reinscription of the necessity of the living and its givenness. This explains why the horror of the Etruscan torture became a source of motivation and an impetus for philosophy rather than a cause of akinesia and complete paralysis. For the Muslim Ottoman, the impalement threatened the solidity of the religious man from behind, hence the terror of a death through the penetration of religion and masculinity from behind, both of which were of utmost divinity for the Turkish man of the Ottoman era. Yet for the philosopher, the fate of being in the embrace of the dead, being intimate with them and then only finding freedom in decay was a sufficient motivation to completely turn around and distort the system of the Etruscan torture: It is not the body that is tethered to the dead, but it is the soul qua living that is chained to the body qua dead. That is to say, according to Aristotle, it is not the dead that is fastened to the living and sees itself as the animated dead, but it is the living that is tortured by being bound to the dead. The horror of being intimate with the dead can only be sedated by the chains extending to the soul on behalf of a Mezentius-like mad king called ontological necessity or an ontological privilege (the *nous*, the Ideal, the One, qua being,

³ On the instrumental definition of the body in Aristotle’s philosophy see, Abraham P. Bos, *The Soul and its Instrumental Body: A Reinterpretation of Aristotle’s Philosophy of Living Nature* (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2003).

the vital necessity of the living). Therefore, in order to opiate those who have already fallen into the embrace of the dead – each and every one of us – and are blackening in the process, it is best to bring out chains and shackles so as to fetter us to the soul – Thus speculated the philosopher. To put it differently, if we are already fixed upon the dead, then the philosopher must fasten us upon the soul in an attempt to reduce the horror of perpetual intimacy with the dead into a torment which will only last for a while.

By the virtue of its ethico-philosophical attraction to essential mourning and building upon essential spectrality of hauntology, Meillassoux's speculative solution in *Spectral Dilemma* abides by the speculative decision of the philosopher in establishing the reign of chains. But nothing weighs down the speculative vector of philosophy more than philosophy's own chains. Meillassoux's essential spectres who deserve a proper or essential mourning are strongly resonant of the poltergeists – ghosts who are identified by the clanking noises they make and which utterly disturb the peace of the mind for any living human who can hear them. As elaborately described by Lutheran pastors and theologians, the poltergeist is a 'strange spectre' (*Grösseste Denkwürdigkeiten der Welt*, E.W. Happel) who has been begotten by a terrible death and its clanking noise can banish one to the realm of madness. The terrible noise originates from the 'dragging iron chains' (ibid) to which the spectre is shackled and when it moves, voluntarily or involuntarily, causing a great rumbling noise that disturbs the living. To this extent, poltergeist can be posited as the logical consequence of the philosopher's decisional ontological solution: Essential spectres or poltergeists are the dead who have now realized that they are chained to the putative living, yet contrary to the promise of the philosopher, the chains are not attached to the soul or anything by which they can be saved. The dead, in this case, is only chained to a specular apparition called the living, and for this reason, his chains are loose, making a terrible noise while burdening him greatly for no apparent reason. In short, the essential spectre or poltergeist is the dead who still insists on its attachment to the living via chains (the noetic enslavement) and demands the reestablishment of its bonds with something as solid as the ground or the necessity of the living. Or contrary to this scenario, the poltergeist refers to the disillusioned dead who has just realized that the chains have never been attached to anything and they are nothing but a temporary apparatus of torment, a painful temporary diversion from the perpetual horror of intimacy with the dead. The latter case suggests that the poltergeist is not seeking the renewal of his enslavement to the living but that he is demanding a freedom from the chains he once believed in and to which he was and is still attached.

In his painstaking study of spectral disturbances in early modern times, Wolfgang Neuber draws a brilliant connection between the reappearance of poltergeists or essential spectres and Lutheran doctrines aimed at overthrowing or undermining catholic theological doctrines.⁴ Neuber suggests that the Lutheran resurrection of essential spectres or poltergeists is in line with the militant remobilization of Protestantism against the church and Catholicism. Luther does not really question the essential spectre itself but instead he cunningly takes the spectre as an 'evident warning' (Neuber, p. 8) so as to utilize its insinuations to re-enact the doctrine of justification yet abandon sacerdotal Catholic practices such as sacrificial masses

4 See Wolfgang Neuber, 'Poltergeist the Prequel: Aspects of Otherworldly Disturbances in Early Modern Times,' in *Spirits Unseen: The Representation of Subtle Bodies in Early Modern European Culture*, eds. C. Gottler and W. Neuber (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2008).

and trade of indulgences. This as Neuber suggests gives Luther the opportunity to tweak the theological controversy that if God is responsible for every phenomenon, then he is also responsible for the appearance of evil or pestering spirits and spectres which can plunge the faithful into a mortifying gloom. The existence of spectres and poltergeists, accordingly, is not questioned or refuted. They are instead excommunicated by Lutherans – in a distinctly papal fashion – as demonic games or tricks so that God is exonerated from the accusation of driving its own servants into madness. The Reformist redefinition of disturbing spectres and ghosts as demonic frauds played by the devil does not vanquish or relinquish spectres, insofar as it merely attributes them to a higher order of terror in order to strengthen the position of the One *qua the necessity of life and the guarantor principle of the living*. Just as Luther does not question Christianity but rather reforms it on the vital ruins of Catholicism, he reforms the spectral order on the ghostly ruins by relocating it to the order of the demonic (of the devil). This relocation or redefinition escalates the disturbing tension of the spectral and its terror, since the problem of the spectre cannot be tackled in its own terms any longer, whilst now it also belongs to a higher order of terror i.e. the demonic. In addition, since the existence of the spectral has not been questioned, the incorporeality of the spectre and the materiality of the demonic produce a deranged mixture that only adds to the confusion and terror of the ghostly and the spectral. Meanwhile, in contrast to the Lutheran theologian who in the manner of a stoic philosopher can ignore the *the ghost qua demonic* through the act of faith or ‘farting in the face of devil’ (Luther), normal people were rendered completely unarmed against poltergeists and their new order of terror.⁵

In the manner of a Lutheran pastor, Meillassoux does not question the instrumental spectrality of essential spectres either but reinforces and protects it by correlating the essential spectres to the (dis-)order of hyper-chaos. The priority of the living, its ontological privilege and the instrumental definition of the dead – subsumed within ‘essential spectres’ and ‘essential mourning’ – are reaffirmed by Meillassoux in his attempt to wed the essential spectrality with the divine inexistence. The latter is implicated in hyper-chaos where necessity of contingency generates an unrepletable rupture between laws of nature and the Principle of Sufficient Reason. It is the incommensurable marriage between the instrumental spectrality and absolute contingency that produces a great tension at the core of Meillassoux’s philosophy, threatening to implode its speculative core from within. This is because on the one hand, this great tension intensifies the ontological instrumentality of essential spectrality by leaving it unharmed and on the other hand, it induces the ontological privilege implicated in essential mourning to the absolute contingency. Yet we know that the latter cannot accord with the former, for it brings forth something akin to a Lutheran mixture of neo-moralist terror where the incorporeality (of the spectre) is conjoined with the materiality of demonic and its higher order of terror. In the same vein, the presupposed ontological privilege, instrumentality and noetic enslavement hidden in essential spectres return under a new rubric of terror, more powerful and more elusive than ever. Just as the Protestant poltergeist returns with a perplexing terror and begins to haunt the people of reformation (the Universal Priesthood) on the ruins of Catholicism, the noetic enslavement of the dead who is still chained to the illusive

⁵ Gillian Bennett draws a connection between Reformist redefinition of ghosts as a higher order of terror and the rise of witch hunting. See Gillian Bennett, ‘Ghost and Witch in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries’ in *Folklore* vol. 97, no. 1 (Taylor and Francis, 1986).

apparition of the ontological necessity (the spectre) is reestablished under a new heading in Meillassoux's *Spectral Dilemma*.

As it was argued, the weight of the ontological privilege – implicated in essential mourning and its instrumental bond to the living – heavily slows down and trammels the speculative drive in Meillassoux's philosophy. This is not, however, the only danger that flaws *Spectral Dilemma*, for it also retards the speculative drive by a system of judicious knowledge which reinscribes the omniscient God under the heading of the hyper-chaos. As in the case of Luther who fails to properly address the problem of judgement when encountered with poltergeists, Meillassoux's spectral dilemma falls short in questioning the judicious knowledge when it is confronted with essential spectres. Therefore, rather than interrogating the problem of judgement (knowledge) in spectrality, Meillassoux's spectral dilemma accepts it as something given and not necessary to be questioned. In *Spectral Dilemma*, Meillassoux maintains that essential spectres are 'those of terrible deaths', 'deaths which cannot be come to terms with either by those whom they befall, or those who survive them'. Accordingly, essential spectres are those who have fallen in cruel deaths, not deaths in cruel conditions but deaths whose terms cannot be resolved by either the living or the dead. Hence the cruelty of these deaths lies in unjustness of those terms which cannot resolve them, that is to say, terms which fail to justly address these deaths, namely of atheism and religion. But the question which arises here is according to which criteria of knowledge can we distinguish cruel or terrible deaths from non-cruel and non-terrible deaths so as to define essential spectres from the ordinary dead? Of course, if the latter category exists.

In religion, since God is aware of the conditions and the terms of death, cruelty of one death can be determined against another. God can either directly cause the emergence of a spectre based on the determination that its death has been cruel (as in the case of vengeful ghosts in Catholicism) or conversely, God can determine the righteous and salvation of a person, hence saving him and his soul from the devil's manipulations (as in the case of Lutheran poltergeists). In both cases, it is the omniscience of God as the one who can determine the terms *of* and *around* death that is able to directly or indirectly cause an essential spectre. In *Spectral Dilemma*, however, it seems that *any* death can be a terrible death and the terms of every death are potentially cruel as long as they are trapped within the dichotomy of atheism and religion. It is true that this definition of terrible or cruel death as the requirement for appearance of essential spectres breaks away from God's *know-how* omniscience, but it instead returns to a more fundamental aspect of God's omniscience. This aspect of the divine's omniscience that in *Spectral Dilemma* Meillassoux cannot escape from is the propositional knowledge of God according to which terribleness or base-cruelty is only found in death and in its terms. Among all species of knowledge, propositional knowledge (*know that*) is the most fundamental aspect of God's omniscience. Whereas Meillassoux circumvents the easy obstacle of God's *know-how* by stating that any death can be terrible or every death can be potentially a cruel death, he does not break free from the propositional knowledge or the fundamental aspect of God's omniscience. This is because *Spectral Dilemma* does not question why cruelty or terribleness *in terms of death* should be taken as the focal point for the implementation of justice. Here essential or proper mourning represents the implementation of justice. To put it differently, Meillassoux abides by this presupposition that the starting point of a speculative justice should be focused on 'those of terrible deaths' based on this

implicit presumption that the ultimate irresolvable manifests of cruelty or terrible-ness appear in one's death (whether the actual death or in its terms) rather than life.

The assumption that the terrible irresolvability (viz. cruelty) which should be taken as a locus for the beginning of justice only happens in one's death and according to terms of that death strongly conforms to the fundamental aspect of the omniscient God i.e. God's propositional knowledge. It is a godly decision – i.e. in accordance with God's omniscience – to first determine the locus of cruelty and then implement a complete system of justice *in* and *after* one's death. If God only enacts his complete system of justice after death, it is because he propositionally knows that death is the completion of one's life (teleological decision) and must be encompassed and set as an outset for the complete unravelling of his system of justice. Likewise, Meillassoux adheres to the propositional aspect of the omniscient God in that he decisionally and unilaterally presents one's death in contrast to its former life as the locus of justice. This contrast and opposition is manifested in essential spectres *from which the survivors can ostensibly be distinguished*. This brings us back to this fundamental question, 'why should cruelty be distinguished by the ontological difference between one's life and one's death?' Because, after all, the ontological difference between life and death which essential spectres or poltergeists miss, envy or cannot come to terms with is an instrumental correlation between the dead and the living's ontological privilege. The necessity of this ontological difference as the marker of cruelty or a signpost for the beginning of justice is fully abolished by the absolute contingency which is posited not only in future but also anterior to the emergence of life. That is to say, since the anteriority of absolute contingency renders us already dead, then cruelty or terrible-ness cannot be decisively found in one's actual death or terms of death, because they have already been here. The omnipresent cruelty of life is not the result of the reversal of values or propositional knowledge which privileges life over death or makes life more significant than death; it is rather the immanent outcome of the collapse of life's ontological necessity and the problematization of its determination qua difference-in-itself.

III.

This part of optics, which is called catoptrics, teaches to make a mirror, which does not retain the images of objects, but reflects them in the air. Witelo has written about its composition [...] Thus, should one prohibit cunning women to fool the eyes of men with this mirror, by making them believe they see ghosts raised from death, while they see the image of some hidden child or statue in the air outside the mirror? Because what is most certain is that, if a cylindrical mirror is placed inside a room closed from all sides, and if a mask, or a statue, or whatever else, is placed outside this room, so that there is a fissure in the window or in the door of this room, through which the rays from the mask penetrate [into the room] to the mirror, then the image of the mask, placed outside the room, will be observed inside the room hanging *in the air*, and, since the reflections from these mirrors are highly deformed and show a *misshapen image* of a beautiful thing, how hideous and terrible will the image seem of a mask prepared to arouse horror and consternation. (Jean Pena, from the introduction to *De usu optices*, the emphases are mine)

It has been suggested that the outbreak of the poltergeist epidemic in the sixteenth century was concomitant with the development of optics especially experiments with mirrors through perspectivist concepts and late scholastic analytical geometry. The philosophers could now experiment with their visions in regard to cosmos through optical techniques not practiced before. Yet the philosophical approaches of the majority of these philosophers and polymaths who were enthralled by the development of optics and new scientific visions were still bound to the dominant scholastic philosophical decisions of the Middle Ages. Consequently, their fascination and support for the burgeoning science were in many cases in line with their philosophical goals – that is scientifically projecting their still scholastically influenced philosophies into an ever expanding universe and in turn, anticipating the universal reflection of their philosophical projects as a specular alibi brought about by the science of the time. For the late scholastic and early Renaissance philosophers, the possibility of this specular alibi that could testify to the universality of their philosophical decisions had been brought about by optics as a new science of vision. However, this complicity with the scientific reflection (image) was significantly subjected to the imperfections of the perspectivist optics and the flaws in early optical models as well as the technological or methodical peculiarities of the time. As the result, the so-called scientific reflections of these philosophical projects (viz. specular alibis) were usually modally disproportionate to their original form and even in some cases, incompatible or inconsistent to their original philosophical hypotheses conceived prior to the scientific projection / reflection. This distortion of scientific reflections of scholastic philosophical projects was one of the major impetuses behind the rise of the pseudo-scientific branch known as ‘natural magic’ along with philosophy and science (Giovanni Battista Della Porta, John Dee, Athanasius Kircher, *et al.*)

Otherworldly apparitions such as poltergeists (*rumpelgeist*), wraiths and lemures were meticulously incorporated and categorized under the heading of (philo-)pseudoscientific Natural Magic. These apparitions were not only representing the distortion of the scientific reflections / images brought about by the complicity between scholastic philosophy and science, but also they themselves were the *misshapen* specular alibis of scholastic philosophy and theological doctrines generated by the application of heavily decisional systems into science. The radically treacherous nature of the latter is present even when it is restrained by analytical inadequacies and methodological flaws. In the wake of the spectre as a misshapen scientific witness for the scholastic marriage between ontology and theology, one can also ask if Meillassoux’s essential spectres and the theory of spectral dilemma are distorted illusionist apparitions generated by the application of implicit ontological privileges and the living’s noetic enslavement to the blackening ethos of contemporary science. The astrophysical unbinding of the image of the cosmos as a dark, contingent and catastrophically expanding universe which will eventually stop to support conditions for materialization gives a misshapen reflection of us qua the putative living. The discrepancy between such a cosmos and ontological necessity or a philosophy that still – even implicitly – insists on the determination of the dead against the living or vice versa produces a misshapen image of us wherein we are all potentially spectres. That is to say, we are instrumentally and neurotically living dead rather than already dead (i.e. freed from the chains of ontological necessity, noetic enslavement and the burden of any privilege that ontology brings with itself).