

# Clearing Up Correlationism: Goldschmidt, Meillassoux, and the Problem of Finitude

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**ABSTRACT:** In *After Finitude*, Quentin Meillassoux speculates from the principle of non-contradiction's *a priori* enclosure toward a standpoint of absolute contingency. Based on his propositions, I argue that his thinking continues to reproduce a contradiction between the finitude of the subject and the infinitude of the noumenal world. Accordingly, I eschew the principle of noncontradiction in favor of a principle of contradiction derived from Hermann Levin Goldschmidt's *Contradiction Set Free*. Goldschmidt formulates contradiction as an Either-And-Or whereby the two contradictory terms share a space between them in which there elapses a continuous process of negotiation. If the relation between finitude and infinitude is an Either-And-Or, then there is an interpenetration between the finite and the infinite, between bounded subject and noumenal world. Goldschmidt's method reinvigorates the contradiction with which Meillassoux is grappling and introduces a more immanent mode of infinitude that echoes certain Spinozist and pre-Spinozist strains of Jewish thought.

**KEY WORDS:** Meillassoux, speculative realism, contradiction, Goldschmidt, Spinoza, ontology, infinity, correlationism, immanence, Jewish philosophy

In 2007, Quentin Meillassoux's *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency* first appeared in front of an English-speaking audience, and the discourses that have emerged from its propositions have been wide-reaching, leading to the foundation of the speculative realist movement and deeply influencing theorists of new materialism and object-oriented ontology. *After Finitude* takes aim at a very particular problem: the epistemological limitations of Immanuel Kant's treatment of subjectivity and ontology in his *Critique of Pure Reason*. What follows here is not necessarily a faithful reconstruction

of Kant's positions with respect to the subject's epistemic capacities; rather, it is a recapitulation of Meillassoux's own interpretation of Kant's argument, which forms the ground from which the central claims of *After Finitude* arise.<sup>1</sup> He holds that according to Kant, the condition for knowledge is a correlative meeting point between what is given to the subject (the for-us, which for Kant makes itself known to us in the form of phenomena) and that which exists unaltered by the subject's conceptual intervention (the in-itself, which is what Kant refers to as the world of noumena, the world as it exists independently of our thinking about it). Having delineated this ineluctable pairing of the for-us and the in-itself and then recognized its continued ubiquity as a locus of difficulty throughout modern and contemporary philosophical practice, Meillassoux (2012: 3–8) dubs it *correlationism*. Put simply, the problem he outlines with the correlationist model is that the subject, by virtue of its finitude, cannot possess knowledge of anything pertaining to the in-itself that harkens to a point anterior to the correlation between the two of them: its finite temporal extension means that there will always be things in the world of noumena that are anterior to and therefore incommensurate with the world that is given to the subject. As a result, the bounded subject is fundamentally unable to get outside of itself, to grasp the in-itself as anything other than a mediated, phenomenal for-us. Though Meillassoux elaborates on this idea at length in order to justify his anti-Kantian position, I will reformulate the basic dimensions of the problem as follows: the limit of Kantian correlationism shows itself to us at the points where the finitude of the for-us, bounded as it is by subjectivity, cannot be rendered commensurable with the infinitude of the in-itself, which is the unbounded expanse of the noumenal world (Meillassoux 2012: 10–16).

The way out of this bind, for Meillassoux, is to be found in the very mechanisms that hold the correlation between the for-us and the in-itself together. Since Kant claims that the in-itself is tethered to the for-us by way of *a priori* principles that must adhere to a strict internal logic, the knowledge that we receive of that which resides beyond the bounds of our own minds must also be parsed and ordered according to the logical structure of the *a priori* (Meillassoux 2012: 31). Given the fact that *a priori* logic cannot be contradictory, all knowledge of the outside world that we receive must be equally beholden to that same principle of noncontradiction. Rather than taking this principle of noncontradiction for granted, Meillassoux both adheres to it and undercuts it, claiming that what is at stake *before* the *a priori* ordering of knowledge is the matter of facticity: the notion that things exist. He observes that along with conceiving of the possibility of existence, we can also think of the possibility of nonbeing, and indeed can simultaneously contemplate the idea that everything exists and the notion that everything might not exist (41). Thus, beneath the correlationist framework lies a fault line between being and nonbeing, which produces an absolute contingency

that implicates *everything that follows*—both the for-us and the in-itself (71). Since this principle of absolute contingency also implicates instances of nonbeing that are anterior to or beyond the principle of noncontradiction, it is apparent that the latter principle can no longer be all-encompassing in quite the same way: it is applicable only to that which has arisen from that absolute contingency (i.e., everything), but it cannot bind the contingency itself.<sup>2</sup> Meillassoux, then, upholds the principle of noncontradiction that is so essential to the correlationist epistemic model even as he manipulates, distorts, and explodes it in order to dismantle correlationism from the inside.

At this juncture in his argument, it is worthwhile to consider a scenario in which he might have taken another route in response to the noncontradictory apriority that acts as a bridge from the for-us to the in-itself within the correlationist framework. What if, rather than turning the principle of noncontradiction against itself, Meillassoux had opted to embrace a principle of contradiction? These two approaches are distinct from one another: the first simply ceases to treat the choice between contradiction and noncontradiction as a central epistemological horizon, whereas the second prioritizes contradiction as a fundamental epistemic aperture onto the world that must be preserved rather than resolved. In order to understand how such a principle of contradiction is structured, we can look to the philosopher Hermann Levin Goldschmidt and his work *Contradiction Set Free*. Goldschmidt asserts that contradiction needs to be viewed on its own terms as an expression of the dialogic nature both of being and of our discourses surrounding it—when we submit contradiction to the suppression of logical or *a priori* principles, we flatten certain truths about our experience of the world. In the context of Meillassoux's discussion of correlationism, such a flattening would entail the naturalization of the intractable noumenal world into the bounded finitude of the for-us. Put in other words, the contradiction between finitude and infinitude that haunts Meillassoux's critique of correlationism risks becoming an opposition whereby one term—namely, finitude—dominates the other. Goldschmidt's philosophy challenges us to rescue contradiction from lapsing into opposition, and so imagines a state of affairs in which finitude and infinitude are able to meet without suppressing one another. Goldschmidt, then, shows us another route that we might take in an attempt to gain access to the "great outdoors" of the in-itself—a route, moreover, that does not require us to undercut our own positionality as subjects by implicating ourselves within a chaotic principle of absolute contingency. Accordingly, I will explore Goldschmidt's conception of the dynamics that govern contradiction in general in order to understand how the bounded subject's experience of the incommensurability between the finite and the infinite exposes it to that which is beyond its own finitude. I will show that the infinitude of the in-itself and the finitude of the for-us are mutually permeable precisely by virtue of the fact that they impede, frustrate, and contradict one another. In the end, I

will claim that the infinitude of the in-itself impinges on the bounded individual in such a way that the negotiation between them both maintains the limitations proper to the subject's finitude and generates a dialogic admixture between the finite and the infinite that emanates through the subject continuously, adhering to the constricted dimensions of the for-us even as it moves according to the boundless temporal extension and inexhaustible magnitude of the in-itself. This dialogic relation between finitude and infinitude upholds Meillassoux's conception of the infinite as that which is proper both to infinitely proliferating countable sets and to unthinkably large, irreducible quantities (for Meillassoux, the in-itself is one such unthinkably large quantity) even as it reconciles such a model with a far older formulation of infinity that harkens back to influential Jewish thinkers such as Hasdai Crescas and Baruch Spinoza, whereby infinitude is understood as a kind of inexhaustibility or boundlessness.

Now that we have outlined the fundamental problematic that drives Meillassoux's project, we must take a closer look both at his treatment of the principle of noncontradiction and at the nature of the incommensurability between subjectivity and the noumenal world that troubles correlationism. In doing so, we will reframe Meillassoux's own description, viewing it in a new light so that we can uncover the fundamental point of contradiction from which the structure of the entire correlationist framework emanates. He illustrates the operative necessity of noncontradiction within correlationism as follows:

Kant effectively allows us the possibility of knowing a priori that logical contradiction is absolutely impossible. Although we cannot apply categorical cognition to the thing-in-itself, the latter remains subject to the logical condition that is the prerequisite for all thought. Consequently, for Kant, the following two propositions have an absolute ontological scope:

1. The thing-in-itself is non-contradictory.
2. The thing-in-itself exists, otherwise there would be appearances without anything that appears, which for Kant is contradictory. (Meillassoux 2012: 31)

These, then, are the conditions by which the world is thinkable for Kant, according to Meillassoux's diagnosis. The *a priori* logical establishment of a principle of noncontradiction means that we can only conceive of the in-itself as correspondingly noncontradictory. Moreover, the impossibility of contradiction means that the existence of things-in-themselves is necessary, since otherwise their phenomenal manifestation as that which is given to the subject (i.e., the for-us) would be a contradiction.

However, Meillassoux exposes a fault line in this idea that the principle of noncontradiction necessitates the existence of things-in-themselves. Taking noncontradiction as an ontological given does not prove that things-in-themselves

exist; rather, it proves the impossibility that things-in-themselves do *not* exist, provided that the subject within the correlation can establish its own existence as the entity that is met with the phenomenal content of the for-us. The principle of noncontradiction cannot provide a reason that explains or necessitates the noumenal existence of anything in affirmative terms, and, moreover, there is no reason for its own existence—it is in place as a principle simply because it is thinkable *a priori*. Thus, despite the all-encompassing logical extension of apriority, existence is present rather than necessary, formulated as an ad hoc foundational facticity, a being without justification. As Meillassoux puts it, “facticity is the ‘un-reason’ of the given.” The absolutizing ontological gesture of facticity holds that even that which would be unthinkable in the given cannot be impossible—including that which is contradictory. Contradiction becomes both possible and impossible at the same time: “*it is unthinkable that the unthinkable be impossible.*” As a result, the principle of noncontradiction discloses the possibility of contradiction while also guarding against its realization (Meillassoux 2012: 40–41).

Indeed, since the directive toward noncontradiction produces a facticity that cannot have any reason necessitating its existence as such, no entity can be necessary. Instead, everything is contingent. Being necessary, then, is a contradiction in terms under the principle of noncontradiction, meaning both that necessity must be impossible and that a contradictory entity can (or *must*, as Meillassoux perhaps fallaciously extrapolates) be necessary, which is impossible (Meillassoux 2012: 67). It is this proximity between contradiction and necessity that provides Meillassoux with his escape valve from the entire correlationist model:

[O]ne may certainly say of a contradictory entity that it is at once necessary and unnecessary, but in doing so, one continues to describe it as a supremely necessary entity, since one continues to preclude any dimension of alterity through which the entity could be subjected to change. (70)

Under the principle of noncontradiction, there emerge two simultaneous scenarios that can determine whether a contradictory entity is necessary. The first is a simple syllogism: if all contradictory entities are impossible according to the principle of contradiction, and if existence is a necessary condition for an entity to be necessary, then a contradictory entity must be unnecessary. The second scenario, however, is as follows: if the *a priori* principle of noncontradiction is subtended by an absolute contingency in which everything that exists is possible but not necessary and if no possible entity can be necessary due to the unreasoned facticity that subtends the *a priori* principle of noncontradiction, then a contradictory entity, which is *not* possible according to the principle of noncontradiction, must be the opposite of unnecessary and must, therefore, be necessary. Given that these two scenarios are operative simultaneously according to the logic of the principle of noncontradiction, we must now accept that

a contradictory entity can be both necessary and unnecessary at the same time. While this assertion, when taken at face value, might seem to be a contradiction in and of itself, the truth is that any entity that appears to be both necessary and unnecessary at the same time must really be absolutely necessary. Meillassoux's rationale for such a conclusion lies in his understanding of what it means to be unnecessary: if an entity is contingent or unnecessary, then it must be alterable, and in order for it to become different, there must be a realm of possibility exterior to what it currently is, a dimension that it might come to occupy, depending on what happens. A necessary entity, on the other hand, is already all that it can possibly be—it cannot be different from itself. It follows that an entity that is both necessary and unnecessary, by virtue of its necessity, encompasses all dimensions of its own possibility and cannot be different from itself—it lacks the ability to change, and so must be “supremely necessary.” In this way, the contradiction between being necessary and being unnecessary resolves itself.

Change and difference, meanwhile, are the essential determinants both of the multiplicity of being and of all *a priori* thinking, because they constitute the mode by which things distinguish themselves from other things. Without such distinguishability, nothing would be able to think about anything else, and thus no principles could arise from thought. To wit: things must become different from one another and change in order to be subject to any kind of *a priori* principle, because if everything were the same, then the subject's sphere of cognition would be indistinguishable from the in-itself, and the correlation between them would not be possible. Since only unnecessary entities can become different from themselves or change, we must therefore conclude that everything must be unnecessary under the auspices of the principle of noncontradiction. As Meillassoux (2012: 71) asserts, “the ontological meaning of the principle of noncontradiction, far from designating some sort of fixed essence, is that of the necessity of contingency, of the omnipotence of chaos.” Of course, the chaos of this absolute contingency is the very thing that subtends and relativizes all that resides within the correlationist model, rendering any distinctions between the for-us and the in-itself moot, since both are equally destabilized by the possibility of their nonbeing.

There are two dynamics that are particularly notable in Meillassoux's formulation. The first has to do with the great effort that he has deployed in order to portray the manner in which the thinking subject's *a priori* principles must fold in on themselves and change shape over the course of their attempt to think through the unthinkable immensity of the noumenal world. On a very fundamental level, this struggle appears to be caused by a problem of scale: the subject is bounded and doing its utmost within the limitations of its own finitude to extend its cognition over a realm that vastly exceeds its own scope. The only way to begin to reckon with the full extent of the in-itself is to subject it to a putatively all-encompassing principle, be it the totalizing logic of noncontradiction or the absolutizing contingency

that Meillassoux has extracted from facticity. Finite subjects simply do not have the bandwidth to move particular by particular throughout the infinitude of the noumenal world, and so must rely on the extension of disembodied *a priori* logic to refine it, whether that means a straightforward imposition of noncontradiction or, as Meillassoux has demonstrated, an overcoming of apriority from the inside.

Meanwhile, the second dynamic has to do with the manner in which Meillassoux thinks about contradiction and noncontradiction. On a methodological level, he is extracting contradictions from the principle of noncontradiction in order to generate a linked chain of deductions: First, he draws a distinction between an entity that is necessarily possible and an entity that cannot be impossible. In each case, one can assert that the entity exists, but in the second case there is no reason provided that would necessitate its existence; there is instead an argument against its inexistence. From there, he is able to reason his way toward the facticity of the given, which then yields a further contradiction: the idea that an entity might be both necessary and unnecessary at once. In turn, that contradictory notion is what allows him to produce his universally applicable principle of absolute contingency. It is apparent, then, that Meillassoux is using the principle of noncontradiction as a way of moving from inside of the bounded, finite realm of the for-us toward standpoints of greater and greater ontological totality until, with the principle of absolute contingency, he arrives at an aperture that is anterior both to the for-us and the in-itself: absolute contingency subtends the entire Kantian correlation and, finally, exceeds totalization.

Such a move from a determinate principle of noncontradiction that governs the full, theoretically countable magnitude of the for-us to an absolute contingency that pertains to the larger, unthinkable infinite multiplicity of the in-itself is consistent with Meillassoux's appeal to Zermelo-Fraenkel set theory, which posits that there is an infinite proliferation of sets, both finite and infinite, and that this infinite proliferation cannot be unified so that it is wrapped up into a 'set-of-all-sets' whose contents would include every possible set. Zermelo-Fraenkel set theory does away with the set-of-all-sets because its contradictory character—the fact that it must be both internal and external to itself all at once—renders it unthinkable.<sup>3</sup> For Meillassoux, though, the impossibility of the set-of-all-sets means that nothing can contain all of the infinitudes obtained by other sets and shows that an infinitude with the capacity to implicate all ontological possibility must be untotalizable. This quality of nontotalizability is important for him, because in place of a unified set-of-all-sets, we are left with a multiplying infinitude (or *transfinitude*, as Meillassoux would put it) that cannot be unified and therefore exceeds the totalizing scope of correlationism's epistemic horizon, which must always bundle all being into the unitary field of what appears to or can be conceptually assimilated by the subject. Thus, in its chaotic inconsistency, the looming impossibility of the set-of-all-sets forces us to countenance the idea that there can only be an ever-escalating

proliferation of infinitudes whose indefinite changeability destabilizes all *a priori* conceptions of nature and represents the absolute contingency of everything. Meillassoux's goal is to travel from inside the limits of correlationist subjectivity all the way to the unthinkable (and untotalizable) horizon of the set-of-all-sets, and in doing so, move beyond a conception of specific things or events that are possible toward the more absolute infinitude of possibility itself. Such a method allows him to think from the standpoint of the in-itself in all its possible permutations, which subsist independently of our capacity to think and, since they exceed the aleatory and causal logics proper to *a priori* modes of thought, can be encompassed only by an appeal to the contingent facticity of all things (Meillassoux 2012: 104–11, 126–28; Zantvoort 2015: 20–21; Brown 2011: 144).

The step-by-step move toward the limitless ontological proliferation of absolute contingency from within the finitude of the subject's *a priori* thinking is an attempt to render the finite commensurate with the infinite, and so to succeed where Kant failed in his attempt to imbue apriority with a kind of rational infinitude. The epistemological problem with the subject's finitude with respect to the boundlessness of the noumenal world is really that in order to know the world, a finite, bounded subject must find a way to stretch itself over an infinite expanse even as it remains finite. The terms of the problem hold that the subject, by virtue of being finite, must end before the infinite expanse of the noumenal world does, and that this state of affairs requires that there be a limit impeding the subject's absolute knowledge of that which is outside of it. However, the very idea of correlationism hinges on a situation whereby the finite subject is commensurate with the infinitude of the in-itself such that its *a priori* principles *do* in fact extend outward to encompass the entirety of the in-itself such that it is governed by the principle of noncontradiction. Meillassoux's treatment recognizes the failure of such an indefinite outward expression and attempts to remedy it by replacing the principle of noncontradiction with a principle of absolute contingency. Whether or not the attempt is successful, it does not clear up the contradiction that orders the correlationism: the subject must still both be finite and extend itself to infinite proportions all at once.

If there remains a fundamental contradiction between finitude and infinitude underlying all of the impressive thinking that Meillassoux has undertaken, then we must ask ourselves whether exploding the principle of noncontradiction into the chaos of absolute contingency is a radical enough step. What if Meillassoux had opted instead to truly bring the contradiction between finitude and infinitude to life? Perhaps the only way out of the correlationist epistemic situation is to follow where that fundamental contradiction leads. Of course, in order to do so, we would require a principle of contradiction to replace the logic of noncontradiction that previously governed our thinking.



It is at this juncture that the work of Hermann Levin Goldschmidt takes on direct methodological relevance. Goldschmidt is an atypical philosopher in that he is not interested in resolving, smoothing over, or moving away from points of incommensurability. Where philosophical monism refuses the possibility of contradiction and dialectical philosophy treats contradiction as an opposition in which one term overcomes the other or both terms are overcome into a new synthesis, Goldschmidt (2020: 39–40) prefers to follow a third path, claiming that it is the contradiction itself—and not its resolution, whereby it is no longer allowed to remain contradictory—that is the inflection point according to which our thinking ought to form. Indeed, Goldschmidt recognizes early on in *Contradiction Set Free* that the desire to do away with contradiction must in and of itself be contradictory. He ascribes to the pre-Socratics a volition toward a noncontradictory “truth” that splits speculative discourse into two separate camps, despite its intended trajectory toward noncontradiction. These camps both contradict one another and at the same time rely on practices that are internally contradictory: first there is the sophist, whose aim is to contradict the other side of a given discourse in order to be right, and then there is the philosopher, who seeks to contradict what is not true in discourse in order to arrive at the truth. Thus, the philosopher, in accepting his or her role, embraces a situation whereby the truth that runs counter to the artifice of sophistic discourse is *always* operating as part of a contradiction: that which is not true must be preserved as an antagonist in order for the philosopher to make a truth claim (19–20). Put in other words, the philosopher’s quest for a unitary truth that is internally noncontradictory and whole is always suppressing the fact that it is at odds with something else that is incommensurable to it: an antinomy that structures the conditions by which the philosophical project arises, whose antagonism cannot be resolved by the internal wholeness of any truth claim that is later produced.

The perceived need to resolve or prohibit contradictory thinking, then, drives the foundational volition of philosophy, and yet, since the project of philosophy can only assert itself by way of maintaining a discursive contradiction, the desire of the philosopher to be noncontradictory is in and of itself a contradiction. From the perspective of a thinker who is operating according to the principle of noncontradiction, this state of affairs would be troubling; for Goldschmidt, it represents an opportunity. After all, if the entire situation of philosophy inheres in the play of contradiction between philosophic truth and sophistry, then we are presented with a fissure into which the content of being wells up: not the truth claim or the sophistry, but the space between them, in which the contradiction is negotiated.

This configuration is indefinitely transposable, according to Goldschmidt. Indeed, he readily recognizes a version of the contradiction that we have identified in Meillassoux’s argument: the meeting between the finite individual and that which is too expansive to be confined to its grasp. He asserts that “although

spirit is perceived by the individual—and by the individual alone—the truth it makes accessible to the individual is nonetheless supra-individual” (Goldschmidt 2020: 18). Goldschmidt arrives at this claim by describing the ways in which the individual’s desire for “singularity and wholeness” deepens and expands until it seeks to wrap the entire universe up into a unity. In aspiring to such a unity, the individual is met with that which exceeds individuality and is too large to be unified—when the activity of unification fulfills its aim, it is contradicted by the very ontological amplification that it facilitates. However, even as the individual remains unable to naturalize the full extent of the ontological plurality (or “spirit”) that it desires to unify, in being met with the contradiction that arises from this failure and lurks just beyond the outer boundaries of its reach, it takes in more than what is contained within the limits of its finitude: it accesses the supra-individual rather than being wholly confined to mere individuality. In other words, even if the individual cannot take in the full magnitude of what it fails to unify, it does take in *more* than what would otherwise have been within its purview, exceeding its own extension. Moreover, in making this claim, I must emphasize that this category of the supra-individual exceeds the reach of *a priori* thinking, because apriority desires a noncontradictory unification of all being, whereas in Goldschmidt’s model, the individual is *also* taking in the contradiction that occurs at the point of *a priori* logic’s failure. The supra-individual is what becomes of the incommensurable and boundless plurality of being once it is contradicted by the bounded finitude of the individual.

He expands on this same dynamic later on in the text:

Only the mutually contradictory demonstrations of the truth of the particularity of every single individual and of the supra-individual universality of their history together are true, just as the ideal and material teleology of history or, in the case of existentialism, its theism and atheism together are true. Only the And of their Either-And-Or opens the whole truth—and it does so only when they contradict each other, and only so long as they continue contradicting each other. (Goldschmidt 2020: 35–36)

Here, Goldschmidt presents the contradiction between the individual and the supra-individual universality that rejects unification not as an Either-Or scenario but as an Either-And-Or scenario. An Either-Or relation requires a choice between two terms such that one suppresses or supplants the other; an Either-And-Or relation preserves both poles of a given antinomy *and* the antagonism between them, thereby showing itself to be the true expression of a contradiction that has been brought to life such that it truly acts on its own terms. The contradictory formation of the Either-And-Or is significant precisely because it preserves a generative field of negotiation that spaces out the “Either” and the “Or” from one another—in fact, this generative field is the “And” that chains the “Either” to the “Or” such that they remain at odds with one another. Without

the “And,” we cannot access the whole truth of the terms that are contradicting one another, because that field of negotiation plays host to elements of both the “Either” and the “Or.” If we act like such a field does not exist, then we are excising essential elements of the activity and the content of both the “Either” and the “Or,” and in doing so, we are limiting the scope of what we can learn about the two contradictory terms. Thus, Goldschmidt encourages us to take stock of more than the incommensurability between bounded individual and boundless proliferation of all being, asking us also to turn our attention to the space in which that incommensurability is negotiated. Already, then, Goldschmidt provides us with a way to adjust our approach toward the contradiction between finitude and infinitude that arises from Meillassoux’s argument in *After Finitude*: rather than viewing that incommensurability as something to be resolved, we ought to think of it as a clash whose occurrence opens up a space of negotiation *between* the finite and the infinite. It is in this space that the finite and the infinite might be said to share an experience on equal terms, insofar as they negotiate with one another.

What does such a negotiation look like? Goldschmidt offers us some insight into the kinds of dynamics that both drive and perpetuate it. To begin with, he points out that in order to inhabit contradiction, we must turn toward it. Goldschmidt encapsulates this turning with his invocation of the Jewish practice of *teshuvah*, which, as he holds, can mean “turning,” but also (and more commonly) means “returning.” It is no coincidence that he prefers the first definition over the second one: as we have learned from his analysis of the pre-Socratic urge for noncontradictory unity, departing from contradiction only yields further contradiction. As a result, contradiction is not something to which we can ever return, given that we have never been able to successfully part from it. Rather, we must turn *toward* the contradiction that is already there, in the same way that the terms of the contradiction must turn toward one another in order to facilitate the negotiation that is to occur between them. The act of Turning constitutes a path-formation whereby that which is seen to be at odds with its other opens itself to an ethical reconciliation with its antagonist and enters into the space of negotiation (Goldschmidt 2020: 113). *Teshuvah*, then, is the dynamic by which both philosophers and contradictory terms can orient themselves toward the “And” that sits between the “Either” and the “Or” in order to participate in the negotiations hosted there. Though we have concluded that in Meillassoux’s formulation, the finite and the infinite are at loggerheads, we must also credit him for his recognition that the subject’s finitude cannot in fact force the infinitude of the in-itself into a bounded *a priori* unity: thus, the Turning has already begun, since there already exists an acknowledgment that one term cannot succeed in dominating or suppressing the other and that it is necessary to come up with another solution. What is missing, however, is that the philosopher—who is a bounded finite subject, too—must

also turn toward the contradiction between finitude and infinitude if this process of *teshuvah* is to realize itself completely—only then can we think about how the finite and the infinite might come to terms with one another.

When we turn toward the contradiction, we allow ourselves to consider the modes of exchange and negotiation that ensure that it retains its structure and prevent it from collapsing into a resolution such that one or both of the contradictory terms are suppressed. Moreover, turning toward contradiction means adopting a conceptual formation that lends itself to the Either-And-Or rather than the Either-Or. It is for this reason that Goldschmidt develops the idea of *Aufgeräumtheit*, which he presents as an alternative to Hegel's *Aufheben* (sublation). As a kind of negative overcoming, *Aufheben* annihilates the contradiction by elevating the two opposing terms, preserving them within the totality of the Absolute even as it eliminates them by negating the mutual disagreement that was essential to their character. *Aufgeräumtheit*, by contrast, is targeted not at the terms themselves but at the "And" situated between the "Either" and the "Or" of the contradiction. Both *Aufheben* and *Aufgeräumtheit* bring about and bear witness to the annihilation of the other, but in the case of the former, the other is the opposing term (since both opposing terms negate one another in order to rise and be wrapped up in the Absolute), while in the case of the latter, the other is the confusion *between* the two contradictory terms. *Aufgeräumtheit*, then, manages to preserve both terms in the contradiction without also negating or eliminating them; *Aufheben* is confined to the very double motion of preservation and elimination that *Aufgeräumtheit* avoids. Under the auspices of *Aufgeräumtheit*, the negotiation that takes place between the two terms of the contradiction is a clearing-up of the confusion that prevents them from seeing one another (Goldschmidt 2020: 125). This clearing-up of confusion is quite clearly not a resolution of the contradiction. Instead, it is a mutual equivocation such that passage from one to the other and back becomes possible. The two terms remain contradictory, but in reckoning with one another, they are able to mutually express the conditions, forms, and stipulations of their negotiation. In the case of the contradiction between finitude and infinitude at play in Meillassoux's work, then, this would mean that, by virtue of their incommensurability, the finite would be able to express what the infinite "says" to it as they navigate their disagreement. The in-itself would have its "say" articulated within the bounded interior of the for-us as a result of the negotiation between the two. In this way, the boundless noumenal word and the finite subject enter one another, engaging in a mutual permeation due to their active dialogic reckoning. This represents a point at which finitude is porous to infinitude and therefore can extend beyond itself, to a territory outside of the reach of *a priori* thinking.

Moreover, Goldschmidt offers a very important explanation of the temporality of this kind of mutually penetrating and all-encompassing negotiation between the "Either" and the "Or":

*Aufgeräumtheit* on the other hand, likewise a fundamental determination that reappears absolutely everywhere, is a threefold process of clearing-something-up [*Mit-Etwas-Aufräumen*], having-cleared-up [*Aufgeräumt-Haben*], and being-cleared-up [*Aufgeräumt-Sein*]. One who clears something up becomes, because he or she has cleared up, “cleared up” him- or herself: satisfied, well-balanced, cheerful, happy. The clearing-up one accomplishes outwardly becomes evident in oneself internally and externally according to the degree of one’s success. By putting things in order, one puts oneself “in order.” (Goldschmidt 2020: 125)

*Aufgeräumtheit*, according to Goldschmidt, clears up confusion in the present perfect, the present active, and the present passive all at once. Moreover, this clearing-up *becomes* evident both outwardly and inwardly, is the result of a *process* of clearing-up that is complete and ongoing at the same time. These are both essential details, because together they point to two truths about *Aufgeräumtheit*. The first is that clearing-up is continuous, because the contradiction, by virtue of the fact that it is preserved, is never resolved. The confusion within the contradiction must always continue to be cleared up even if the clearing-up has already happened. This means that in the context of the contradiction that we have observed in Meillassoux’s formulation of the bounded for-us and the boundless in-itself, the dialogic negotiation that allows the infinite to express itself within the finite is not an imprint—instead, it is an ongoing permeation whereby the infinite expresses its position with respect to the finite within the dimensions offered by finitude and that only by way of the preservation of finitude can the infinite be expressed. Moreover, it lends to the finite a discursive continuity that never ends, which allows its capacity for eternal negotiation to subsist on the same scale as that of the infinite.

Meanwhile, the second essential feature that we can extract from Goldschmidt’s description of *Aufgeräumtheit* is that it entails movement from the inside to the outside and from the outside to the inside. The cause of this activity becomes clearer when we recall the space in between the “Either” and the “Or”: finitude must make itself present in this space outside of itself in order to negotiate with infinitude, and it must also enter back into itself with the terms of that negotiation, thereby bringing infinitude into its bounds. In this way, there arises a dialogic movement between the finitude of the for-us and the infinitude of the in-itself: in frustrating one another, they become mutually permeable such that the noumenal world’s infinitude enters or is brought into the boundedness of the for-us and expresses itself within that sphere according to the terms of the negotiation that is forever in progress, remaining infinite even as it takes on finite dimensions.

With his formulation the Either-And-Or, Goldschmidt allows for a portrait of the infinite that turns toward the contradictoriness of the set-of-all-sets: in considering the set-of-all-sets, we can see that the contradiction between its internality

to itself and its externality to itself is what is really true about it, subsisting as a fundamental element of its being that is always in the process of being cleared up. Moreover, despite the putative impossibility of the set-of-all-sets, it exists for us as a concept because on some level, even as the escalating proliferation of infinite sets (or the *transfinite*, to use Meillassoux's term) cannot be contained in one set and is therefore untotalizable, it is also being held together and theorized as a unity in order to be available for our use: a unity that never unites all the way, and a proliferation that is never fully escaping unitary conceptualization. Indeed, Meillassoux himself is guilty of such conceptual unification when he asserts that the "non-All" of set theory's infinite proliferation amounts to an ontological absolutization that discloses "the structure of the possible as such"—Goldschmidt's principle of contradiction allows us to see that despite all of Meillassoux's correct claims about the nontotalizability of the transfinite, he has also totalized that very same figure by unifying it into a structural and therefore internally consistent concept about being (Meillassoux 2012: 127). Thus, Goldschmidt enables us to retain a version of Meillassoux's model of infinitude, only now it is sustained by contradiction rather than noncontradiction. At the same time, however, in facilitating an interpenetrating negotiation between the finite and the infinite, Goldschmidt's principle of *Aufgeräumtheit* shows that even the most infinitely proliferating order of sets can spill or erupt according to finite dimensions and, insofar as it is oriented toward the standpoint of finitude, can be an immanent source of inexhaustible emanation within limited dimensions even as it remains a vastness that contains infinite sets of countably infinite particulars. The contradiction between finitude and infinitude is just as much a part of infinitude as the contradiction that inheres in the notion of the set-of-all-sets.

In enabling the figuration of infinitude as a font of immanent inexhaustibility without displacing more contemporary mathematical conceptions of the infinite, Goldschmidt allows us to recuperate and recontextualize certain ideas about the relation between the limitless godhead and the human subject that were deeply important in Jewish thought for centuries. Hasdai Crescas (2018: 75), a highly influential rabbinic thinker from the fourteenth century, argues contra Aristotle that bodies can possess infinite properties, qualities or dimensions in certain respects while remaining finite in others. This is readily apparent if we imagine a surface that lacks any depth whatsoever, and yet extends infinitely (we can think of a Möbius strip here), or a block that extends infinitely on a horizontal plane such that its infinitude resides in its length and depth even as it possesses limited dimensions on a vertical plane, such that its finitude resides in its width and height. Moreover, Crescas extends this formulation so that it includes forces: for instance, a force can possess infinite duration and finite strength at the same time (92). These interventions are significant because they show that an infinite force can exist within or enter into a finite body whose form is also finite without

overwhelming it with its infinite magnitude. Thus, we can see how a version of infinitude, when it presents itself according to finite dimensions, can emanate forth and enter into a bounded body. In this way, the boundlessness of the in-itself harbors the capacity to permeate the finitude of the for-us: in being everything, it can also be in one thing.

Indeed, Crescas's ideas about infinitude were a major source of inspiration for Spinoza's conception of substance—in a 1663 letter to Lodewijk Meyer, he expresses his agreement with Crescas's theorization of infinite succession (Melamed 2014: 204–207). Spinoza's spin on Crescas's ideas is rather elaborate, but is perhaps best summarized in a brief look at the Demonstration attached to Proposition 28 of Book I of the *Ethics*, in which he claims that the finite “cannot have been produced by the absolute nature of an Attribute of God,” and that it must instead follow from a finite modification of an Attribute of God (Spinoza 1994: 103). All that is finite can only be a mode of the infinite substance. In Spinoza, then, we see the same dynamic as we did in Crescas: infinitude modifies itself into finite dimensions and thus must permeate finitude. In Spinoza, Crescas's propositions are systematized, materialized and eventually, with his theory of affects, scaled up to construct the very fabric of subjectivity. The inexhaustible and uncountably variegated self-modifying activity of the infinite substance is the pool from which flows all being. With Goldschmidt's conception of *Aufgeräumtheit*, we are given a new opportunity to imagine Spinoza's model working in both ways, as a negotiation not only between the infinite and its finite modes, but also between the finite and the infinite (though it must be said, Goldschmidt's version of such an interaction is playing out on more equal terms than is Spinoza's). However, due to his embrace of a principle of contradiction, Goldschmidt's philosophical approach also permits us to conceive of a chaotic infinitude capable of containing or giving way to other infinite sets in the vein of the transfinite that Meillassoux has derived from set theory, and even allows us to countenance the impossible figure of the set-of-all-sets, despite the fact that it cannot avoid being inconsistent with itself (as demonstrated by Russell's Paradox; see note 3). Such internal disunity and contradictoriness would not be countenanced by Spinoza, for whom the limitless substance of the godhead must be indivisible and unique in its absolute infinitude, even if it can be expressed in infinite ways (Spinoza 1994: 93–97).

To sum up, then, we will return to the initial problem that is articulated in *After Finitude*. Meillassoux's foundational claim that correlationism presents an incommensurability whereby the epistemic conditions available to the finite subject impede its access to the unmediated world-in-itself is true. However, what he does not recognize is that this very situation of being impeded offers its own solution, its own process of clearing-up. The frustrations attendant upon correlationism expose a fundamental contradiction between finitude and infinitude, and in witnessing such a contradiction, we can turn toward it and work through the ways in which

the finite and the infinite clear up their confusion and negotiate with one another. Such a negotiation allows us to see how the infinitude of the in-itself *does* venture into the bounded interior of the for-us and how it is this very act of venturing that then expresses itself as finitude, thereby renewing the contradiction that must continue to be cleared up. By understanding the contradiction for what it is, we can watch the for-us and the in-itself as they operate on equal terms, negotiating and making compromises so that they can be seen by one another. Meillassoux might opt to use the principle of noncontradiction to relativize all being by way of a principle of absolute contingency, but in truth we need not undertake such an absolutizing project. Instead, as Goldschmidt's method has shown, we can simply rely on a principle of contradiction and turn toward the places in which the incommensurabilities are being negotiated such that their confusion might be cleared up. In doing so, we allow ourselves to apprehend the ineluctable presence of the noumenal world-in-itself within the mediated interior of subjectivity. Moreover, we facilitate a philosophical system in which the mathematized infinitude of modern set theory can subsist alongside or even synonymously with the materially emanating, inexhaustible infinitude that drives the philosophy of Crescas and Spinoza.

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## NOTES

1. Meillassoux's interpretation of Kant has been met with a mixed reception. While many scholars do not directly push back against his treatment of Kant, Anthony Bruno (2017: 22-23) charges that Meillassoux makes the mistake of interpreting Kant's defense of causal necessity as an assertion of the stability of experience rather than as an elaboration of the necessary condition by which all experience might be possible. Meanwhile, Catherine Malabou (2016: 146-147) holds that Meillassoux's argument does not arrive at any territory in which Kant's thinking has not already been, because the turn toward absolute contingency, insofar as it proves unable to contest the necessity of laws that are not going to modify themselves, does not trouble the transcendental unity of consciousness proposed by Kant. Indeed, Malabou (2016: 155) claims that it is the figure of epigenesis in Kantian philosophy—and not a turn toward absolute contingency—that can open up onto “a new perspective on rationality,” thereby rejecting Meillassoux's contention that Kant's thinking is invalidated by its epistemological insufficiency.
2. As Martin Orensanz (2017: 268) notes, Meillassoux does preserve the principle of noncontradiction even after he uses it as an escape valve to depart from the correlationist model and arrive at absolute contingency, because the ensuing hyper-chaos of such a contingency is still unable to produce entities whose existence is contradictory—entities, in other words, that both are what they are and are what they are not. Meanwhile, Ray Brassier (2007: 82) observes that “non-contradictoriness need not conflict with instability.” In other words, despite the fact that the principle of contingency forces us to concede that all being might be or become otherwise, this



- does not render what *does* exist contradictory. Thus, absolute contingency is still unable to produce contradictory entities, even as it itself contains possibilities that might contradict one another were they to exist at the same time.
3. Bertrand Russell famously devised a paradox to demonstrate the inconsistency of the set-of-all-sets. Paul Livingston (2015: 38) summarizes Russell's Paradox succinctly, stating that the set-of-all-sets "is not an element of itself if it is, and is an element of itself if it is not." Put in other words, some sets include themselves in the list of things that they have predicated, while other sets exclude themselves from the list of things that they have predicated. A set-of-all-sets would include both of these types of sets. One the one hand, then, a set-of-all-sets would have to be included in itself, which would violate the predicates of all the sets that do not contain themselves. On the other hand, a set-of-all-sets would have to be excluded from itself, which would violate the predicates of all the sets that *do* contain themselves. In both cases, this appears to be an impassable contradiction.

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