

LOVE AND SINCERITY:

READING SPECULATIVE REALISM WITH GRAHAM HARMAN

A CPPE/INTO Leicester School of Business event College Court, University of Leicester,

Knighton Road, Leicester, LE2 3UF, UK

19th June 2017

The Centre for Philosophy and Political Economy and the Innovation, Technology and Operations Division of the School of Business at the University of Leicester are delighted to host a day of discussion with Graham Harman, Distinguished Professor of Philosophy at the Southern California Institute of Architecture. Harman is the founder of *object oriented ontology* and a leading figure in the field of *speculative realism*. He emerged as a significant contemporary philosopher with the publication in 2002 of *Tool Being: Heidegger and the Metaphysics of Objects*; a text derived from his PhD that re-centres philosophy on the object itself via a radical reading of Heidegger. His subsequent output has been prolific with *Prince of Networks: Bruno Latour and Metaphysics* (2009)¹, *The Quadruple Object* (2011), and *Immaterialism* (2016) being amongst the most noteworthy. His most recent text, *The Rise of Realism*, with Manuel De Landa will have just been released when we meet at Leicester. We will thus concentrate our discussion on and around Harman's (2016) penultimate text: *Dante's Broken Hammer*. Participants will be provided with a copy of this text in advance and the day will be organised around discussion of the three key themes in the second half of the text.

Background

Graham Harman works within a field that has come to be known as 'speculative realism' which has garnered increasing attention in recent years, although, as of yet, there has been little direct incursion into the administrative and organisational sciences. We hope to begin to rectify this situation with this event. Speculative realism offers potential to encounter the world anew through a different conceptualisation of the 'objects' that make it up. In Harman's version of speculative realism --- 'object oriented ontology', objects are essentially 'cryptic' in their being, with much of their reality in retreat from any attempt to fully comprehend them. Objects, in this view, are made of parts and can themselves be parts of other objects. Yet despite being made up of other objects, despite unleashing surprising effects on other objects, an object has a realness that exceeds any under- or over-pinnings. The habits of thought that Harman breaks with either undermine or overmine the object *qua* object

¹ Full text is available open access at http://www.re-press.org/book-files/OA_Version_780980544060_Prince_of_Networks.pdf

when they respectively seek to reduce the object to its components or see it merely as a part and nothing more than a part, of some greater whole.

Object-oriented-ontology (O-O-O) has proposed that objects change, assert attraction on one another, generate time and space around themselves, but never cease to exist. One of Graham Harman's examples is that of putting a match to cotton (2005). There is cotton and there is a match, then there is smouldering and smoke, and thereafter there is ash; at all moments there are objects. Objects change and retreat, are transformed and reappear as something else. There is never NO object and there is never an object that is totally given to an observer. For social constructivism, the object is in the eye of the perceiver and 'surprise' is a subjective quality. For O-O-O the object is only partially visible or present and always 'strange', uncertain and somewhat indeterminate.

The agency of objects has been typified and described by Harman as entailing multiple processes. New objects are combines of the 'notes' (Harman, 2005: 211) or 'sensual qualities' (Harman, 2011: 128) of their progenitors, formed when one object 'allures' (Harman, 2005: 211) another into interaction. Interaction, which includes the intervention of the perceived 'sensual objects' between the limitless 'real objects' that are their cousins. We can only know the events of 'vicarious causation' (Harman, 2007) through which objects interact; the real objects themselves are too much in retreat to interact directly.

In *Dante's Broken Hammer* (2016) Harman brings these ideas directly to bear on an object of art, *The Divine Comedy* and indirectly enjoins us to rethink **ethics**, **aesthetics** and **metaphysics**.

Programme

- 9.00 – 9.30** Coffee and Welcome
- 9.30 – 11.00** Introduction and 'Ethics'
Discussion to be led by Hugo Letiche
- 11.00 – 11.30** Coffee
- 11.30 – 12.30** 'Aesthetics'
Discussion to be led by Jean-Luc Moriceau
- 12.30 – 1.30** Lunch
- 1.30 – 2.30** 'Metaphysics'
Discussion to be led by Justine Grønbaek Pors
- 2.30 – 3.00** Concluding discussion

We are grateful to the University of Leicester's School of Business Research Committee for financial support for this event.

Practicalities

We intend to video the event and make the recording available via the CPPE's web site. Attendance implies willingness to be filmed. If you have any concerns regarding this, please contact Simon in advance.

There is ample car parking at College Court and rooms (at your own expense) can be booked there if you need to stay over. More details at <https://collegecourt.co.uk/> (although you may find booking.com offers cheaper prices for the rooms, so it's worth a quick check!).

There is no charge to attend the event but numbers are limited so if you wish to attend please email Simon Lilley (s.lilley@le.ac.uk) by Monday 15th May. Please provide a postal address so that we can get a copy of the book out to you.