

## THE TRANSCENDENTAL CORE OF CORRELATIONISM

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**ABSTRACT:** In this paper I read Quentin Meillassoux's critique of correlationism as truly a critique of transcendentalism and the transcendental method. I do so by considering the two correlationist rejoinders that occur in the English edition of Meillassoux's *After Finitude*. The first rejoinder is from an idealist and relies on adumbrations for its defence. This reliance on adumbrations will be shown to be itself transcendentially implicated through Edmund Husserl's *Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*. I then turn to the explicit engagement with the transcendental method that arises from the transcendentalist's rejoinder. Considered together I hope to convince the reader that the core of correlationism is transcendentalism.

**KEYWORDS:** Transcendentalism; Correlationism; After Finitude; Quentin Meillassoux; Edmund Husserl; Immanuel Kant; Critique of Pure Reason; Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology; arche-fossil; ancestral realm; speculative realism

In the preface to Quentin Meillassoux's *After Finitude*<sup>1</sup> Alain Badiou makes the claim that:

It would be no exaggeration to say that Quentin Meillassoux has opened up a new path in the history of philosophy, hitherto conceived as the history of what it is to know; a path that circumvents Kant's canonical distinction between 'dogmatism', 'scepticism' and 'critique' (AF, vii).

As I interpret this Badiou is telling us that *after* Meillassoux a truly post-Kantian metaphysics might be developed. If we take seriously Žižek's remark that 'Philosophy as such is Kantian' then Badiou's thesis becomes a truly radical one.<sup>2</sup> I claim that the

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1. Quentin Meillassoux, *Après la finitude: essai sur la nécessité de la contingence*, Paris, Seuil, 2006 translated as Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*, trans. Ray Brassier, London, Continuum, 2008. Hereafter cited as AF referring to the English translation. I will also be referencing a short introductory paper introducing the central ideas of *After Finitude* called 'Time without Becoming': [http://speculativeheresy.files.wordpress.com/2008/07/3729-time\\_without\\_becoming.pdf](http://speculativeheresy.files.wordpress.com/2008/07/3729-time_without_becoming.pdf). This paper was delivered at the Centre for Research in Modern European Philosophy, Middlesex University in May, 2008. Hereafter cited as TWB.

2. Slavoj Žižek, *Organs without Bodies: On Deleuze and Consequences*, New York, Routledge, 2004, p. 44.

core of correlationism, as defined by Meillassoux, is the transcendental method. To overcome correlationism is to overcome the transcendental method. I will show that in both Meillassoux's imagined correlationist rejoinders one discovers that the core defences of correlationism are always transcendently founded. I call the transcendentalist element of correlationism the *correlationist nexus* to distinguish it from the derivative forms of correlationism. Since these derivative forms of correlationism return to transcendentalism in their defensive strategies they are to be read as transcendentalist in their core.

The effectiveness of Meillassoux's argument rests on collecting the entire post-Kantian tradition under one simple commitment: '...that there are no objects, no events, no laws, no beings which are not always-already correlated with a point of view, with a subjective access' (TWB, 1).<sup>3</sup> This correlationist commitment binds the post-Kantian tradition under the label correlationism. Correlationism is the '...contemporary opponent of any realism' and so, in essence, correlationism is his name for antirealism (TWB, 1). Meillassoux lists three positions that fall under the label of correlationism: transcendentalism, phenomenology and postmodernism.<sup>4</sup> This implies that most correlationists are 'continental' antirealists. These continental antirealist positions tend to emphasize questions of givenness, human access, and transcendental subjectivity.<sup>5</sup> The correlationist claims that when you speak about objects, events, laws or beings you do so in the sense of the correlationist's commitment: *as given*. Meillassoux wants to complicate the correlationist's commitment by introducing an un-correlated time. He calls this time the *ancestral realm* and he defines it as '...a reality—a thing or event—which existed before life on earth' (TWB, 3). This does not mean that we are unable to discuss the ancestral realm. The empirical sciences do so often, but they resort to indirect means to do so (e.g. radioactive isotopes, or stellar luminescence).

Meillassoux calls the objects that allow us to talk about the ancestral realm *arche-fossils*. In his definition an arche-fossil is '...a material indicating traces of "ancestral" phenomena anterior even to the emergence of life' (TWB, 3). Meillassoux thinks that correlationism can deal with this time, but that an interesting tension arises between correlationism and empirical science based on the correlationist's commitment. Meillassoux thinks the distinction can be traced back to the 'in-itself' (noumenal) and 'for-us'

3. Meillassoux recognises that despite the label correlationist positions are '... extraordinarily varied in themselves' (TWB, 1).

4. Meillassoux does include analytic philosophy under correlationism in *After Finitude* (AF, 7), but he never provides a complimentary critique of analytic philosophy to mirror the critique of continental correlationism.

5. One might be inclined to state that not all continental antirealists have givenness as their theme, but Meillassoux's critique is important precisely in that it reveals that, whether it is explicit or not, givenness remains a fundamental commitment of any continental antirealism. In my reading Meillassoux is truly out to critique transcendentalism, or the transcendental method, but he deploys the label correlationist to broaden the *potential* targets of his critique. According to Peter Gratton 'Meillassoux's "speculative realism" is dismissive of an entire tradition in post-Kantian French and German phenomenology (Husserl, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, etc.) and post-phenomenology (Lacan, Derrida, Deleuze, Foucault, etc.): in Peter Gratton, 'After the Subject: Meillassoux's Ontology of "What May Be"', *Pli: The Warwick Journal of Philosophy*, no. 20, 2009, p. 60.

(phenomenal) distinction. He teases out the point of departure from pre-critical dogmatic metaphysics toward the post-critical Kantian turn along this distinction. Not only does Kant overturn access to a mind-independent reality, but he inaugurates a reassessment of what a correspondence epistemology might mean. Kantian correspondence does not mean that one's statements directly correspond to a mind-independent object. Rather what is objective is a representation that can be universalized and validated on an intersubjective basis.<sup>6</sup> The sum total of these considerations leads Meillassoux to an important conclusion:

...the central notion of modern philosophy since Kant seems to be that of *correlation*. By 'correlation' we mean the idea according to which we only ever have access to the correlation between thinking and being, and never to either term considered apart from the other. We will henceforth call *correlationism* any current of thought which maintains the unsurpassable character of the correlation so defined. Consequently, it becomes possible to say that every philosophy which disavows naïve realism has become a variant of correlationism (AF, 5, his italics).

There are three important pieces of information imparted here. The correlationist limits access to what occurs between thinking and being. Secondly, in order to be a correlationist one must think that this bind is unsurpassable as defined, and finally, in a roundabout sense, it confirms that correlationism is a form of antirealism. The correlationist insists that in order to think about subjectivity one must include objectivity and *vice versa*. This is called 'the correlationist circle' (AF, 5). More sophisticated forms of correlationism introduce the 'correlationist two-step' which asserts the primacy of the relation (AF, 5). The two-step emphasizes the 'co' of correlation: 'The 'co-' (of co-giveness, of correlation, of the co-originary, of co-presence, etc.) is the grammatical particle that dominates modern philosophy, its veritable "chemical formula"' (AF, 5-6).

A central problem for correlationism is its *necessary* relativizing of content *for us*. For Meillassoux the contemporary notion of 'transcending' toward the world is a false image derived from this correlationist relativizing of experience. It masks a loss, and a significant one at that, since this is the loss of:

...the *great outdoors*, the *absolute* outside of pre-critical thinkers: that outside which was not relative to us, and which was given as indifferent to its own givenness to be what it is, existing in itself regardless of whether we are thinking of it or not; that outside which thought could explore with the legitimate feeling of being on foreign territory—of being entirely elsewhere (AF, 7 his italics).

The great outdoors is mind-independent, not relative to us, and it is not given *for-us*. But despite this it was once accessible and open to exploration for pre-critical thought. Meillassoux tries to evoke a sense of the great outdoors by providing us with a list of statements produced by the empirical sciences:

6. Meillassoux elucidates Kant's position as follows: 'From this point on, *intersubjectivity*, the consensus of a community, supplants the *adequation* between the representations of a solitary subject and the thing itself as the veritable criterion of objectivity, and of scientific objectivity more particularly. Scientific truth is no longer what conforms to an in-itself supposedly indifferent to the way in which it is given to the subject, but rather what is susceptible of being given as shared by a scientific community' (AF, 4-5, his italics).

- The date of the origin of the Universe (13.5 billion years ago)
- The date of the accretion of the earth (4.56 billion years ago)
- The date of the origin of life on earth (3.5 billion years ago)
- The date of the origin of mankind (*Homo habilis*, 2 million years ago) (AF, 9).

These are statements about events prior to the emergence of life and by implication to consciousness. They are produced by dating various objects and these objects are themselves ‘...sometimes older than any form of life on earth’ (AF, 9). In the thirties dating techniques were perfected and dating became absolute as opposed to relative.<sup>7</sup> Absolute dating allows us, albeit as ‘revisable hypotheses’, to make remarkably determinate statements such as those listed above (AF, 9). Meillassoux is interested in the *meaning* of these statements as they must be interpreted according to the correlationist’s commitment:

How are we to grasp the *meaning* of scientific statements bearing explicitly upon a manifestation of the world that is posited as anterior to the emergence of thought and even of life—*posited, that is, as anterior to every form of human relation to the world?* (AF, 9-10 his italics)<sup>8</sup>

Correlationism, in step with Kant, *redefines* objectivity. The guarantor of objectivity is no longer the object and a statement’s correspondence to that object. The guarantee now rests with the possibility of universalizing the statement or more precisely making it an intersubjectively true statement. One must no longer interpret the ancestral statement in its literal sense since this leaves aside the problem of givenness. Givenness is the condition for the universalizing potentiality of any given statement. The ancestral statement must be understood as dealing with a fossil-material that exists, and is experimented upon, in the present:

It is then possible to maintain that the statement is true, insofar as it has its basis in an experience which is by right reproducible by anyone (universality of the statement), without believing naively that its truth derives from its adequation to the effective reality of its referent (a world without a givenness of the world) (AF, 16).

This inverts the intuitive temporal sequencing that a literal interpretation invites. The correlationist insight is derived from its insistence that knowledge is created from the standpoint of the present and read back into the past: ‘This means that we have to carry out a *retrojection of the past on the basis of the present*’ (AF, 16, his italics). Correlationism inscribes a counter-sense into the ancestral statement and one that must include the appendage ‘for us’. In response to the literal interpretation the correlationist has been forced to make two decisions: to *double* the meaning of the statement and to carry out a *retrojection* of the past on the basis of the present.

These remarks remind us that the correlationist’s position is by no means inno-

7. Meillassoux describes how these techniques work as follows: ‘These techniques generally rely upon the constant rate of disintegration of radioactive nuclei, as well as upon the laws of thermoluminescence—the latter permitting the application of dating techniques to the light emitted from stars’ (AF, 9).

8. It is put more concisely in *Time without Becoming*: ‘...I ask if correlationism—in any of its versions—is able to give a sense or a meaning to ancestral statements’ (TWB, 3).

cent. The problem of the ancestral realm seems to force correlationism into a deeply counter-intuitive position. This is not a problem in itself, but it is clear that the correlationist cannot easily come to an direct agreement with science on this issue. The correlationist looks to be, at this point, a full-blown antirealist incapable of accommodating a particular kind of realist statement. Meillassoux is aware that his depiction of correlationism seems to blur important distinctions between the varieties of correlationism. Transcendental idealism and speculative/subjective idealism seem to bleed together as both masking an ‘extreme idealism’ about the ancestral realm (AF, 18). At this point Meillassoux pauses to consider possible rejoinders from the correlationist side. It is in the consideration of these rejoinders that it becomes clear that Meillassoux considers correlationism to be broadly transcendentalist. The first rejoinder fixates on Husserl. Problematically Meillassoux includes Husserl under this ‘idealist’ rejoinder. This occludes the more interesting distinction between givenness and realism that marks the Husserlian project and it will be necessary for us to expand upon the limited discussion of Husserl as present in *After Finitude*. The second rejoinder relates directly to the transcendental distinction between the transcendental and empirical levels bringing us into direct contact with Kant and the problem of embodiment. In both cases it is clear that Meillassoux is operating with the assumption that the correlationist’s commitment is, at heart, a transcendentalist commitment.

The first rejoinder that Meillassoux considers is the idealist rejoinder. His idealist remarks that the ancestral realm is nothing more than a complicated re-imagining of mundane anti-idealism. The idealist locates the core of Meillassoux’s critique as the correlationist’s inability to think about things or events if they are not ‘...connected to a relation-to-the-world’ (i.e. the correlationist’s commitment) (AF, 18). The argument, the idealist notes, can just as easily be extended to spatial distance as much as temporal ancientness. Distant objects looked at through a telescope might cause one to miss a local event such as a falling vase. Here the distant craters pose no problem for idealism, but the vase goes un-witnessed. This is an old critique of idealism and the idealist reminds Meillassoux that most sophisticated idealists have a solution to the problem—namely the ‘...*lacunary* nature of the given’ (AF, 19, his italics). Meillassoux’s idealist introduces Husserlian adumbrations as an example of sophisticated idealism. Husserlian adumbrations provide for the inclusion of the non-given in and within given perceptual experience. The idealist ends with the remark that ‘...even the most elementary theory of perception will insist on the fact that the sensible apprehension of an object always occurs against the backdrop of the un-apprehended’ (AF, 19).

It is important to flesh out the role that adumbrations play in Husserl’s schema. I do not think that Meillassoux’s response is undermined by engaging with this schema, but rather that Meillassoux’s inclusion of Husserl among the idealists hides the transcendental direction that adumbrations lead Husserl. This is important because it reveals that even in his discussion of idealism Meillassoux has in mind the much stronger case presented by transcendentalism. Further the defence by adumbration is a distinctly phenomenological contribution to transcendentalism. It is developed relatively early by

Husserl and it is essential enough to the reduction to be carried over into Husserl's later work. In the *Crisis* Husserl provides a sustained argument for grounding the objective on an intersubjective basis.<sup>9</sup> This, as we have seen, Meillassoux considers a definitive characteristic of transcendentalism. Husserl is a relatively uncomplicated example of correlationism and he regularly uses the term correlation. The important section '§46' of the *Crisis* is tellingly entitled: 'The Universal *a priori* of correlation'.<sup>10</sup> The normally restrained Husserl has this to say about the important transcendental accomplishment achieved there:

Ordinarily we notice nothing of the whole subjective character of the manners of exhibiting 'of' the things, but in reflection we recognize with astonishment that essential *correlations* obtain here which are the component parts of a farther-reaching, universal *a priori*.<sup>11</sup>

The adumbrations argument is deployed in Husserl's proto-phenomenological description of perceptual experience, but it is, for Husserl, more important as a hint to the broader phenomenological field he intends to uncover. Husserl recognizes, as did Hegel, that the emphasis on perceptual experience is a naïve, but obvious place to begin: '... involuntarily, we begin with the intentional analysis of perception (purely as perception of its perceived object) and in fact give privileged status thereby to intuitively given bodies'.<sup>12</sup>

Husserl is interested in two features of perceptual experience. The first is the problem of how objects are considered as unified despite 'hiding' aspects of themselves and appearing in different configurations.<sup>13</sup> The second is the problem of how our directed

9. Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Philosophy*, trans. David Carr, Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 1970.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 159.

11. Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences*, p. 159 my italics.

12. *Ibid.*, 160. Regarding Husserl's uncomplicated correlationism it is well known that the phenomenological method does not rely on science as an external condition: '...we may use no sort of knowledge arising from the sciences as premises, and we may take the sciences into consideration only as historical facts, taking no position of our own on their truth'. *Ibid.*, p. 147. This is a radical departure from Husserl's earlier position as evidenced in Heidegger's characterization of the young Husserl in *The Hermeneutics of Facticity*: 'For Husserl, a definite ideal of science was prescribed in mathematics and the mathematical natural sciences. Mathematics was the model for all scientific disciplines. This scientific ideal came into play in that one attempted to elevate description to the level of mathematical rigor'. In Martin Heidegger, *Ontology: The Hermeneutics of Facticity*, trans. John van Buren, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1999, p. 56.

13. Regarding the objects of perceptual experience Merleau-Ponty provides another interesting explanation for this phenomenon of unification. In vision the object remains either at the edges of the visual field or one actively focuses on a particular object. The object at the edge can still be concentrated upon and in focusing one's vision we never exclude the wider visual field. The shift is one of emphasis or making certain objects dimmer and others sharper. This is the activity of 'sectoring': 'In normal vision...I direct my gaze upon a sector of the landscape, which comes to life and is disclosed, while the other objects recede into the periphery and become dormant, while, however, not ceasing to be there'. In Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith, London, Routledge, 2005, p. 78. This unique ability allows us to maintain the unity of a single object against a background of 'dimmer', unthematized objects. Sartre's contribution to the phenomenology of perception is to focus on the empty 'ground' that allows for the distinguishing of objects. Objects can come to my attention, but none mark the ground itself. They can



attention toward an object translates into an adequate correspondence to that (cognized) object. Once more Husserl is clear about his correlationist credentials. In his discussion of adumbrations Husserl discovers that a necessary implication of being able to hold a unified object in perceptual experience is the *pregiven*. This is entailed precisely because there are ‘lacunae’ in perceptual experience. If one is aware that objects are many-sided and yet one remains capable of distinguishing that object as a single unit then this can only operate on the further assumption that each object is located in a wider unthematized pre-given region that contains its other sides.<sup>14</sup> This world, which operates covertly, must be pre-given if it is not to ‘get in the way.’<sup>15</sup> The task of transcendental phenomenology is to thematize this pre-given.<sup>16</sup> Therefore it is important that we recognize that adumbrations are not merely ‘insurance’ for the idealist against the un-witnessed argument, but, in the Husserlian sense, the path into the wider, unthematized region of the life-world. In other words they are implicated in the transcendental.

Meillassoux responds to the idealist rejoinder by agreeing that the un-witnessed argument ‘poses no danger to correlationism’ (AF, 20). But this was not his argument. The problem of the arche-fossil cannot be equated with either spatial distance or temporal ancientness since it designates an event that is prior to givenness as such. The idealist

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all slip back into ‘what is not at my attention.’ They can become indistinguishable. To get a sense of the ground objects must actively ‘occupy’ it. In the famous case of absence the ‘ground’ (that is itself nothing) grounds an absence leading to a ‘double nihilation’ i.e. a nothingness of a ground preparing for an absence, but it is the concrete situation, and not the abstractness of the discourse, that matters here. Sartre wants us to imagine that we really are in a café, to truly expect Pierre to fill this event, and only in this experience can absence be properly understood. Idle musing on absences could play out infinitely, but thinking about absence in terms of an experience reminds us that absence does, in fact, partake in our lives: ‘The *not*, as an abrupt intuitive discovery, appears as consciousness (of being), consciousness of the *not*’. In Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes, London, Routledge, 1958, p. 11 his italics.

14. The argument is worth quoting at length: ‘...there are various individual things of experience at any given time; I focus on one of them. To perceive it, even if it is perceived as remaining completely unchanged, is something very complex: it is to see it, to touch it, to smell it, to hear it, etc.; and in each case I have something different. What is seen in seeing is in and for itself other than what is touched in touching. But in spite of this I say: it is the same thing; it is only the manners of its sensible exhibition, of course that are different. If I remain purely within the realm of seeing, I find new differences, arising in very manifold form in the course of any normal seeing, which, after all, is a continuous process; each phase is itself a seeing, but actually what is seen in each one is something different...But in them the surface exhibits itself to me in a continuous synthesis; each side is for consciousness a manner of exhibition for it. This implies that, while the surface is immediately given, I mean more than it offers’ (Husserl, op. cit., p. 158).

15. The more familiar name for this is the life-world: ‘...the life-world, for us who wakeningly live in it, is always already there, existing in advance for us, the “ground” of all praxis whether theoretical or extratheoretical. The world is pre-given to us, the waking, always somehow interested subjects, not occasionally but always and necessarily as the universal field of all actual and possible praxis, as horizon’ (Husserl, op. cit., p. 142). Even when the phenomenologist makes it thematic it continues to operate: ‘...the world, exactly as it was for me earlier and still is, as my world, our world, humanity’s world, having validity in its various subjective ways, has not disappeared; it is just that, during the consistently carried-out epoche, it is under our gaze purely as the correlate of the subjectivity which gives it ontic meaning, through whose validities the world “is” at all’ (Husserl, op. cit., p. 152).

16. Husserl, at one point, is happy to define transcendental phenomenology as ‘...a science of the universal how of the givenness of the world...’ (Husserl, op. cit., p. 146)

has assumed that Meillassoux is thinking about the problem of temporal distance rather than ‘anteriority in time’ (AF, 20). This difference is the difference between the un-witnessed argument and the not-given argument. The lacunary angle will not suffice as a defence here. Meillassoux insists that the ancestral argument is of a different order to the un-witnessed argument. It neither addresses spatial distance nor ancient time, but the ‘time’ that includes the passage of givenness from ‘*non-being into being*’ (AF, 21, his italics). Meillassoux claims that this must not be the time of correlationism, but the ‘time of science’ (AF, 21). Science uncovers a ‘time’ that is not only prior to givenness, but ‘indifferent’ to it (AF, 22). The challenge from the ancestral argument is once again revised, but this time Meillassoux asks how ‘*science can think a world wherein spatio-temporal givenness itself came into being within a time and a space which preceded every variety of givenness*’ (AF, 22, his italics).

Meillassoux is more concerned about the explicit transcendental correlationist rejoinder than the idealist one. The transcendental response deals with the claim that Meillassoux is confusing the empirical and transcendental levels. The split is, according to the transcendentalist, a clear one: the empirical deals with the content of the natural sciences, but the transcendental deals with the *possibility* of science as such:

You [Meillassoux] proceed as though the transcendental subject...was of the same nature as the physical organ which supports it...you collapse the distinction between the conscious organ which arose within nature and the subject of science which constructs the knowledge of nature (AF, 22).

The distinction can be enforced along ontological lines since the conscious organ is an entity like all other objects, but the transcendental subject cannot be said to exist in the same manner as an entity. It is ‘rather a set of *conditions*’ that allows for scientific knowledge about entities to be possible (AF, 23, his italics). The critique is simply not applicable to the transcendental subject: ‘The paradox you [Meillassoux] point to arises from crossing two levels of reflection which should never be allowed to cross’ (AF, 23).<sup>17</sup> Mirroring Meillassoux’s own critique the transcendentalist claims that Meillassoux is cancelling out the *sense* of transcendental statements. The form of this transcendental argument is traditional and we can find an early example in Kant’s remarks on nature. Kant attributes the order discovered in nature, or the *appearance* of order in nature, to the transcendental subject:

Thus we ourselves bring into the appearances that order and regularity in them that we call nature, and moreover we would not be able to find it there if we, or the nature of our mind, had not originally put it there (CPR, A125).<sup>18</sup>

17. Further to the point: ‘...you cannot claim your problem is “ontological” rather than empirical, since your problem of the arche-fossil is empirical, and only empirical—it pertains to objects. As for the transcendental conditions of cognition, they cannot be said to arise or disappear—not because they are eternal but because they are “outside time” and “outside sense”—they remain out of reach of the scientific discourse about objects because they provide the forms for this discourse’ (AF, 23, his italics).

18. References to the *Critique of Pure Reason* (CPR) refer to the Kemp Smith translation, Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith, New York, St. Martin’s Press, 1929.



Kant is not arguing that nature is nothing ‘in-itself’, but rather that the order and regularity we attribute to nature is an additional contribution *from our end*. For nature as such may not possess the clean form that we clothe it in, but in order to make sense of nature we must, in some way, formalize it. The formalization of nature occurs for the transcendental subject *a priori*. In each encounter with nature the formalizing process has ‘always-already’ occurred:

Categories are concepts that prescribe laws *a priori* to appearances, thus to nature as the sum total of all appearances...and, since they are not derived from nature, and do not follow it as their pattern (for they would otherwise be merely empirical), the question now arises how it is to be conceived that nature must follow them, i.e., how they can determine *a priori* the combination of the manifold of nature without deriving it from the latter (CPR, B163).

Since the form of nature is prescribed *a priori* it is clear that the transcendental subject is not simply impinged upon by nature. Kant provides a convincing solution to the problem of how it is that the mind and world synchronize so well. The solution also provides evidence that the transcendental subject cannot be explained in a purely empirical register.

The transcendentalist’s defence is founded on the transcendental subject’s resistance to empirical explanation. This transcendentalist argument can also be further fleshed out. The general *form* of the argument is that one cannot reduce the transcendental subject to the empirical one. There is more contained in the transcendental subject than is contained in the empirical subject. The empirical subject, as an entity like all others, can be said to exist in time or in the ‘time of science’. However the transcendental subject is not merely ‘in time’, but experiences ‘time’ as *temporality*. Temporal experience is not a mere succession of points on the arrow of time, but the experiential feeling of having a past, living in the present, and looking to the future. Time might be applied to both empirical and transcendental subject, but temporality can only be applied to the latter. They are therefore, to put it bluntly, different. If we do not recognize this difference then we can be accused of conflating the empirical with the transcendental. This, after all, is one of the core lessons of the first *Critique*:

Gradually remove from our experiential concept of a body everything that is empirical in it—the colour, the hardness or softness, the weight, even the impenetrability—there still remains the space that was occupied by the body...and you cannot leave that out. Likewise, if you remove from your empirical concept of every object, whether corporeal or incorporeal, all those properties of which experience teaches you, you could still not take from it that by means of which you think of it as a substance or as dependant on a substance...Thus, convinced by the necessity with which this concept presses itself upon you, you must concede that it has its seat in your faculty of cognition *a priori*. (CPR, B6)

Meillassoux’s response to the transcendental rejoinder begins by accepting that the transcendental subject exists in a different sense from other entities, but he maintains that it still exists in *some sense* in that it ‘takes place’ and has a ‘point of view’ (AF, 24 his ital-

ics). In particular the transcendental subject relies on the body as a ‘retro-transcendental’ condition that allows for its emergence:

Granted, the transcendental is the condition for knowledge of bodies, but it is necessary to add that the body is also the condition for the taking place of the transcendental. That the transcendental subject has *this* or that body is an empirical matter, but that *it has* a body is a non-empirical condition of its taking place—the body, one could say, is a ‘retro-transcendental’ condition for the subject of knowledge. We will invoke an established distinction here and say that a subject is *instantiated* rather than *exemplified* by a thinking body (AF, 25 his italics).

Meillassoux turns the Kantian picture on its head. Since the transcendental subject is an embodied subject, and the empirical subject instantiates, although does not exemplify, the transcendental subject then the distinction between a time that affects the empirical and a time (temporality) that affects the transcendental is radically complicated and so Meillassoux is free to find his middle path.<sup>19</sup> My task in this paper has been very direct—to prove to the reader that, even when it is not explicitly stated, Meillassoux’s anti-correlationism is anti-transcendentalism (or against the transcendental method). We have seen that the idealist has recourse to transcendentalism in her appeal to adumbrations and that the stronger, explicitly transcendentalist rejoinder returns anti-correlationism back to the foundational decision of transcendentalism itself: the distinction between the empirical and transcendental levels. In sum the implicit and explicit defences of correlationism ought to convince the reader that the core of correlationism is transcendentalism. To the question as to why this matters we must remember that if philosophy is, as Žižek claims, Kantian, and if Meillassoux’s thinking is, as Badiou claims, a new path for philosophy then one has here an anomalous thinking that can take us back to the great outdoors—back to the real itself.

What does this heretical thinking look like? There has been the occasional flirtation with realism in the continental tradition. Merleau-Ponty scorned us with the warning that the ‘real has to be described, not constructed or formed.’<sup>20</sup> Despite this it is clear that most continental philosophers did not get the memo and realists have remained a somewhat exotic species among their ranks. For the most part the continental tradition has set its course on, in Lee Braver’s phrase, the ‘erosion of the noumena.’<sup>21</sup> Or, as Sartre inversely put it, the foreclosure of the real has resulted in a ‘monism of the phenomenon.’<sup>22</sup> The continental tradition can be seen, then, as a slow coming to terms with Kant’s consequential distinction between the phenomena and the noumena. The exemplary aporia of the thing-in-itself remains the ‘bone in the throat’ that Žižek likes to remind us

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19. Meillassoux notes that ‘We thereby discover that the time of science temporalizes and spatializes the emergence of living bodies; that is to say: *the emergence of the conditions for the taking place of the transcendental*’ (AF, 25, his italics).

20. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith, London, Routledge, 2005, xi.

21. Lee Braver, *A Thing of This World: A History of Continental Anti-Realism*, USA, Northwestern University Press, 2007, 79.

22. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes, London, Routledge, 1958, xlv.

about from time to time.<sup>23</sup> It never seems to disappear but rather it is appropriated (as in Hegel), venerated (as in Žižek himself), or is disguised (as happens in general). Who needs to deal with the thing-in-itself when antirealism is king? Who needs the real when the truth is in the appearances? There is, however, a sense that we are here in the midst of a mild sea-change. Forced to name this trend I would offer the label continental realism. Continental realism is comprised of a loosely connected set of thinkers unified in their opposition to correlationism or, to use the more traditional name, to antirealism. In essence continental realism opposes what Lee Braver terms continental antirealism i.e. the assumption that continental philosophy exists as an antidote to the realism.

In recent years the response to this assumption has been the intensification of speculation. This intensification is characterized by the attempt to think, in Graham Harman's words, the content we 'silently *rely* on'.<sup>24</sup> This is no easy task. It necessitates that we attune ourselves to, as Jane Bennett puts it, the 'strange logic of turbulence' belonging to the seemingly inert material underwriting our general experience.<sup>25</sup> Harman's approach, in particular, is worth emphasizing. In his essay on causation Harman challenges outright the assumption that the debate on causation must be filtered through Kantian lenses (and Hume, for that matter, is broadly absent too):

To revive causation in philosophy means to reject the dominance of Kant's Copernican Revolution and its single lonely rift between people and everything else. Although I will claim that real objects do exist beyond human sensual access to them, this should not be confused with Kant's distinction between phenomena and noumena. Whereas Kant's distinction is something endured by humans alone, I hold that one billiard ball hides from another no less than the ball-in-itself hides from humans.<sup>26</sup>

This is not just a strategic jettisoning of the transcendental, but an attempt to see the problem anew. For his part Meillassoux takes a more tempered approach. He operates, as we have seen, within the transcendental nexus and undermines it from within. Meillassoux's critique is immanent to that tradition although it is clear that he intends to generate a line of flight that can surpass it—that takes us *after* finitude. *After Finitude* concludes with a consideration of the consequences that might come with this loosening of our Kantian bonds. In a tellingly titled chapter on 'Ptolemy's Revenge' he posits a simple question: why is it that when the natural sciences were going one way philosophy went another? What explains the curious inversion of the Copernican Revolution that philosophers alone subscribe to? These are questions for continental realists.

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23. Slavoj Žižek, *The Fragile Absolute: Or, Why is the Christian Legacy Worth Fighting For?*, London, Verso, 2001, 28.

24. In Graham Harman, *Tool-Being: Heidegger and the Metaphysics of Objects*, Chicago, Open Court Press, 2007, 20.

25. In Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, USA, Duke University Press, 2010, xi.

26. Graham Harman, 'On Vicarious Causation', in *Collapse II: Speculative Realism*, London, Urbanomic, 2007, 172.

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